



Getting  
**CLOSE**  
While Building  
**LONG**  
Distance



Photo: Gabriel Builders

**W**hen Ben and Bennie Whipple decided to come to The Cliffs, it was all about golf.

“I live, breathe and eat golf” is how Ben describes his passion for the game. “Now that I was retiring, I expected to be playing a lot.”

What he didn’t expect was that he and Bennie would develop a friendship as close as family with the contractor who built their home. But that’s exactly what happened.

#### **Amusement Park for Golfers**

When the Whipples decided they’d had enough of California taxes and traffic, Ben went on the Internet looking for golfing communities. Then a friend, the publisher of a golf magazine, told them they had to take a look at The Cliffs, where one membership meant seven courses to play.

“One for every day of the week.” A smile as big as a bunker breaks out across Ben’s face at the very thought of it. “The Cliffs is just Disneyland for golfers.”

So the question became, at which Cliffs club should they build? And, of course, there were the very real issues inherent in building a home in South Carolina when you’re living in California.

“We came out in 2010 and stayed in Asheville for three days. We enjoyed it, but when we came to Greenville, we absolutely fell in love with it,” Bennie says. “We walked everywhere and discovered a beautiful theater, fabulous restaurants, a river right downtown ...”

“And a Class A minor league team that plays baseball there. Very cool,” Ben adds, referring to the Greenville Drive, a Red Sox affiliate that plays in a replica of Boston’s iconic Fenway Park. “So we focused on Mountain Park.”

Close to Greenville, it proved the perfect location for the retired commercial architect and his wife. They’re no more than an hour from any of the courses, allowing them to follow their regimen: Bennie plays three days a week; Ben plays four and practices two. And they’re close to all that Greenville offers.

## Making Wise Choices

“As soon as I saw the view, an overwhelming sense of peace came over me.” That’s how Bennie describes her feeling when, after much searching, they found the lot on which they would build their new home. Once a location was settled on, there was a house to build.

“I was a commercial architect, so I appreciate the importance of the contractor,” Ben says. “The value of a contractor is too often underestimated in terms of value engineering and material decisions. So, I went out to find the best contractor I could and then find a residential architect he was comfortable working with. When the contractor is involved early and works closely with the architect, the results are invariably better.”

“We talked with our agent about builders,” Bennie recounts. “He asked if we’d seen the Tom Glavine house and when we did, he suggested we talk to Gus and Belinda Rubio of Gabriel Builders, who built it. They’re part of The Cliffs Preferred Builder Program, which meant they matched up to The Cliffs’ exacting standards. So we called them.”

“Gus came to the airport hotel where we were staying the very next day with a yellow tablet and a lot of questions about what we wanted in a house. He made the meeting about us, not about his company. We appreciated that.”

“As soon as we were back in California we received emails from Belinda with information about the company and from Gus with lots of recommendations about publications we might look at for ideas.”

Gus explains: “We always want to learn what style of house a client is looking for. We want to know what kind of finishes and details they’re looking for. We want to get an idea of their budget and whether they’ve already purchased a lot. The more we know, the better able we are to help them realize their dream.”

After doing their research, the Whipple’s were certain that they wanted something with an Old World, European feel. They chose French country. Beyond that, there was only one requirement, Ben says: “That my wife have everything she wanted.”



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## Trust in the Team

“Challenges come with building a house from across the country. It’s not an easy thing to do,” Bennie says. “So many people told us we would need to be onsite and keep watch over everything. But we never lost a moment of sleep. I had complete trust in the team — Gus and Belinda; Stephen Fuller, our architect; and Jennifer Willis, our designer.”

It’s also a challenge for the builder, but one the Rubios are familiar with. “Most of our homeowners are absentee, and Ben and Bennie’s concerns were not unusual for us. What’s necessary is good communication and lots of it,” Gus explains.

“Gus and Belinda kept us constantly updated by phone, email and with photos. Whenever we did come out from California, they were there for every meeting with the architect, the landscaper and the interior designer,” Gus says.

The painstaking attention to every detail paid by both the Whipple’s and Gabriel Builders over the 18 months it took to build is readily apparent everywhere the eye comes to rest in this stunning yet relaxed and livable 7,100 square-foot showcase.

## Built on a Foundation of Friendship

Spend any time with these two couples and you quickly get the sense that the friendship that’s developed is every bit as solid as the foundation on which the home is built.

Laughter comes easily. The guys’ back-and-forth kidding is relaxed and effortless. There have been attempts, mostly unsuccessful, by Gus to teach Ben how to grill. The women get together to look for things for the house, they hike in the hills and they get into Greenville for lunch.

Bennie sums it up best: “We found a property, a community and friends that will be with us the rest of our lives.”



All photos: Gabriel Builders