

REAL ESTATE *and Romance*

This doctor found the love of his life while
building the home of his dreams

By BRITTANY CONLEY » Photos by G. FRANK HART

Dr. Ellis' favorite spot, the living room, features floor-to-ceiling windows with spectacular water views.



SOME PEOPLE KNOW exactly what they want, and they aren't afraid to wait until they find it; settling for less isn't an option. Dr. Chris Ellis is one of those people. His new home and new marriage are excellent examples of why patience is a virtue. After several years in his medical practice, he was ready to find his dream home. "I looked at properties for several years, and for one reason or another, just didn't love anything enough to pull the trigger," says Dr. Ellis. Then he found Trinity Avenue.

It's rare for someone to get a property that offers everything they want. But, with water access, a slight elevation to protect it from the elements, and impeccable views of the Intracoastal Waterway and the Atlantic beyond that, the only thing it needed was a home. "Seemed like a great place to live at best; at worst, a great investment," says Dr. Ellis. While he may have felt at the time that he was making his biggest life decisions with which architect to hire, and the hundreds of little decisions one must make when designing and building their own home, love was also about to waltz into his life.

Holly Ellis grew up in Greensboro but spent a lot of time in Wrightsville Beach. "It has always been a special place for me. Sunrise runs, boat days with my brother, catching crabs off the dock. I am a beach kid at heart," says Mrs. Ellis. Her job as an account executive for Meta's global business group took her to New York City for eight years, but when the pandemic hit, she returned to North Carolina to be closer to family and friends. "I ended up buying a condo in Channel Walk in 2020 less than a mile from where Chris lived on Pelican Drive coincidentally. Fortunately, my job allowed me to work [remotely] full-time, so I was able to call Wilmington home." The pair met through mutual friends at an engagement party and spent the rest of the evening lost in conversation. The rest is history, so they say.

The home and relationship were well underway. Dr. Ellis had already hired renowned local architect, David Lisle, to design his home, and their collaborations

produced plans that would cause anyone with a penchant for modern architecture to swoon. The son of missionaries, Lisle traveled the world from a very young age. Amid all those adventures, he found a love for architecture and worked his way through higher education to realize his ambitions. Lisle is a powerhouse in his field, having designed more than 2,400 projects throughout the southeast, from residential, commercial, bridges, and everything in between.

“My goal has always been never to do the same project twice,” says Lisle. There is nothing cookie-cutter about his work. “The Ellis residence is another example of a great client allowing me to take their dreams and create a lasting project that will give back to them every day. The views, the spaces, and the aesthetics [are based] on what I discussed and created for them specifically.”

The house broke ground on September 1, 2022, with someone very special to him at the helm of the construction project. Cress Bell, of Bell Custom Homes, is a long-time friend, former college roommate, and fraternity brother, to Dr. Ellis. With a friendship spanning more than 25 years, working together on this project was a natural fit.

“[It was] something we have kicked around for years, more seriously after he returned from California and began his solo building career in Wilmington,” says Dr. Ellis. It wasn't just their friendship that brought together their working relationship, though. Their similar style and aesthetic coupled with Bell Custom Home's stellar reputation in the area for top-notch builds was the real reason Dr. Ellis sought out Cress Bell and his team for the job.

A self-described nomad, Cress Bell was much like David Lisle in that he was exposed from an early age to many different styles of architecture as his family moved around quite a bit. “Where I'm from is a little hard to pin down because we moved every three or four years my entire life. But as a kid when that's just the norm I learned to make the best of it, not knowing any different. Ultimately [that] fed a lot of who I am as a custom home builder,” says Bell, who lived in many places from California to Singapore and credits those cultural



The Elisses can often be found on the pool deck where they are each enamored with the indoor/outdoor shower and ample room for entertaining.



Renowned local architect, David Lisle, and Cress Bell, of Bell Custom Homes, designed and built the home.



Mrs. Ellis worked with her aunt Hooper Patterson, one of the area's premiere interior designers, to incorporate soft, warm details.



and architectural differences with what inspires him as a builder today. “Inspired” is surely one of the first words that would come to mind when seeing the home for the first time.

“The Ellis home is definitely on the contemporary side of architecture but in a more subtle way which gives it a unique warmth,” says Bell. Warmth isn't usually synonymous with contemporary homes, which often feature clean lines and lean toward minimalism. That touch of warmth is Mrs. Ellis' personal signature.

“Though the structure I designed with Lisle, as Holly and I became more serious, more of the decisions were handled

jointly,” says Dr. Ellis, who admits that while both of them are fans of modern styling, it is Mrs. Ellis who influenced the softer, warmer details of the home.

Though she said designing their dream home was a little daunting, as she had never lived somewhere larger than 1,300 square feet, Holly Ellis also had someone special to her to look to for guidance the same way Dr. Ellis had his friend Cress Bell. Of course, she spent a lot of time researching and scouring inspiration boards online, but to make sense of it all, she turned to her beloved aunt—an interior designer of more than 30 years—to really pinpoint her design style and to meaningfully convey





The kitchen features warm flooring, walnut accents, and warm marble tones.



Every room comes with a water view.



her desires to the designer they had contracted: Hooper Patterson, one of the area's premiere interior designers, who would help her turn all those ideas into a beautiful reality.

"I am a big fan of adding warmth through different materials, textures, and color 'pops'. Kelly Whesler's projects in Santa Monica, particularly the Santa Monica Proper Hotel were a big inspiration for me," says Mrs. Ellis, who notes she was attracted to the modern yet organic style that leaned into the location, environment, and architecture, a design philosophy that worked well with Hooper Patterson. "I loved working with Hooper because she searches for unique options that feel truly right for the space, shops local, and really gives a range to make sure it's the right fit for us."

A Wilmington native who moved inland, then back to the coast some 20 years ago, Hooper Patterson has made a name for

herself among those who want homes that exemplify style but also want flawless functionality. Having worked many times with Bell Custom Homes as well as with David Lisle, Patterson says she jumped at the chance when approached about the Ellis project.

To satisfy both Dr. and Mrs. Ellis' preferences, the main task was to harmonize a modern style with the kind of warmth that would elevate the house into a home. "They wanted clean, modern, and comfortable. Often 'modern' can feel sterile and cold, but we stressed 'comfortable,'" says Patterson. "Overall, everything feels very sculptural, from the lines of the tile to the furniture to the lighting. These elements fit so beautifully into David's design and Cress and his team executed it perfectly."

Georgia O'Keefe famously said, "The details are not the details, they make the design." And Hooper Patterson Interiors

left nothing to chance. Tile choice was a huge factor in achieving the couple's goals. "[Tile] sets the tone for the home and tells a story," says Patterson. "I love the kitchen splash and the powder room accent wall are two of my favorites. The kitchen splash set the color palette for the living room." She also paid close attention to textures and layered neutral tones throughout the home. "We brought in warm flooring, walnut accents, and warmer marble tones in the kitchen and tied in some black tones to bring out the black interior of the floor-to-ceiling windows," she adds.

Those windows capture exactly what Dr. Ellis wanted in his home even for many years before the first plan was conceived. "During an initial on-site meeting, David Lisle asked what I wanted," says Dr. Ellis, who admits that was a tough question on the spot. "I remember saying [a water view] from every room if possible." Ask and ye shall receive. While every room



The interior design features a mixture of materials, textures and colors to achieve the clean, modern and comfortable look the Ellises desired.



has water views, his favorite is from the living room. “The view doesn’t get old, no matter the weather,” says Dr. Ellis. While the living room may be his favorite, both he and Mrs. Ellis are often found on the pool deck where they are each enamored with their indoor/outdoor shower and the ample room they have inside and out for entertaining. “Also have to mention the sky deck above the living area[...] Unparalleled views, [it is a] great place for an evening wind down,” he says.

The Ellis home is the epitome of modern style and warmth combined while proving how important it can be to be patient for one’s dreams to come true, both in real estate and romance. ■

BellCustomHomes.com
HooperPattersonInteriorDesign.com
LisleArchitecture.com