

LOCAL

Reminiscing

Antiques
show
lecturer
has fond
memories
of area

Staff report

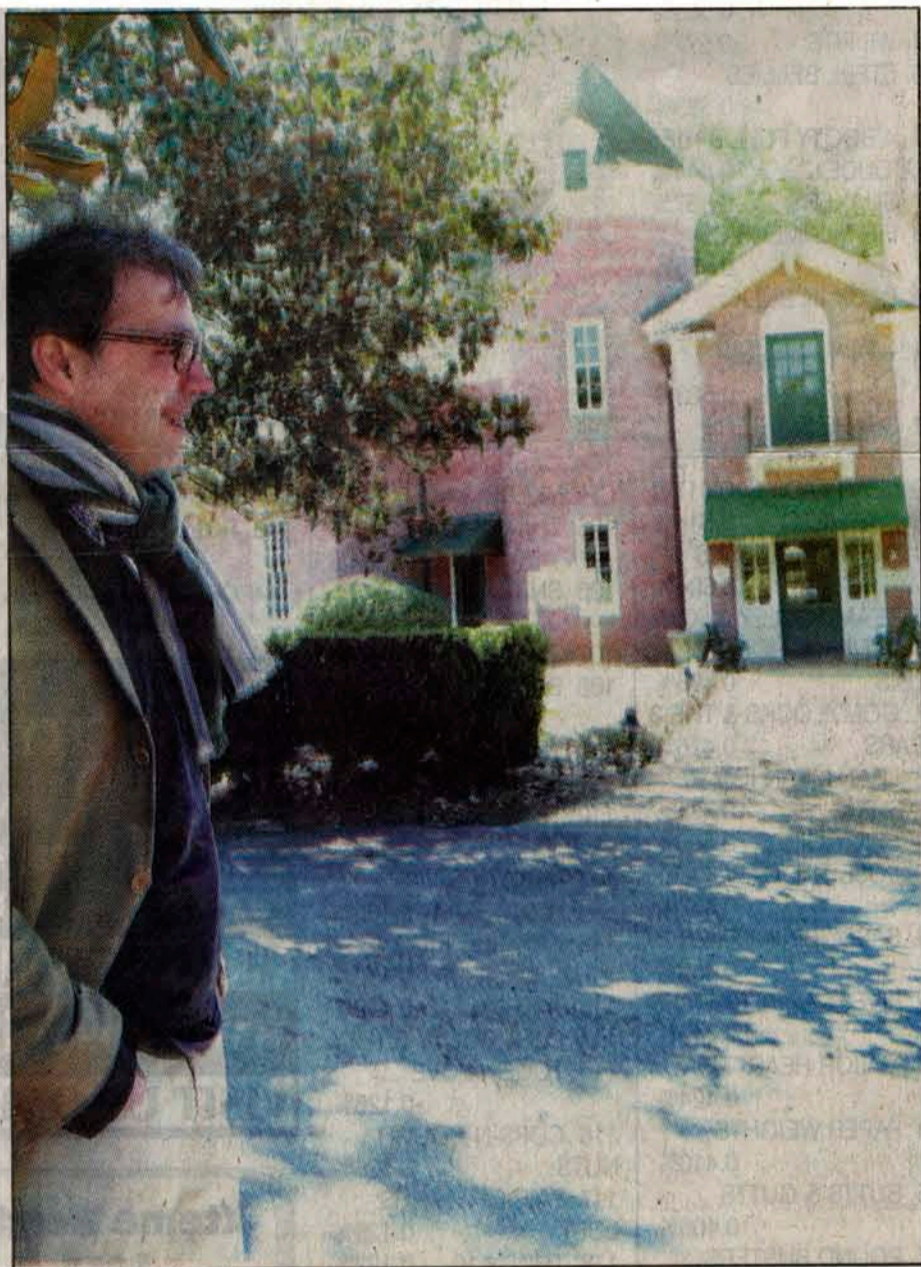
Gil Schafer, one of the 2010 Thomasville Antiques Show and Sale lecturers, is a renowned architect with a unique connection to Thomasville. Schafer's family once owned Melrose Plantation, more recently named Coalson and he credits this heritage with influencing his sense of design. Indeed, he is one of the most sought after home designers for those desiring a traditional style of home. Charles Olson of Olson Design and Historic Preservation Consultants asked him five thought-provoking questions.

Charles Olson: What architect in history do you gain the most inspiration from and why?

Gil Schafer: For residential architecture, there are a number of architects from history that inspire me, but three of the giants for me are Edwin Lutyens in England, and Charles Platt and David Adler here in the U.S. All three brilliantly integrated architecture, decoration and landscape into a unified, comprehensive whole, which I think is so essential for a successful house design. They each were also brilliant classicists who knew the tradition inside and out and were thus able to transform the language and bring something new to their architecture for their time.

C.O.: What do you think is unique regarding the architectural heritage of the hunting plantations in our area?

G.S.: The architectural heritage of the hunting plantations grows out of the 19th-century classical roots of the local architecture which was beautifully adapted in late 19th and early 20th centuries to these comfortable and elegant houses as well as the many outbuildings these recreational properties needed. One of things that strike me is that these buildings are certainly elegant, but also in most cases understated (they were after all vacation houses of a sort-or, extremely elegant "hunting cabins"). That combination of elegance and understatement in these



Submitted photo

Gil Schafer, designer of traditional homes and one of the 2010 Thomasville Antiques Show and Sale lecturers, takes a stroll at Pebble Hill Plantation. Schafer learned to ride horses at the Pebble Hill stables and has fond memories of PHP.

places has been what has left an indelible impression on me.

C.O.: What does the word "home" mean to you?

G.S.: The word "home" to me has everything to do with comfort, family and friends, and memories. It is why Melrose Plantation always felt like "home" to me and my family because it was the locus for so many wonderful family times-so many memories. As a result, I think the place inspired so many that visited it-both in and out of the family.

C.O.: What period in history and architectural style do you most connect with and why?

G.S.: I would have to say either the early to mid-19th century when Federal and then Greek Revival Architecture thrived in this country with their classical exuberance as a result of archeological discoveries in Rome and then Greece, transformed into a language of wood architecture for our young country. And then again in the 1920's and 30's when classicism once again had a kind of easiness about it, as a result of the architects who had studied the classical language of architecture developing a kind of self-assured fluency with the language-in

other words, they came to know the rules so well, that they thus knew how to break them to create something wonderful and new that could also be a little less formal, a little more relaxed.

C.O.: There are architectural critics that say there is no place for classical architecture in today's world. What do you think is the validity of classical architecture in 2010?

G.S.: Classicism is not so much an architectural style as it is an architectural language that is based originally-in ancient Greece and Rome-on the proportions of the human body. Inherently, it is designed to connect on a visceral level to all of us, just as it has done for thousands of years. Because it is a language, it has the potential (and does so again and again through history) to be reinvented in the way it is used in a building in each era you find it-to thus allow each classical building to express something about its own time. It is why a Federal house looks different from a Greek Revival one and why a 30's Georgian or Colonial Revival house will look different from those two earlier styles from the 19th century. I think Classi-

cism is still relevant today because it is a language of architecture that people still connect with intuitively-they just love living in a classical or traditional house. It just speaks to them. And it probably says "home" more than a modern house does, for most people.

A little example: when I graduated from Yale in the late 80's with a wonderful avant garde architecture education, almost no firms came to the school to recruit me and my fellow graduates. Two years ago, before the economic bust, at the University of Notre Dame's architecture department (which teaches an exclusively classical curriculum), over 60 firms came to recruit 52 graduates. I think the marketplace speaks for itself, don't you?