



## HISTORIC REVIVAL

*One of South Carolina's most vibrant seaside towns is back, and it's better than ever*

by ROBIN HOWARD / *photography by* HOLGER OBENAU

**S**TANDING ON FRONT STREET IN HISTORIC GEORGETOWN, I feel like I've wandered onto a set for a Hallmark movie. Cue the smell of freshly baked bread wafting from Indigo Bakery and the tinkle of shop bells as visitors pop into bookshops and boutiques. Here and there, cute dogs are walking their owners, stopping at sidewalk water bowls, wagging for treats handed out like candy from retailers. It's noon, so couples and friends are sitting down for light Lowcountry lunches at sidewalk tables in front of contemporary farm- and sea-to-table restaurants. Right on time, a bearded, white-haired shrimp fisherman in waders strolls past and gives a cheery greeting, his boat tied up at the dock on the wide Sompit River on the other side of the shops.





The last time I visited Georgetown, a devastating fire had leveled most of the historic district, and Front Street was eerily quiet. The fire was a heartbreaking benchmark in the city's history, and many wondered if the seaside landmark, with its legendary waterfront restaurants and homey dive bars, was down for the count. I'm pleased to report that it most certainly is not.

Today, my informal tour guide is Paula Moland, owner of an enchanting commonwealth of retail stores on Front Street that includes Bluebird Vintage, Urban Farmhouse, Wildflowers + Whiskey and Open Road. Moland is part of a dedicated and innovative group of business owners, volunteers and city officials that are determined to put Georgetown on the map as a contemporary, relevant destination while preserving its rich history and small-town charm.

Founded in 1729, Georgetown is the third-oldest town in South Carolina,

and it is rich in Native American, Gullah, Revolutionary, and industrial American history. Just an hour north of Charleston, the town is surrounded by wildlife reserves and refuges, making the drive up (down or over) extremely pleasant.

I meet Moland at Bluebird Vintage to catch up on her move from Mount Pleasant's Old Village and to see for myself what she's been up to in her new home. Bluebird Vintage is an extension of the original consignment shop in Mount Pleasant, kept stocked to the gills with a steady stream of high-end contemporary and antique furniture that flows in from affluent Lowcountry homes. Today, Moland's friendly team is putting the finishing touches on Urban Farmhouse, a home furnishings boutique adjoining Bluebird that offers new furniture, organic textiles, earthy dinnerware and other accessories with casual beach-meets-Belgium flair.

Not everyone has the time or inclination to travel the world collecting the furniture

and accessories required to make a home look collected, so the next best thing is to fake it. "With Urban Farmhouse next door, we can show people how to blend old and new," Moland says. "And you avoid ordering delays and shipping issues; you can buy it and take it home that day."

Our next stop is Moland's contemporary womenswear boutique, Wildflowers + Whiskey, which offers rare boho labels such as Dolma and Magnolia Pearl that are famously "one size fits most." I'm not going to give away all of Georgetown's secrets, but out the backdoor of this boutique is a pocket garden where those not shopping can relax with a complimentary whiskey.

On the way to Open Road, a menswear boutique where Justin Timberlake-style casual-cool oozes out of the exposed brick, we stop to say hello to more friends and shop owners. "This is just the best small town," Moland says. "Everybody knows everybody; everyone says hello, and it's just 10 minutes to Pawleys Island.





When you need more excitement, Charleston and Myrtle Beach are close.”

Front Street shopping and dining aside, Georgetown has plenty going on, including history, nature and water tours, a local theater featuring the Swamp Fox Players, outdoor concerts, a Bridge Run, a food and wine festival, a Christmas parade, Wooden Boat Festival, Yuletide Home Tours and more. There are a handful of historic bed-and-breakfasts and short-term vacation rentals, and soon visitors will be able to book a room at a new 56-room boutique hotel in the old newspaper building.

This is the new, old Georgetown; the esprit de corps is palpable, and it's exciting to see the results of the city's hard work. It's worth a drive north for lunch and shopping, but fair warning, when you go, pack an overnight bag because you're going to want to stay. \*

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