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## One Fine Day

*Saying 'I do' in grand  
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Here: Ron Johnson's painting, *Until You Learn the Meaning of Trust*, hangs above the fireplace. Opposite: the exterior of Alpenglow.



photography by Kip Dawkins

*A Bath County mountain retreat where rustic and whimsical meet to create a stunning backdrop for a Virginia-themed art collection.*

*by Neely Barnwell Dykshorn*

# APPALACHIAN AERIE

**T**HE IDEA WAS TO BRING A PIECE OF SWITZERLAND TO BATH County," says Jil Harris of Alpenglow, the Warm Springs retreat of her Richmond-based family. As a teen, Jil's family decamped from their home in Danville each summer to the Swiss glacial village of Grindelwald where, she says, the sunset behind the mountain paints everything pinkish-orange. Jil attests that the Warm Springs sunsets similarly color the hillsides, though the glow from the peaks of the windswept Alleghenies is distinctively purple. A nod to her Alpine heritage is an antique cowbell hanging on a timber in the great room. "In Switzerland, the bell is how they find cows grazing high in the mountains," says Hiter Harris, Jil's husband. "The bigger the cow, the bigger the bell."

The idea of a weekend home came about after the Harris visited a friend's Montana ranch where they stayed in a guest house decorated by Richmond interior designer Janie Molster. They came home determined to build something similar. "How are you going to make that look like Virginia?" Hiter remembers Charlottesville architect Jack Rinehart asking. In the end, Hiter says, the solution was easy. "He got the Virginia exterior, and we have our Montana lodge on the interior."

Both Harris were thrilled when Rinehart took on the design of their house, which is located in the Homestead Preserve. They knew that he only worked on one project at a time (via Fax, no email) and were lucky that theirs came along at the perfect moment. When they received his first sketches, they were a little

puzzled that the house's orientation neglected a breathtaking view. "There was a dense mist covering the mountains the day I visited the site," remembers Rinehart. The weather cooperated on his next visit, and the new design took a dramatic turn to take in a nearly 270-degree view to the south.

The result is a design dominated by a gambrel roof typical of barn construction, in keeping with the farm-like setting of the agricultural fields below. This tradition stretches back to the 1800s when The Homestead raised its own beef, says Jil. (The property is situated on land where cattle were once raised for the resort.) The 6,500-square-foot structure, which was completed in 2011, further references this heritage with agrarian elements like clapboard and shingle and native materials like stone and heavy timber headers.

Ilex Construction in Charlottesville and Streamline Timberworks in Floyd moved the project along beautifully. "At the end of construction, our punch list was about five items long," says Hiter. In fact, Jil's only regret at the completion was missing the raising of the timber, a process Steve Arthur at Streamline Timberworks equates to the memorable Amish barn-raising scene in the 1985 movie *Witness* (sans Harrison Ford).

Streamline converted the architect's drawing into a buildable set of plans, including a pine-framed great room. "Jack draws everything by hand, so he did the conceptual sketches of what everything was going to look like," says Arthur. "We did the CAD drawings and integrated the timber frame seamlessly into his design."

# HOME

Here: *Apparition* by Teresita Fernández above a 17th-century Spanish chest; right: Isabel Bigelow's painting, *Antlers*, and linen-upholstered seating group.



Streamline leaned on a construction style typically used in English cathedral ceilings to give a bigger clear span without interior columns. This traditional timber frame configuration, called a hammer beam bent, transfers the roof load to the outside posts with smaller timbers. “We took that concept and made it fit in a traditional gambrel barn.”

Reclaimed long leaf southern yellow pine, also known as heart pine, was sourced from Long Mill in Danville, Jil’s hometown. Because reclaimed wood doesn’t go through a grading process, to meet code, Arthur had to inspect each of the load-bearing members at the timber frame shop. “We cut all the joinery, and all the timbers are connected wood joints honoring the old way of doing things,” he says. The entire framework is pre-assembled in sections “like oversized Tinker toys.”

During the 16 months of construction, designer Molster was busy planning the interior. “The ‘mountain look’ was a good challenge for her,” says Jil, “a departure from the contemporary sophisticated style which is Janie’s signature.” Molster incorporated elements like primitive branch forms, hammered metal finishes, antique leather and every permutation of burlap imaginable. It all adds up to something entirely fresh and unexpected—and about as far from fussy as one can get.

The resulting Virginia mountain lodge is an easy style where rustic and whimsical co-exist. “Jil really wanted it to feel masculine,” says Molster. Towards that end are reclaimed floorboards—each and every one practi-

cally hand-picked—with plenty of character (bolt holes, pulled nails) and, as her clients requested, “rugged, so you can’t hurt it.”

Additionally, Molster says, Jil asked for something “woody or furry in every room.” As a result, twig and leaf designs run through the house like a leitmotif. Hide-covered ottomans populate the great room alongside branchlike floor lamps, a dramatic twig fixture hangs overhead, and sheepskin rugs are found throughout the house.

Comfortable upholstered pieces up the cozy factor. “Sofas are deep and overstuffed, luxurious to prop their feet or curl up in,” Molster says.

The boldest strokes are in the rooms of daughters Katie, 26, and Tyler, 24, and son Hiter, 22: Chocolate and raspberry flocked velvet bedskirts and lovely loopy-shaped headboards as well as a café au lait-colored fur chair are found in Katie and Tyler’s room along with boiled wool throws—another furry bit—that Jil found herself. In Hiter’s room, which contains a cowskin dresser and chair, patterns prevail while Pendleton blankets hold their own with broad ticking stripes.

Combined with Jil’s penchant for purple (like the sunset light), the whole house’s color scheme takes its cues from the fearless palette in the client’s impressive collection of art, which contains a large number of pieces by Virginia artists. “They say collecting art is an addiction,” says Hiter, “and we are almost cured.”

“Our jumping off place” for the design of the interior, says Molster, “was



Clockwise from top left: The porch's furnishings are weighted for significant breeze, all the stone in the house is from Charles Luck Stone Center; the dining room is formal in scale but cozy in feeling; chocolate and raspberry flocked velvet bedskirts in the girls' room; valley view from the great room.



a Teresita Fernández sculpture, which they said was maybe the most significant piece of art we'll have here. I knew art was going to be really huge." (Fernández is a nationally renowned and widely exhibited sculptor who earned her MFA from Virginia Commonwealth University.)

The Fernández sculpture is "really a magical piece in the way that the green reflection on the back of the stainless steel seems to glow," says Richmond gallerist Bev Reynolds. "Jil and Hiter are adventuresome in their pursuit of cutting-edge art. They have supported Virginia art while maintaining a broad vision for their collection." Reflecting that, Jil recently was appointed to the VMFA Board of Trustees, and Hiter serves on the VMFA Foundation Board. Both Harris are on the campaign committee to raise money for the new Institute of Contemporary Art at VCU. "We have a fair number of pieces by VCU School of the Arts graduates," says Jil. "We are excited for VCU to have the exhibition space for the arts that it so greatly deserves."

Molster paired the Fernández artwork with a 17th-century Spanish chest she found at auction, whose patina seems to have enough clout for the sculpture hanging above it. Elsewhere reposes a Sally Mann photograph from her *Deep South* series, Dale Chihuly drawings and, underlining

Reynolds' point, a roster of other artworks that reads like a Who's Who of Virginia artists, including Nell Blaine, Richard Carlyon, Robert Stuart and Sunny Goode.

On the opposite wall hangs an Isabel Bigelow tree-scape that almost becomes a panorama with the expansive mountain view adjacent. Below, a linen-slipcovered bench allows a place for playing cards or an intimate dinner. For Molster, it was important to create these "moments" in the great room to humanize the grand space and anchor its occupants.

Throughout the house, comfortable perches beckon, but never too far from expansive windows.

The laid-back pace of Warm Springs is a perfect fit for the Harris family weekend activity of choice: relaxing (though top-notch trout fishing and miles of hiking trails occasionally dislodge them from their aerie). Warm Springs and the delights of The Homestead are nearby, but for the Harris family, the restaurant and pub at the Inn at Gristmill Square are in easy reach for a "big" night out.

Really, at the end of the day it is all about the view and the house that so perfectly frames it. ✨