

The Road to *Edenton*

BY LYNNE BRANDON
PHOTOGRAPHY BY SCOTT TAYLOR

Michael and Barbara Cavanagh chill out on the water conveniently located behind their dream home.

It was a hot, dry day in August 2001 when the Cavanaghs ran out of steam. Michael and Barbara had been on the road in their rental car for a week making a trial run of the Intracoastal Waterway (ICW). It was a trial because the two were taking a test run first before taking to the water. The two boat lovers, who hailed from San Francisco, had a dream to sail the ICW from Florida to the Chesapeake Bay, and this was their way of checking it out by land.

"We started in Jacksonville and poked through Georgia, South Carolina and North Carolina," says Michael. One day at 3 p.m., the

couple decided they were too tired to drive any farther. They were on Route 17 and saw a sign for Edenton. "Let's take it," they said, and drove into town. It was an adventure for the West Coast couple who had never spent much time in the South. "Southern food was new to us, and we tried Paula Deen's restaurant in Savannah," says Michael, referring to a first encounter with life below the Mason-Dixon line.

Edenton charmed the couple for several reasons. The quaintness and the traditional values fit the Cavanaghs' philosophy for living. Both also say they were tired of long commutes to work. Michael had two offices in California, and he was spending more than



two hours a day on the road. In Edenton, that would not be an issue.

They went back to California and got on the Internet to look for property in Edenton. They returned at Christmas and bought a lot. Construction of their house at Mulberry Hill began in June 2002. "We wanted to be on the water," says Michael. "This development was just what we were looking for."

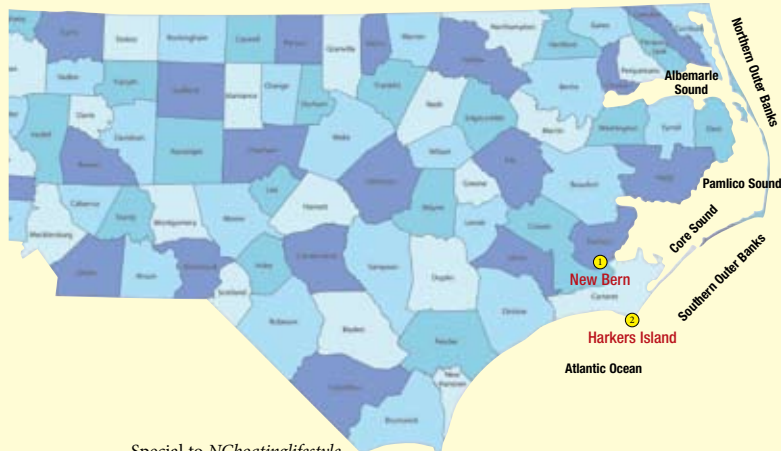
The house took 15 months, and the Cavanaghs moved into their new home in 2003. "This was a challenging house to build," says Michael. "We knew what we wanted and had been looking at designs for awhile." The couple wanted a lot of open space, and it took a cooperative effort with their builder to accomplish their goals. Together they found a way to make their dream house a reality.

The 4,000-square-foot house has four bedrooms and is majestic, but cozy, even with its 20-foot ceilings. The couple's love for culture is evident throughout the home from an exquisite Babinga wood dining room set from Africa to a 40-foot runner on the second floor from India that took 15 months to make. Their favorite room in the house is the drawing room where the two relax with a good book, watch TV or play board games.

Originally the house was to be a second home and eventually their retirement nesting place. Barbara's job changed that. "When we were here at Christmas looking at property I just happened to run into the director of human resources at John A. Holmes High school," says Barbara. The school was looking for a Spanish teacher because the current one was retiring. Was it fate or divine intervention?

Maybe a bit of both, but the fact remained that Barbara was a Spanish teacher. "I started hounding him for the job," she says, with a laugh. It worked, and Barbara got the job.

Suddenly the Edenton home transitioned into a full-time residence. Michael still had his CPA firm in California and until recently he



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ON THE WATER

Grilling out on the deck is a favorite pastime for the couple who met in a restaurant.



was there several weeks each month. In January, he moved his business to downtown Edenton so now he only travels to California several days each month. The two have since settled into the quiet, easy rhythm of Edenton.

Michael was a single father for eight years with two boys and became accustomed to putting family first at night. His sons, Dave, 29, and Richard, 25, are now grown, but family time is still important to Michael who makes it a habit to rise early (3 a.m.) to work and is at the gym by 5 a.m. for a two-hour workout.

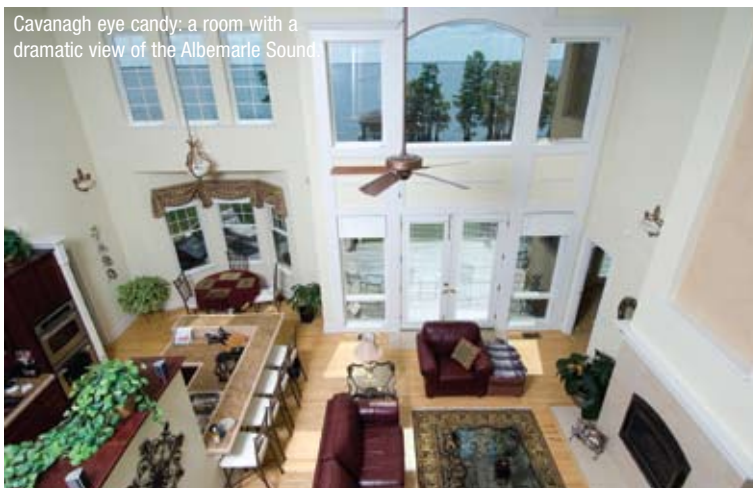
Barbara puts in a full day teaching Spanish and makes time to be the local chapter's first female Kiwanis president.

The couple has dinner every night at 5:30 p.m., and e-mail is off limits once Michael hits the door. The time-zone difference with his clients and colleagues helps. "There is no world crisis in accounting that can't wait until the next day," says a grinning Michael.

Barbara loves exposing her students to Spanish and a new culture. The Arizona native likes to spend time in the kitchen and reminds folks, "I am a Sicilian girl, so I like to cook," says Barbara. Interestingly, her favorite cuisine is Mexican, but she generally cooks healthy. "I have to keep Michael out of the kitchen because he is a butter and cheese man. He is allowed to grill, though!"

It would make sense that the couple who likes to cook met in a restaurant. Michael frequented the steakhouse where Barbara was the

Cavanagh eye candy: a room with a dramatic view of the Albemarle Sound.



manager and had been checking her out for awhile. Barbara's boss was friends with Michael and told him to call her. Years later, she is sheepish about it. "I had no idea who Michael was when he first called," she says with a grin.

They hit it off and went to Napa on their first date, which fell on April 15, no less. It spoke to his intentions that he would go out anywhere on the most stressful day of the year in his profession. A year later they married.

Eleven years later it is all bliss in the house they have created to enjoy and relax in. Both have offices that face the water and confess to not getting a lot done at times for staring out at the Albemarle Sound. Michael's office is right over Barbara's, and it is accessed by a winding stairway. It is also an easy entry for Michael who sometimes enjoys unwinding from his work by throwing paper down from his office onto Barbara when she is working.

The couple that works hard also plays hard. Weekends are on the water with friends and neighbors. They enjoy their Starcraft deck boat and have just bought a Sunfish, a small sailboat built for one. "I have to tell him that it is my turn," says Barbara. "I am the cruiser and he is the racer." Barbara is happy sunning on the deck, tubing or just relaxing on the water in a raft. They also own a Catalina 22 sailboat. A Catalina 27 that stayed behind in California will go to Barbara's parents. Michael is a California native who learned to sail on the San Francisco Bay.

On a calm day here, it is hard to believe that disaster had once struck in 2003 in the form of Hurricane Isabel. The storm threw the Cavanaghs' dock onto their backyard but otherwise they avoided major damage from the hurricane. The tragedy had a silver lining for the Cavanaghs as they watched neighbors and even strangers come together in the small town. "No one had water or electricity for days, and we all banded together and cooked outside," says Michael. "I will never forget grilling steaks for the police officers and how close we all felt."

The couple is still adjusting to the slower pace, but love life in Edenton. "I am a farm boy at heart and hope this never gets spoiled here," says Michael.

Barbara agrees. "I know the families of my students here so well and I would not have had that in California." 