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OUT OF THE WOODS

*BUILDING A HOUSE
IN THE MIDDLE
OF TENNESSEE'S
BLACKBERRY FARM
IS AS CLOSE TO
HEAVEN AS IT GETS*

By Michael Graff

FOUR YEARS AGO, AN ARCHITECT FROM GEORGIA AND A DESIGNER FROM Virginia drove toward the green hills of Walland, Tennessee, to Blackberry Farm. They went past the main dining barn of one of the South's most beloved resorts, through the white pines, and they imagined what kind of home they could grow there for their clients, a couple who had long loved spending time at the destination.

We've all gone on a vacation and imagined living in the spot permanently; it's another thing to pull it off. The homeowners that the architect Keith Summerour and the designer Barry Dixon were heading to meet were not only going to follow through, they were doing so in arguably the dreamiest setting in the South—one open to only a precious few private residences.

A home, Summerour and Dixon believed—especially a home there, on a slope of untouched property with views of the Great Smoky Mountains—should belong in its locale. So over the next two years, every design decision went through the same test: Does the choice fit the room? Does the room fit the home? Does the home fit the landscape? From those questions came the answer: a rustic five-bedroom lodge outfitted in reclaimed barn wood from the surrounding county that looks like it grew from the Tennessee hillside, where the interior invites the outside in at every opportunity, and nature and natural light are exalted. That translates to nearly floor-to-ceiling windows in the forty-foot-wide living room that make you feel as though you're in the woods when you're sitting on a couch. An office looking out

toward Chilhowee Mountain, white pines in every direction, that seems more like a tree house. And flooring that runs from limestone to white oak seamlessly.

The homeowners fell in love with the peace at Blackberry Farm on an anniversary trip in the early 2000s. They returned with their children, year after year, becoming close with the resort's owners, the Bealls. When the property initially opened

■ Above, from left: The front door opens to the cobblestoned courtyard; a custom-upholstered banquette.

land for residences in an area called Blair Branch, the couple was among the first to build what was then a getaway. But they soon dreamed bigger—of making a full-time home there, once their youngest child went off to college. Then a parcel on the main Blackberry grounds opened up four years ago, and they went for it. Now that their four children are scattered in different states, the homeowners hope Blackberry, where they created so many memories, will draw them back with their friends, and eventually their own families.

The magic of the home lies in its ability to sleep a dozen or so people when that day comes, but feel snug for two in the meantime. On a recent weekday afternoon, the weather was cool, so one of the homeowners escaped to a favorite space, the cozy “keeping room” off the kitchen; two of its walls open up to a big screened-in porch, and the pool and the terrace. Another wall features a fireplace and bookshelves, and a custom light fixture made out of rusticated iron resembling an old piece of barn machinery hangs above, between exposed beams of white oak.

Comfort like this was imperative. One of the homeowners’ children, when he was younger, once remarked that their old house was “formal”—they didn’t even realize he knew what that word meant. This house would instead be a place where you could put your feet up anywhere, and where every room would be used.

To the designer, the home also needed to be something else: “I think that doing a well-designed Southern home is like a good story,” says Dixon, who studied at Ole Miss at a time when Eudora Welty would drop in on writing classes, his included. “It has a strong beginning and it has a strong end. It’s all connected.”



One-of-a-kind conversation pieces that speak to both Blackberry Farm beyond the walls and a sense of refinement abound—a gigantic painting of grazing cattle made with the French *verre églomisé* technique using the reverse side of glass, for instance, and in the strikingly beautiful stairwell, a three-story-tall chandelier that Dixon designed, crafted in collaboration with the

■ From top: The kitchen, clad in reclaimed wood; for the living room, artist Jean de Merry created a massive *verre églomisé* piece depicting cattle grazing with mountains in the backdrop.





Charleston, South Carolina, blacksmith Peyton Avrett. To Dixon's point, those same careful details extend to areas beyond the main living spaces, from the mudroom for dogs to the downstairs game and movie rooms. "We wanted modern but elemental things that had a natural and handmade quality," Dixon says, "so that this would belong here in the mountains, but we were bringing the rest of the world to the mountains, too."

In every season, the house delivers on just that, along with lively conversation, merrymaking, and relaxation. Some days begin with coffee in the living room while looking out at the majestic view. In summer, spring, and fall, suppers are served on the screened-in porch, and the cobblestoned courtyard Summerour dreamed up is the scene of parties. But when the weather turns cool, the homeowners find themselves

drifting back to that small keeping room, where they can sit quietly and look up at those oak beams with the fire crackling, or have a chat in the kitchen, or gaze out into the mountains until it's time to go outside.

■ Clockwise from above left: A cozy bedroom; a bathtub with a burnished cast-iron

base; the screened-in porch. Opposite: The sitting room.



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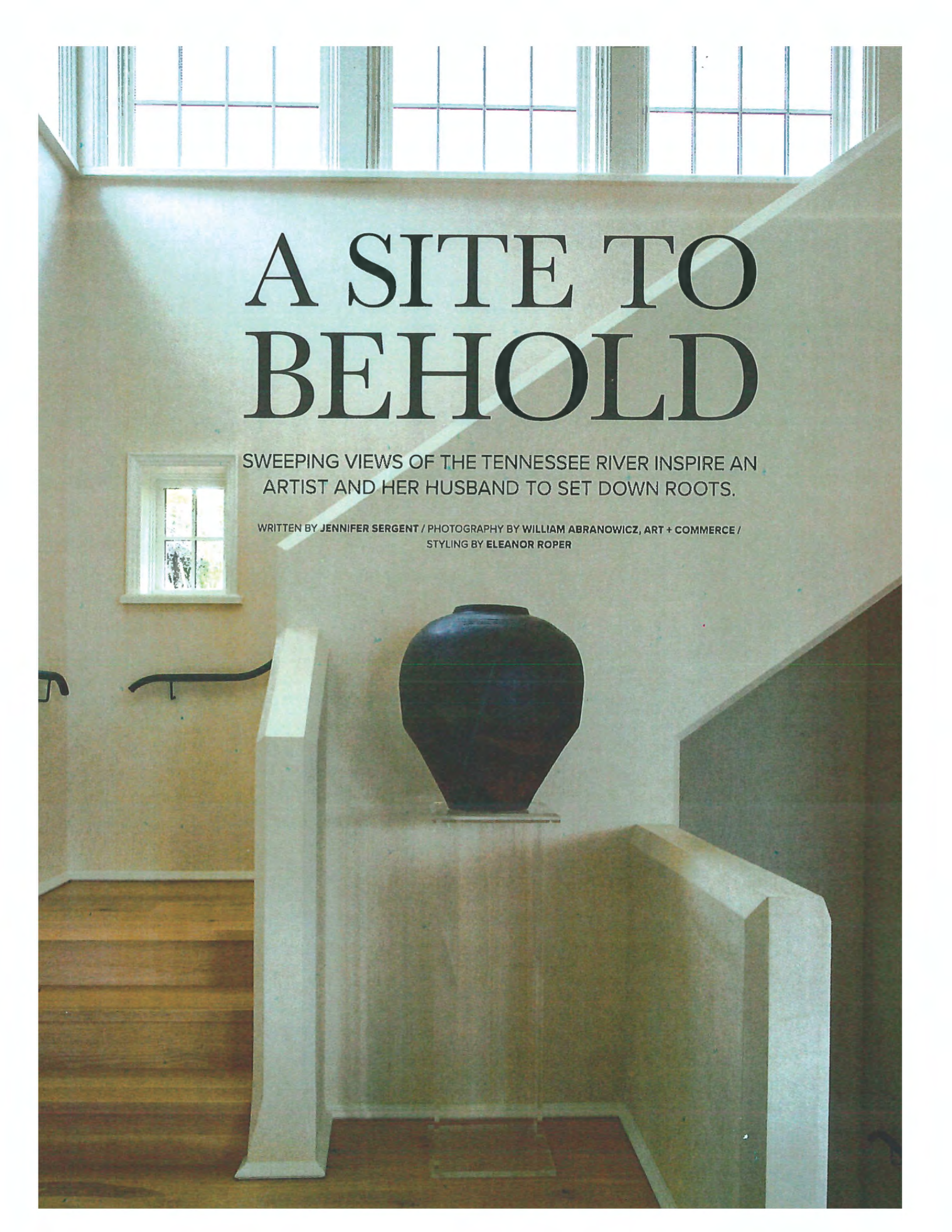
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A SITE TO BEHOLD

SWEEPING VIEWS OF THE TENNESSEE RIVER INSPIRE AN
ARTIST AND HER HUSBAND TO SET DOWN ROOTS.

WRITTEN BY JENNIFER SERGENT / PHOTOGRAPHY BY WILLIAM ABRANOWICZ, ART + COMMERCE /
STYLING BY ELEANOR ROPER

Designer Cameron Mobley created the pattern for the handmade Tibetan wool-and-silk rug grounding the living room of this Knoxville, Tennessee, home, where sofas wear ivory linen with a silk welt, both by Rogers & Goffigon. Between them, a travertine-topped coffee table by Formations greets circa-1840 French stools from English Accent Antiques in Atlanta.

Bill and Teri Nix—natives of Montgomery, Alabama—"didn't know a soul" when Bill's job necessitated a move to Knoxville, Tennessee, Teri remembers. But once they found an 8-acre plot on the Tennessee River, they saw an opportunity to create a waterfront homestead where they could entertain a new coterie of friends and host their children and grandchildren for overnight stays. They called on Birmingham architect Jeffrey Dungan, whose work they'd long admired, to realize their vision. The property, Dungan notes, truly was a blank slate. "It had a Southern, little-rolling-hillside, agrarian feel to it, with a few trees to help nestle the house."

Dungan recalls a four-hour "doodling" session at nearby Blackberry Farm following his first visit to the site. Says the architect, "The muse didn't just show up, she practically drew herself." The result is a compound that nestles into itself along the hillside rather than relying on landscape, with stone walls enclosing an entry court and two gardens, shingled rooflines that swoop down in front like a protective cape and a fireplace on the entry porch to welcome visitors inside. "The final house is exactly what the sketches are—it didn't change," he says.

The Nixes enlisted a team to support Dungan and design partner Michelle Cone, which included Birmingham designer Cameron Mobley, Nashville landscape architect Mike Kaiser and general contractor Burke Pinnell. Their designs played to Teri's preference for a calm, light and neutral palette. "It's an emotion—a feeling that neutrals bring to me," she says. "My mind gets too cluttered if there's too much going on." Throughout the home, Dungan and Cone set the tone with lime wash over the white-oak floors, ceiling beams and plaster walls.





Mobley applied that limited palette to textures that would enrich each space. "Teri really encouraged me to go subtle—no colors," she says, and besides: "The architecture is so beautiful, we didn't want to distract from it." Dungan incorporated classic architectural elements to make the new house feel much older. Ceiling beams were sourced from a Kentucky distillery; the entry's floor tile is antique; and Dungan designed the front door with lime-washed antique oak. The custom, plaster-covered range hood, Mobley adds, makes it feel "like standing inside of an old European kitchen." She credits Teri, who previously owned an art and antiques shop in Montgomery, for appreciating the quality of the antiques and custom furnishings she then selected for every space. "She was

very interested in the history of each piece," Mobley says. "She wanted to know whose hands were on it."

The most cherished spaces are separate from the house: Teri's art studio over the porte cochere and Bill's home office that anchors one of the enclosed gardens. "I wanted him to have a place to think and listen—his own special spot," Dungan says of the latter. "He's a gentleman. I wanted him to have an appropriate gentleman's office." Teri's studio is surrounded by glass on three sides with a paneled ceiling that resembles a pinwheel—a design taken from Dungan's own drafting room in Birmingham. "It's my creative space, and I thought she would like one of her own," Dungan says. The sweeping views from that aerie include the intricacies of the home's many rooflines.

Sheer Lino linen draperies by Mokum, purchased through Paul Plus in Atlanta, admit light into the dining area from the walled garden outside. Custom seating surrounds the homeowners' own table, which is topped with antique Chinese jars from Bungalow Classic in Atlanta. The sconces are by Rose Tarlow Melrose House.



"It's a silhouette you don't find often," Pinnell notes. "There's a stair-step profile in stone that's unique, and on the flatter areas there are pieces of copper that look like wide, rectangular shingles. Each joint was soldered together on-site."

Kaiser completed the picture with plantings that complement the home and shield it from view. "The architecture created rooms in the landscape, and we decided to follow that theme," he said, using the walls that extend from the house as frames for trees, hedges and flowering bushes. Farther out, he positioned more than 50 trees to better define the property. "The trees are planted in groupings so they will mature into and resemble naturally occurring groves," Kaiser says—and

many of them mask the prized river views from the home's approach. "It's to create some mystery; you don't get the money shot until you're welcomed into the house."

Those lucky guests are treated to dinner parties in the courtyard and casual gatherings on the terrace and pool deck. And when not entertaining or spending time with their grandchildren, Teri has begun selling the art she's been painting in her studio. In that respect, Dungan notes, the house is everything he envisioned for clients who've become dear friends. "They are a warm and loving couple. The house, to me, has that appeal. There's something attractive and winsome about it—and I've found Bill and Teri to be exactly that." ■

Dungan designed a standalone structure for homeowner Bill Nix's office. The iron-framed glass walls were fabricated by RG Ironworks. Landscape architect Mike Kaiser planted pachysandra and Autumn ferns to border the stepping stones that lead from the private garden out to the pool.

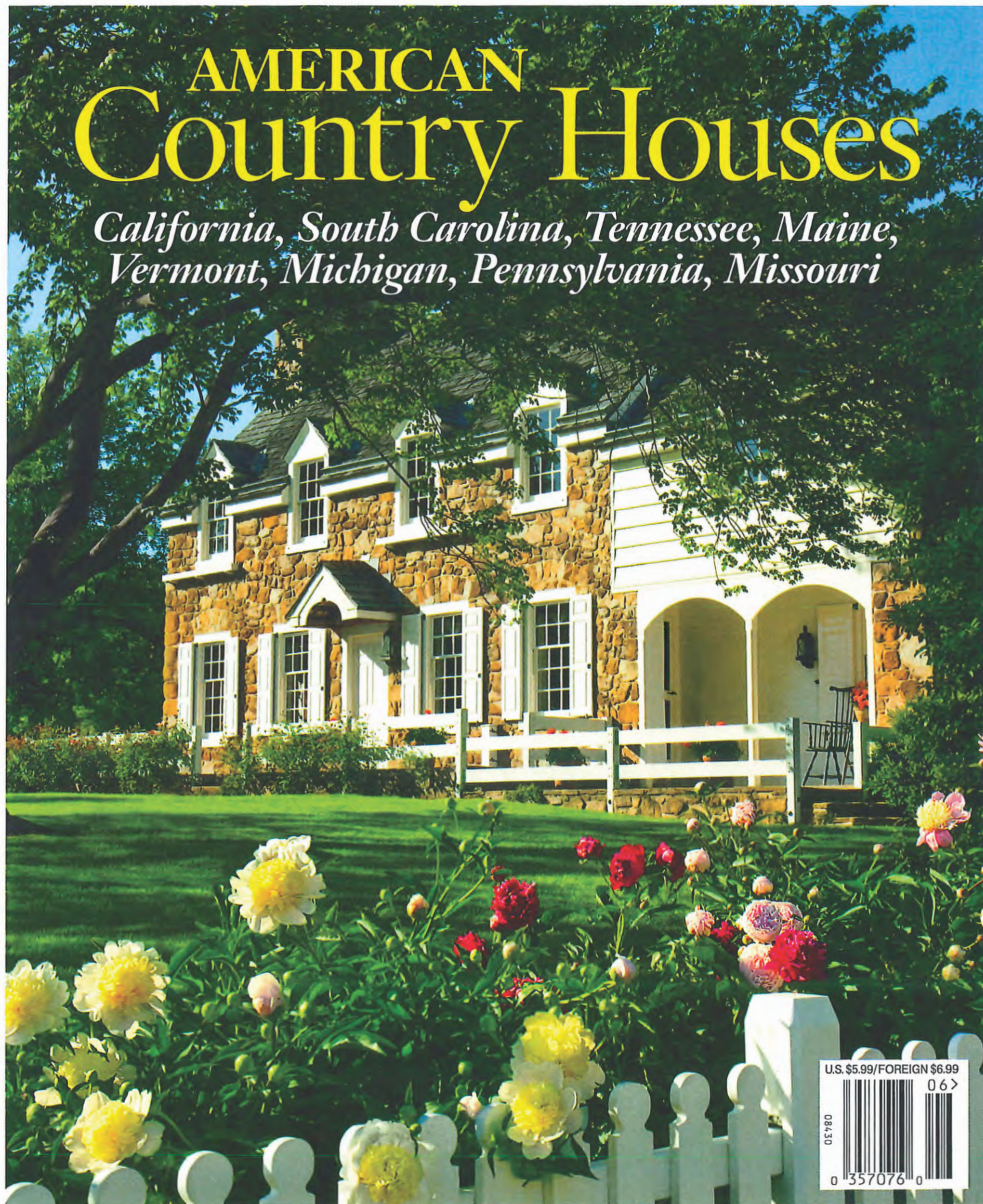
ARCHITECTURAL DIGEST

THE INTERNATIONAL MAGAZINE OF DESIGN

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AMERICAN COUNTRY HOUSES

Tennessee

Tale of Toad Hall

A TASTE OF ENGLISH COUNTRY STYLE IN THE SMOKY MOUNTAINS

Architecture by Jack Davis, AIA/Interior Design by Suzanne Kasler, ASID
Landscape Architecture by Mary Palmer Dargan, ASLA/Text by John Loring/Photography by Jeff Herr

Striking contrasts of rough and rugged with smooth and polished abound at Toad Hall.



MAIN HOUSE

ABOVE: Eclectic materials—chinking, shingles, stone, tin—contribute to the quirky charm of the main house, designed by Atlanta architect Jack Davis. RIGHT: Walls and ceilings of salvaged wood offset the sophistication of the great room's furnishings and art—put together by interior designer Suzanne Kasler—including an unsigned late-19th-century painting, a George III sideboard and chinoiserie tables. Stark sisal carpet. Lee Jofa drapery fabric.

A profound love of the land, mixed with a lifelong passion for home entertaining, is the driving force behind the imposing collection of five log structures that Kreis and Sandy Beall have built on a picturesque 32-acre site in Tennessee's Great Smoky Mountains. With southern understatement, the Bealls and their Atlanta-based interior designer, Suzanne Kasler, refer to the compound's 12,000 square feet of buildings, including the princely main house, as "log cabins," much in the way that southerners might self-deprecatingly refer to the majestic two-story columns of their plantation houses as "sticks."

The logs in question are more than amply proportioned antique timbers collected, as Kreis Beall explains, "by a man in Knoxville, Tennessee, with a passion for finding and gathering timbers from old log barns." If they form a robust and richly textured background for the Bealls' vast collections of 18th- and early-19th-century European furnishings and household ornaments, as they do, they also adamantly refuse to remain in the background. Joined by rugged boulder chimney breasts, the logs set the tone for the interiors' unshakable and comforting stability.

The idea for this cheerfully self-assured and charm-





“It’s an English country house made out of logs,” says the interior designer, Suzanne Kasler.

LEFT: At one end of the great room, the open kitchen “is very much a master chef’s kitchen,” says Kasler. “Kreis Beall has a passion for cooking, which was the inspiration for the culinary excellence at Blackberry Farm.” The pair of French still lifes are 18th century. The oak rack is 19th-century English.

Toad Hall “is a combination of refined and rugged,” remarks Kreis Beall (below, with Brewster). “From blue jeans to ball gowns, it works for everything.” **OPPOSITE:** “The master bedroom was done in soft neutrals—just cream and tan,” Kasler notes. The unsigned oil is from the 1850s. Rogers & Goffigon chair fabric and drapery and valance trim. Gregorius/Pineo lacquered tray tables.

ingly nonconformist dwelling was recycled from one of the Bealls’ former vacation homes in the Carolinas. Like Toad Hall, it was designed by Atlanta architect Jack Davis in log cabin style and named The Abe by Kreis Beall. “All I could think of when I saw it was Lincoln Logs. I even collected Lincoln memorabilia for it,” she recalls, adding, “That was a long-distance house; I was more removed from it. But when I did a house I was going to live in, I had to be completely involved in that.”

The Bealls have long been involved in their Great Smoky Mountains property developments, having founded their Relais & Château resort, Blackberry Farm, in 1976—“my labor of love for 33 years,” Kreis Beall notes. It is recognized by the Zagat guidebooks as one of the finest boutique hotels in America, and its main hotel

and log cottages, which sit on a 4,200-acre property, are looked after by a staff of 120, including talented artisans such as a master cheese maker and a chocolatier.

In planning their new home on the magnificent mountain valley site adjacent to Blackberry Farm, Kreis Beall says, “I have a pet saying, which goes, ‘Don’t agree with me, because I’ve already changed my mind.’ So, after a lot of plans and a lot of meetings with our architect, I announced that I was changing course and wanted to build The Abe all over again. It fits the site so perfectly. For me, building a home is not all about blueprints but about materials and construction and about simplifying everything.”

For the interior designer, the challenges of the interiors’ massive logs and boulders was not at first so simple. “How do you take a log house and in-



GUEST COTTAGE

LEFT: Tadpole Cottage was "built from a simple sketch," says Kasler. "The builder just put it together." **BELOW LEFT:** The bedroom's walls and ceiling inspired the high-contrast palette of the furnishings, including the cream bed hangings for the hickory-log four-poster.



introduce the fabulous?" Kasler asked herself. "It's an English country house made out of logs—a dark surround you're working with, and everything had to have texture and dimension. Fabrics had to have enough weight to hold their own. Scale and strength were key elements.

"The Bealls love architecture and design, and because of it, they really push the envelope. Working with them is special, because you get to do things that are unique. They pay attention to the details of everything, just as they do at Blackberry Farm."

Striking contrasts of rough and rugged with smooth and polished abound at Toad Hall. A gilt Regency mirror above a Chippendale sideboard is backed by the timbered walls, as is an antique Chinese lacquered screen. Below it is a second sideboard, which displays boldly colorful late-18th-century Coalport china in what Kasler describes as the "fabulous, enormous, all-in-one" great room, where the owners entertain. There are gleaming antique silver and glowing creamware collections in antique cabinets. A large and jauntily rococo northern European tapestry cartoon is key in taming a rough-hewn wall.

There are velvets, damasks, paisleys and tapestry fabrics mixed together in upholstery and accent pillows. Antique Oriental rugs are layered on larger sisal carpets. "Tone and texture, weight and texture, are in balance," Kasler observes. "Every visual you go toward has

such interest and pulls the interior together." There are fabrics from the house of iconic English antiques dealer and designer Geoffrey Bennison, which Kasler also used in every room of Blackberry Farm's Singing Brook Cottages. Bennison's well-known, relaxed if studied, very grand and very English mix of Regency and William IV styles, with the odd note of the Victorian club, appears to inform much of Toad Hall's interior, although his fabrics are the only immediate presence of pure Bennisonian style.

Gracefully conceived and thriving English-style gardens, designed by Mary Palmer Dargan, cover the site surrounding and articulating the compound's five log structures. There is every possible native herb, shrub and flower, along with boxwood, rosemary and lavender, espaliered pears and apples, antique roses and even herbaceous terrestrial orchids.

A madly picturesque two-room log cabin baptized Tadpole Cottage sits across a pond. Its function, defined by Kasler, could be said to be the universal function of all that Toad Hall embraces: "charm and folly!" □

WRITER'S COTTAGE

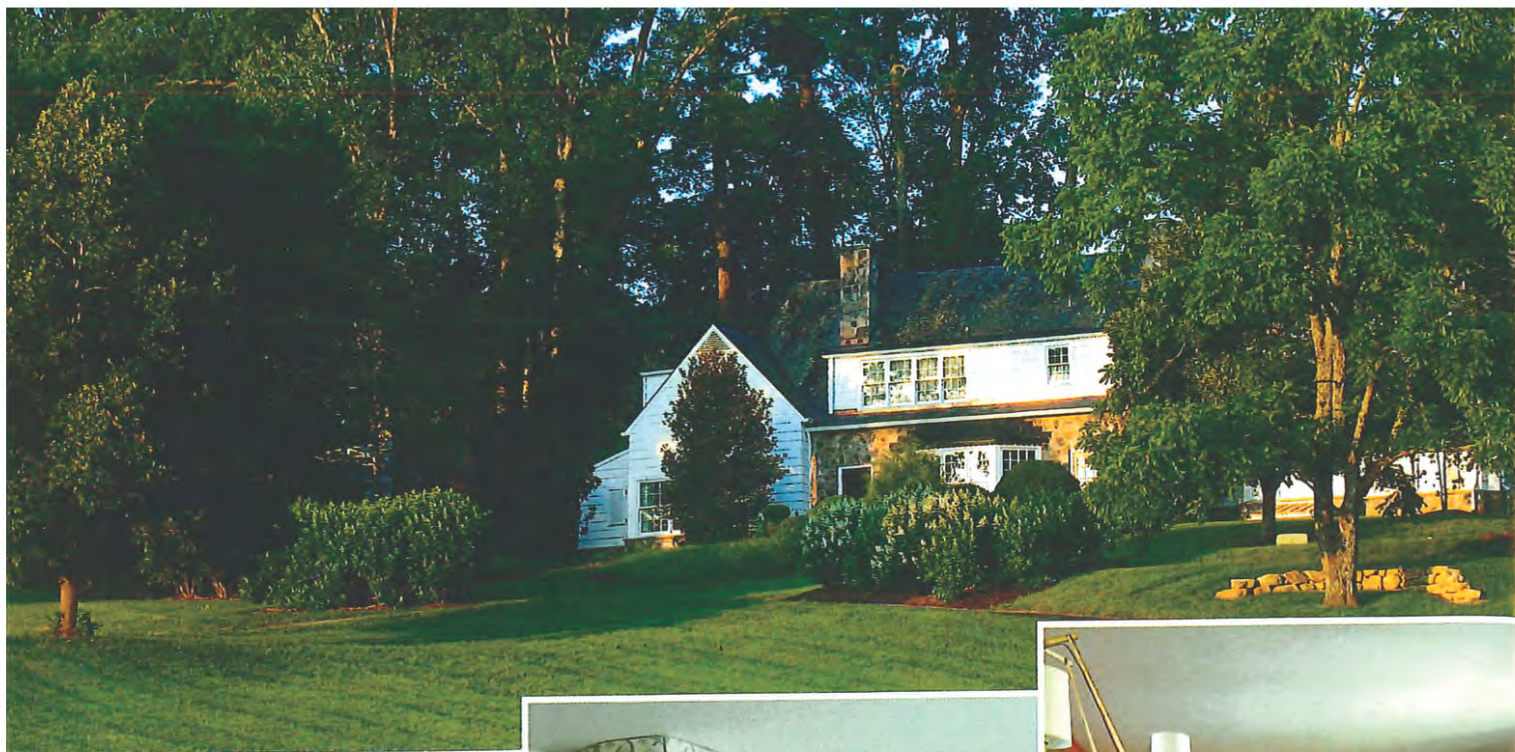
OPPOSITE: The cutting garden, which is filled with both perennials and annuals, is "old-fashioned," says Toad Hall's landscape architect, Mary Palmer Dargan. Beyond it are a newly planted apple orchard and, nestled at the edge of the woods, the Writer's Cottage.



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Opening pages: Life at Blackberry Farm, situated in the scenic foothills of Tennessee's Great Smoky Mountains can be as carefree for guests as going for a swing beneath the shade of a giant tree—a favorite activity for children and adults. The resort's flock of resident sheep help to naturally manicure the lawns on the 4,200-acre property. This page: The resort is comprised of several buildings scattered on the grounds, including one that is known simply as The Guest House, a picturesque home. Its rooms typically feature well-adorned beds and private and public seating areas that are comfortably furnished with wing chairs, settees, and artworks. Opposite: Another one of the more sought-after guest cottages at Blackberry Farm is The Carriage House, situated atop a small rise and noted for its architectural cupola.



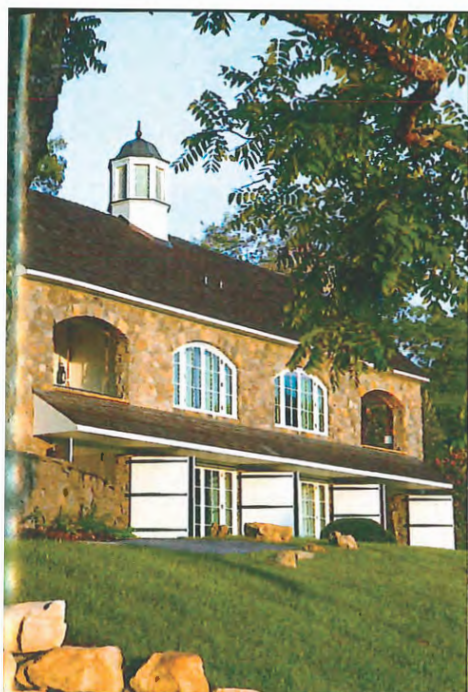
One of the most magical times of day at Blackberry Farm is early morning, when mist wafts gently over the foothills of Tennessee's Great Smoky Mountains and hangs like a cloud over the property's Tellico Lake. There are 4,200 acres here, an hour south of Knoxville in the eastern part of the state, and scattered among them is a topographical array of hills, forests, grassy fields, and streams. There are also blackberry bushes, which gave the property its name.

Back in the 1930s, the previous owners, a couple named Florida and Dave Lasier, discovered this land while traveling between Chicago and the Georgia coast searching for a locale to build a home. They were enchanted by the place and when Florida's stockings snagged on a blackberry bush, they had the name. In 1976, while walking through the property, Kreis Beall had no such blackberry altercation

but she and husband Samuel Beall III, known as Sandy, the founder of the Ruby Tuesday restaurant chain, were also drawn to it just as the Lasiers had been.

"The immediate charm was, of course, the beauty," she says. "It was inspiring. I looked at the land and the space and saw an opportunity to bring a dream to life—creating a place for great food and cherished fellowship. This had always been a dream of mine and I knew this place could be so much more than just a home for my family."

At first, they opened six rooms to outside guests, adding rooms incrementally over the years, along with self-contained cottages and houses with three to five bedrooms for a current total of sixty-eight. The inn was also accepted as a member of the esteemed organization Relais & Châteaux and is often cited as the best in the country.



But the overall style has remained the same throughout: gracious, traditional but not fussy Southern charm. From the antiques and fine fabrics in the original rooms, now known as the Historic Rooms, to the stone fireplaces and rustic four-posters composed of fused striplings in the secluded Hill Cottages and the nubby fabrics, oriental carpets, and wing chairs in the living rooms of the houses, all exude warmth and ease. Beall's eye for design has proved so popular with guests that she formed a separate division, Blackberry Farm Design, which apart from designing the inn's rooms also now undertakes outside design projects.

As gracious as its design is, though, many guests return again and again for the inn's food; its culinary achievements showcasing local ingredients in inventive preparations have earned multiple James Beard Foundation nominations,

three awards, and fans around the world and within the chef community. It's one area of the inn that was always a family focus but that has clearly evolved over the years.

"The culinary focus really came to the forefront when Sam became proprietor," Beall explains, referring to her late son who took over management of the inn with his wife Mary Celeste in 1998. (He died tragically in a skiing accident in Colorado in February 2016; Mary Celeste Beall, already involved in inn operations, took over management.) "He spent a lot of time visiting and working at some of the most well-respected restaurants, wineries, and farms in the world. He wanted to bring that experience, the farm-to-table experience and high-quality cuisine to Blackberry Farm."

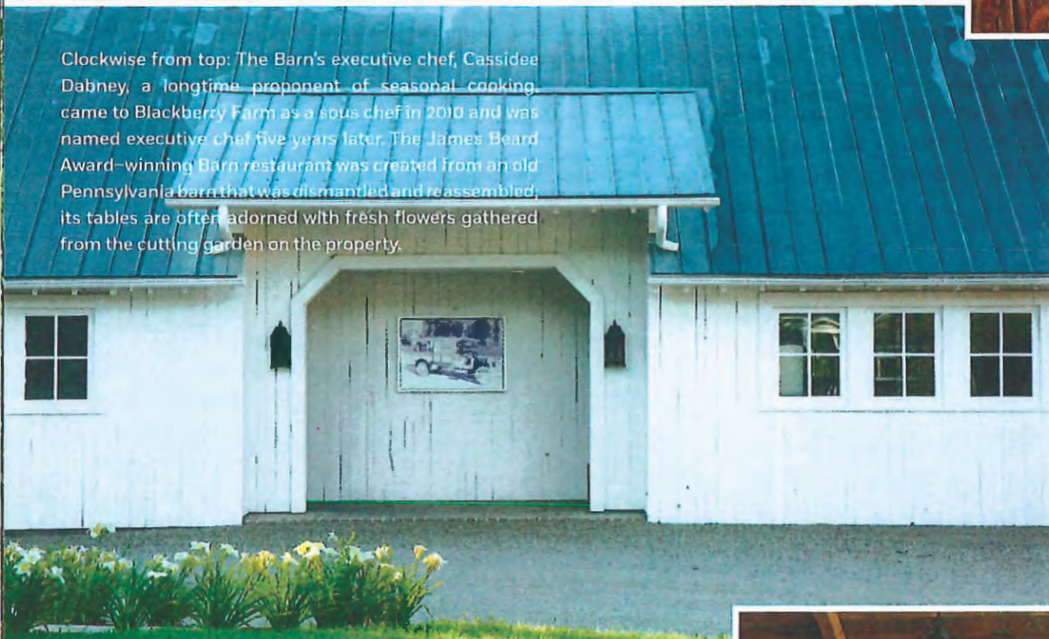
The results are clearly visible to guests as they stroll the gardens with master gardener John Coykendall, learning



Clockwise from top: The arched wooden Boathouse on the property's scenic Tellico Lake is such a romantic spot that it has been the setting for many a wedding proposal. Rocking chairs are a fixture of the Farm, positioned at every point to take in views of the Great Smoky Mountains. Picnic tables are often the setting for alfresco tastes of farmstead products. Some houses incorporate local stone.



Clockwise from top: The Barn's executive chef, Cassidee Dabney, a longtime proponent of seasonal cooking, came to Blackberry Farm as a sous chef in 2010 and was named executive chef five years later. The James Beard Award-winning Barn restaurant was created from an old Pennsylvania barn that was dismantled and reassembled; its tables are often adorned with fresh flowers gathered from the cutting garden on the property.



about heritage seeds and farming practices or doing a tasting tour of farmstead fruits and vegetables such as the namesake blackberries, sour cherries, and wild mushrooms. Or they can taste products such as arugula and black walnut pesto, their house-produced cheeses with evocative names such as Appalachian Gold and Singing Brook, charcuterie, preserves, including bacon jam, all available to buy to take home.

The real showcase of the culinary experience, though, is The Barn, the specialty dining room set in a two-hundred-year-old Pennsylvania barn, taken apart, moved, and reassembled piece by piece. It opened in 2007 with interiors designed by Suzanne Kasler, who had previously contributed other designs to the inn, as well as designing the interiors for the house built by Sam and Mary Celeste Beall on the property. The offerings here, elite examples of their "Foothills Cuisine," feature dishes such as shaved beets with the local smokehouse Benton's country ham with yogurt foam, chives and smoked mushroom oil, and roasted Pekin duck breast with sweet-tea gastrique, fall vegetables and foie gras. There's also a list of three hundred rare whiskies and a worldwide wine list that runs a couple of hundred pages. Rare among facilities here, no children under ten are allowed.

They are, however, quite welcome in the inn's other restaurant, the main dining room, The Dogwood, with a slightly simpler menu (wild striped bass with brown butter, capers, and lemon; cakes such as caramel chocolate tart with espresso whipped cream and cocoa nibs). And they're totally welcome and encouraged to participate in all of the Farm's activities. Unlike other hotels with such sophistication, Blackberry Farm is truly slanted toward families.

"We always had a vision to include families," explains Beall. "When Sam was a toddler and we were just getting started, he would follow behind me and help me serve meals to our guests. As he and the property grew, he worked in all different areas of operation. It always felt natural to create a family experience because family was such a big part of it for us."

That's why, unless children four years and older are off on their own in supervised Camp Blackberry activities, or pre-teens and older are in Youth Discovery programs painting, doing ceramics, or engaging in adventure activities, you'll see families together all over the grounds. They might be canoeing or paddling a stable board on the lake, trout fishing in Hesse Creek, riding horses on the trails, hiking a field of wildflowers. Or, they may be making friends with the Lagotto Romagnolo puppies that are being bred to ferret out the truffles in development in the fields. Then making s'mores and staring up at the stars.

Next year, families will have even more activities from which to choose when a project Mary Celeste is shepherding opens seven miles from the Farm. Blackberry Mountain will present cottages decorated in Blackberry Farm-style with reclaimed oak, white rough-sawn walls, lime washed oak ceilings, and antiques located amid more than five thousand adjoining acres. The family farm grows. ■




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