



Elemental Concerns

All About Windows offers superior hurricane protection—and much more

BY MARY KIRTON | PHOTOGRAPHS BY DICKSON DUNLAP

Hurricane season is upon us again. As weathermen warn of tropical depressions off Africa or point to swirling white pinwheels in the Caribbean, we start to worry: What direction will those storms take—and what should we do to protect our homes in the event they make

landfall?

When the alarm finally sounds, three types of homeowners go into action: Optimists tape their windows. Procrastinators race to the hardware store for plywood. But the last group, the prudent among us, calmly close their shutters. They have taken precautions well

ahead of hurricane season. These are the folks who've taken time to consult with Roland and Mary Ann Gahafer, owners of All About Windows.

The Gahaferes, who spend much of their time advising homeowners about hurricane protection, offer up some good news: There are



many products available for protecting a home's windows and doors, and they are affordable, ranging in price from \$150 to \$800 per window. Today's options offer advantages over last-minute solutions like plywood, because they are decorative, lightweight, durable, translucent (to allow sunlight into a home) and easy to store. They range from

removable products that homeowners can install themselves to more expensive, permanently installed systems—manually operated or motorized—that require professional installation.

Among the removable protective products is the Clear Storm Panel, made of Lexan. This product, four times stronger than half-inch

plywood sheets, is translucent and offers protection from the sun's ultraviolet rays. Lexan and comparable products like Wayne Dalton Fabric Shield meet or exceed International Building Code standards, mandated in South Carolina, and can withstand wind speeds of 120 miles per hour or more.



In the Lowcountry, permanently installed, hurricane-resistant colonial shutters are particularly popular for home exteriors. The Gahafers believe that All About Windows' turnkey service—which includes manufacturing, painting, installing and servicing such shutters—distinguishes their company from competitors. Their products are custom-fitted, meet local architectural standards and are made from rot-resistant composite materials or aluminum.

They are particularly proud of All About Windows' record of providing shutters for some of the finest homes in Charleston's historical district. Their mahogany shutters are durable and will last for years. All About Windows also produces shutter hardware, including an exterior locking bolt that resembles those on pre-1850 homes. "This hardware hasn't been made for 50 to 100 years," says Roland, who commissions an overseas foundry to manufacture all his shutter hardware.

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All About Windows also specializes in state-of-the-art, motorized roll-down shutters that can be wired to home integration systems. Roland explains that it's now possible for homeowners to push a button on their laptop in New York or Atlanta and remotely close shutters over every window in their Charleston home—the ultimate in convenient, 21st-century hurricane preparedness.

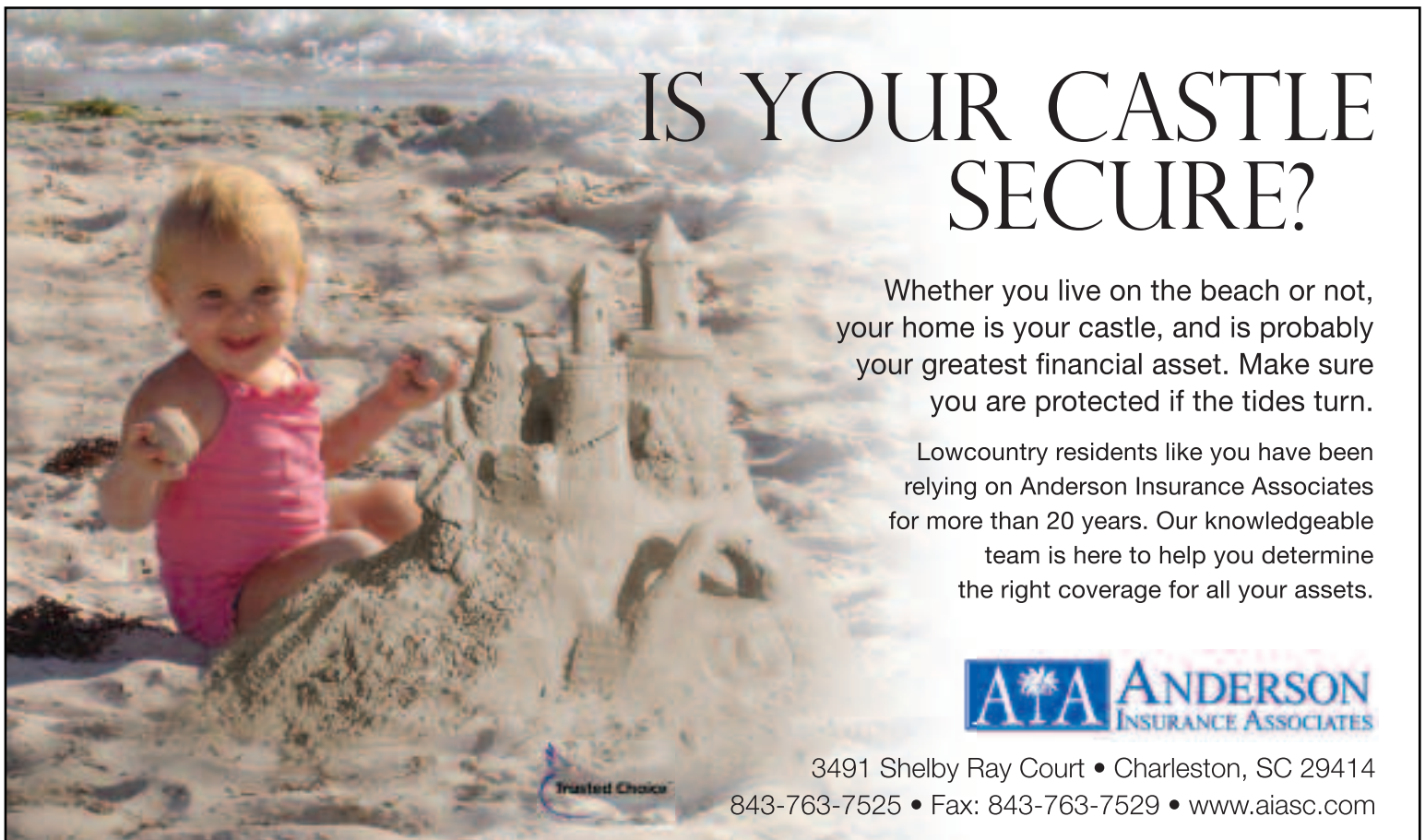
Interior Solutions

Mary Ann started All About Windows around

ten years ago, after relocating to Daniel Island from Charlotte, North Carolina, to be closer to the coast. After a project to install their own window treatments turned into a four-month ordeal of unreturned phone calls and inadequate service, the Gahafers concluded that the Charleston area could benefit from their entrepreneurial skills.

The company got started by focusing on custom interior window treatments, including plantation shutters, natural and Roman shades, blinds and other treatments manufactured by Hunter Douglas, B&W, Conrad and others. As the window fashions market improved in terms of fabrics, styles, textures, colors and control systems, the business grew. Then, after finding success with interior window treatments, the Gahafers began to offer traditionally styled exterior shutters and hurricane protection products.


Today, All About Windows offers products for all a homeowner's needs, Interior treatments



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are designed to offer 24-hour privacy and to control natural light. Exterior treatments, such as storm panels, permanent shutter systems and colonial shutters, can be hurricane resistant, purely decorative—or both.

The company continues to add new, innovative products to their line-up. Increasingly popular are solar screen shades, made of a contemporary-looking mesh or woven material. These sleek shades diffuse light and deflect the heat and glare of the sun. Best of all, they come in various “strengths,” so it’s possible to preserve the view while staying comfortable. Some are even available in eco-friendly, 100% PVC-free fabrics.

The couple believes that a distinguishing feature of the company is their commitment to superior customer service. In fact, every member of their experienced sales and installation team goes out of his or her way to ensure that customers avoid costly mistakes by selecting products that are in line with their

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needs. As a result of their commitment to quality and service, the company’s customer base has grown rapidly and now includes clients in Charleston and the surrounding area, from Myrtle Beach to Hilton Head.

The Gahafers are sensitive to aesthetic considerations. Regarding interior plantation shutters, for example, which are a large part of the company’s business, Mary Ann says, “Plantation shutters are not just for traditional homes. They can go in contemporary settings as well. Those with wider, four-and-a-half-inch

louvers help provide an open, clean feeling to a room, especially when you add the clear view [invisible] tilt feature.”

Mary Ann, who focuses more on the company’s interior window treatments, says that clients who come to her often don’t know exactly what they want. But she and her experienced sales staff, acting as designers and consultants, help people find what they really need. “Our goal,” she says, “is to recommend the perfect window solutions....We’re available through the entire process from product selection to installation and beyond. Details are important, and we make sure we cover them all.” ➔

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