

PLATEAU

December / January 2021

MOUNTAIN LIFE IN HIGHLANDS-CASHIERS NORTH CAROLINA

Family Traditions

Festive Holiday Entertaining

Refined & Defined

The Highlander Mountain House

White Christmas

Top Picks for Cold Weather Fun

Fashion

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from the editor



Magic

With entrepreneurial parents, some Christmas mornings were better than others. Through stories, I know Daddy had an early resilience to what he compared to Merle Haggard's "If We Make It Through December" type Christmases, the kind that didn't go quite as you hoped. The song got him through the winter he left college twelve credits short of graduation to work offshore and send money to help out back home.

I was about four when a low industry cycle gave my dad the excuse he needed to pack up his young family and move from our home in Lafayette. The first year we spent in Texas was, without a doubt, a Merle Haggard Christmas. I remember Daddy in the garage working on something we weren't allowed to see- handmade presents for my brother, Jack, and me, stick horses with fabric bandanas and yarn hair. Mom painted their facial expressions.

The following year we were in Albuquerque. I can recall many of the details through photos, a girl with chubby cheeks and blunt blonde bangs dressed in candy cane striped pajamas standing next to her three-year-old brother and brightly wrapped presents. But there is one memory that I know wasn't from photographs. Mom and Dad told us to stay in our rooms so they could make sure Santa had left. Daddy shouted from the living room, "Who asked for a giraffe?" My toes curled with excitement. I hadn't asked for a giraffe, and I was hoping my brother hadn't

either. I was elated with the thought that Santa might know my deepest desires and bring me something that I had only in this instant realized I wanted. Using six-year-old math, I quickly visualized how tall the giraffe could be. Two decades later, when I was working in luxury fashion and part of the industry that created magic, no longer experiencing it, I would often walk down to the FAO Schwarz store in the Forum Shops at Caesars. From a bench drinking coffee, I would look in and watch kids stare up at the giant stuffed animals and think of my dad's giraffe, a little piece of magic that I have stashed away in my heart.

It is not the Barbies, and later clothes and electronics, from more abundant Christmas mornings that I save to pass on to my children. It is a handmade stick horse. It is not a six-foot-tall stuffed giraffe that reminds me of Christmas magic, but the memory of my father's voice, knowing what would send his daughter's imagination soaring. In this issue of Plateau, we're highlighting many things that make the season happy and bright in our area, from gifts and giving to winter experiences. If there were ever a recent year when many of us were collectively experiencing some form of a Merle Haggard Christmas, 2020 would be a strong contestant. But for what it is worth, in my experience, the ones that didn't go quite as planned are the ones where the real and loving holiday magic takes root.

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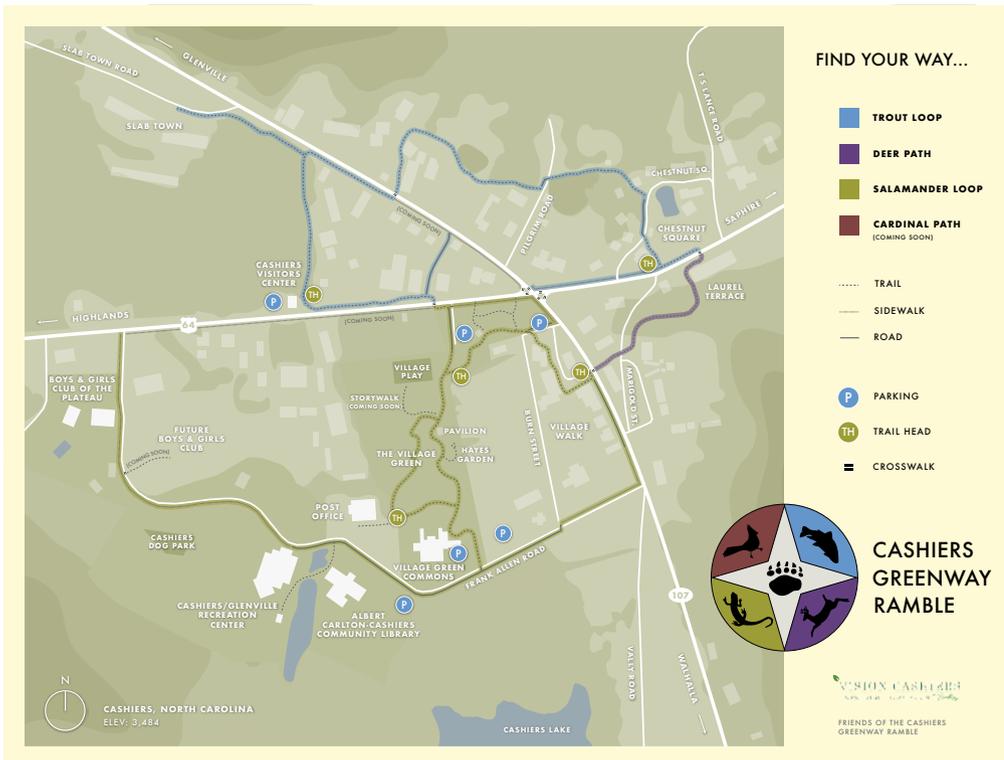


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A Storied Walk

The next chapter of the Cashiers Greenway Ramble

By KAT FORD



The updated map, created by Philip Curcuru, uses a color-coded key to highlight four different paths and loops along the Ramble.

SOMEWHERE BETWEEN TEN AND FIFTEEN YEARS AGO, BOB DEWS, owner of the Laurelwood Inn, started reaching out to local business owners and friends. His idea was simple, to make Cashiers walkable. Then, it was difficult for pedestrian traffic to move around the crossroads. When the initial idea for the project that would eventually become the Cashiers Walking Trail started, there weren't even crosswalks at the crossroads. To shop in Cashiers required driving to individual retailers and destinations. Bob envisioned a loop, where visitors and locals could park anywhere, walk around, make it back to their car and never get lost. He felt that it was better to move people behind the main spaces, creating a leisurely path instead of street sidewalks, which required more planning, engineering and money.

In addition to raising money from local businesses, Dews asked organizations like the Rotary Club of Cashiers Valley, Jackson County Tourism Development Authority, and Jackson County Economic Development to match funds dollar for dollar. When done, for every dollar he had raised, he had five.

With a total of \$25 thousand and the blessing of multiple businesses and landowners, mulch was placed, and maps were printed.

Over the years, the Cashiers Walking Trail became in need of an ongoing group of stewards. As time passed and landowners and businesses changed, the trail also need-

ed room to grow. In 2018, when the Village Conservancy asked Vision Cashiers to take over their organization, the trail fell under Vision Cashiers' mission of "improving tomorrow...today." Immediately the pathway and preservation task force went to work on what was now named the Cashiers Greenway Ramble.

The first step was to take out liability insurance; the second was to apply for a grant from the Highlands-Cashiers Health Foundation. By December 2019, the grant was announced, with a catch. The Ramble needed an autonomous organization to maintain the trail over the long term. In January 2020, the Friends of The Cashiers Greenway Ramble formed. With funds from the grant, more significant cleanup of the trail and future planning was now possible. After a series of interviews with master plan consultants, Equinox Environmental in Asheville was chosen- familiar with the area, already partnering with Jackson County on trails for the Cashiers/Glenville Recreation Center- they are known for their organic, sustainable, environmental approach to projects. They weren't only interested in what the Ramble needed, but what Cashiers needed from the Ramble.

The project began in early 2020, right before the COVID-19 shutdowns. Committed to staying on time and budget, Equinox worked with the pathway and preservation task force remotely and in small socially distanced groups during site visits. Meetings with task force members were held via Zoom across multiple states, as many second home residents were quarantining outside of North Carolina. By the end of July, the master implementation plan's initial draft was sent out to over 1,800 people within the Cashiers community for comments. The plan was finalized by September of 2020.

Equinox chose to focus on three major areas of recommendation. For starters, through meetings and interviews, they found that many people in the community didn't know there was a Ramble or how to find it.

"Some years ago, I greatly admired Bob Dews' efforts to lay out a walking path throughout the commercial district of Cashiers. ... It wasn't until I was given a guided tour that the Ramble became real to me," says Eleanor Welling, who now leads informal tours of the Ramble, assists in cleanups and is part of the pathway and preservation task force.

BUZZ

local chatter

Equinox also encouraged the task force to consider expansion in three distinct phases, and to find and partner with local stakeholders to strengthen the Cashiers Greenway Ramble's longevity. The task force reached out to Jackson County Parks and Recreation Department, the Jackson County Planning Department and the Jackson County Tourism Development Authority. Conversations were held regarding what early actions would need to be implemented if the county ever considered taking over the Ramble, like securing easements, using certain materials and considering ADA compliance. Feedback was given, and information was shared based on past experiences and possible future county projects.

With a finalized plan, the task force could now tackle implementation. Easements from property owners were a vital priority, as it was necessary if the county ever considered taking over the Ramble maintenance. A sub-task force, led by Virginia Guilfoile, set out on the task of contacting property owners. With various surfaces and terrains winding throughout downtown Cashiers, this included everything from flexible easements, requiring the capital investment of resurfacing, to permission for stenciled wayfinding markers in parking lots.

"The Ramble started as a project of the Cashiers community and today is being revitalized and extended through the efforts of a group of committed volunteers and generous donors from all over the plateau. ... The Ramble represents a wonderful resource for visitors and residents of all ages and physical abilities," says task force leader, Margaret Carton.

New wayfinding for the Ramble was a multi-faceted endeavor led by Nan Major. The previous Ramble logo was reimaged

into a key- the heart of all future wayfinding. Defined with four colors and five animal-inspired symbols, the key will serve as a way for Ramblers to find their way around the entirety of the Cashiers Greenway Ramble, or one of its four distinct paths and loops. A combination of bollards, kiosks, stencils and standards will line the revised paths. Bollards will be numbered for safety. Now, if a Rambler needs to call for help, they will have a distinct location to give first responders for reference, such as the deer path, bollard four. The Ramble is an entry-level walk and hike for many visitors to the area. For this reason, the map, created by Philip Curcuru, and trailhead kiosk will also include vital hiking tips, safety information and leave no trace instructions. The trailhead kiosk will include the history of the Ramble and past logos, an homage to the collective communal work invested over the years.

With a loop that interacts with multiple terrains, Equinox recommended several different surface options based on location. Prioritization of renovation was determined based on the current condition of the trail and use. It seems almost destined that the first trail prioritized was located behind Whiteside Brewing, the property that up until the fall of 2020 was owned by Bob Dews- a full circle moment in the life of the Ramble. A legal arrangement is currently in the works with the brewery's new owners, who are eager to continue the legacy of the Ramble's spirit of connecting the community. "We are excited to help facilitate and be a part of the vision of the Ramble as a vehicle for connecting Cashiers residents, visitors and businesses together," says new owner Mat Barnwell.

As talk about the expansion of uses for the Ramble grew, a new story, or rather,

StoryWalk®, began to unfold. A sub-task force, consisting of Ann Self, executive director of the Village Green, Nancy West of the Literacy Council of Cashiers, Serenity Richards, branch librarian of the Albert Carlton-Cashiers Community Library, and volunteer/bilingual advocate Ana Crespo convened with the purpose to create a series of StoryWalks® around the Ramble. The idea had been on the minds and in the hearts of Richards, Self, and West for a while, the renovated Ramble provided the needed opportunity. Within months, the StoryWalk® was on track to become a reality. The Village Green agreed to be the first location. Ben Harris, of Harris Custom Builders, LLC, volunteered to build and install the standards. Mountain Youth Charities was the first to award a grant, Wade Hampton Golf Club Donor Advised Fund, the second. The Literacy Council of Cashiers donated additional resources to the sub-project, which is still in need of donor dollars.

"I approached the Friends of the Cashiers Greenway Ramble to see if they would be interested in partnering with us and was blown away by the enthusiasm and support for the idea. ... It's just perfect that we can have this right in the center of town at the Village Play, ...the little ones can get reading practice in with a little kinesthetic learning, and some STEM activities for the older ones, as well. We're also so excited that we're going to be able to bring these stories to our community bilingually," says Richards.

"What fun it will be to show children and families the advantage of being together outside with a book and finding activities to do, that help bring the story to life! The Literacy Council of Cashiers' primary mission is to further literacy in our area and this meshes perfectly," says West. The StoryWalk® at the Village Green is on track to open on April 2, 2021, International Children's Book Day.

The expanded Cashiers Greenway Ramble is sure to provide a wealth of benefits for the community, connecting shoppers with local businesses, providing health and wellness activities and creating cultural enrichment opportunities. With three phases in the works, there is still a need for additional funds. In addition to the original grant, the first phase requires another \$60 thousand. Phases two through three do not have a finalized price tag but will cost an estimated several hundred thousand. For those interested in contributing time, talents or dollars, visit www.visioncashiers.com. 📍



Equinox recommended that a combination of bollards, kiosks, stencils and standards line the revised paths, using a coding system based on the new key for wayfinding.



Littles Vivian and Kira, in festive outfits, prepare to march with their Bigs in the annual Cashiers Christmas parade.



Little brother Hudson is excited to meet the llamas that marched alongside the program in the 2019 annual Cashiers Christmas parade.

Unwrapping Experience

Mentoring is the gift that keeps on giving

By KAT FORD

WHEN CONSIDERING Christmastime memories, many of us immediately conjure visions of family gatherings. But what about the experiences that weren't family? Was it a friend who brought you to Midnight Mass, taught you how to light a menorah, or shared their cultural knowledge of other winter characters like La Befana or the frightful Krampus? Who showed you how to bake rum cake or gave you their secret stuffing recipe? When you look back at the lifetime of moments that shaped your perspective of the holidays, how many of them came from friends, peers

and acquaintances? It is with these multiple perspectives that we gain a well-rounded and balanced personal narrative.

The Big Brothers Big Sisters of Cashiers and Highlands Council knows first-hand how vital experiences are in shaping a life. Mentoring is the foundation of their organization, to create nurturing relationships with a child, matching them with caring adults to guide them on a path to success.

In addition to the one-on-one mentoring between Bigs and Littles, the program organizes regular outings for Littles and Bigs to participate. During the winter, these events focus on getting Littles into

the yuletide spirit. Past festive outings include marching in Christmas parades and making wreaths. It has been a tradition for half a decade to create an excursion that allows Littles to shop for their family. The Council provides gift cards to Bigs who take their Littles shopping and help them wrap presents to give on Christmas Day. What greater gift than to teach that it is better to give than receive?

Nancy Albers, advisory council chairman, started as a Big six years ago. She recalls one special memory, "It's the little things that mean the most sometimes. When I learned that my Little never had a real Christmas tree, I organized for the whole family to go to a friend's Christmas tree farm and pick and cut their very own tree. To see the excitement on their faces was priceless."

This year, in addition to gift-giving, Bigs, Littles and their families will get together for a guided tour of Tom Sawyer Christmas Tree Farm. They will drink hot chocolate, sing Christmas carols, take family pictures and have the opportunity to choose and cut a tree. It is the gift of an experience that leaves a lasting impression.

On the plateau, the Big Brothers Big Sisters program is always in need of Bigs. Mentoring is about spending quality time with your Little. There are two ways one can become a Big- community or school-based. Hiking, tutoring, going to the library and sharing book lists, listening to the radio and talking about favorite songs, it's all about offering a different lens for a child to see the world. "It is the selflessness and dedication of our mentors that sets this program apart from others by the opportunities they provide and participate in with the children who are enrolled. Our Bigs are dedicated to both their Littles and their families and have a lasting impact on the lives they touch. These matches are the epitome of our program mission - building friendships with a purpose and pushing youth to ignite potential within themselves," says Danielle Hernandez, program coordinator for Big Brothers Big Sisters of Cashiers and Highlands.

As 2020 ends, and you are looking for a way to make good on your promise to help change the world, consider changing the world for a child.

To learn more about the Big Brothers Big Sisters of Cashiers and Highlands program: www.bbbswnc.org, 828-399-9133. ■

A Sense of Place

Defining experience at the Highlander Mountain House

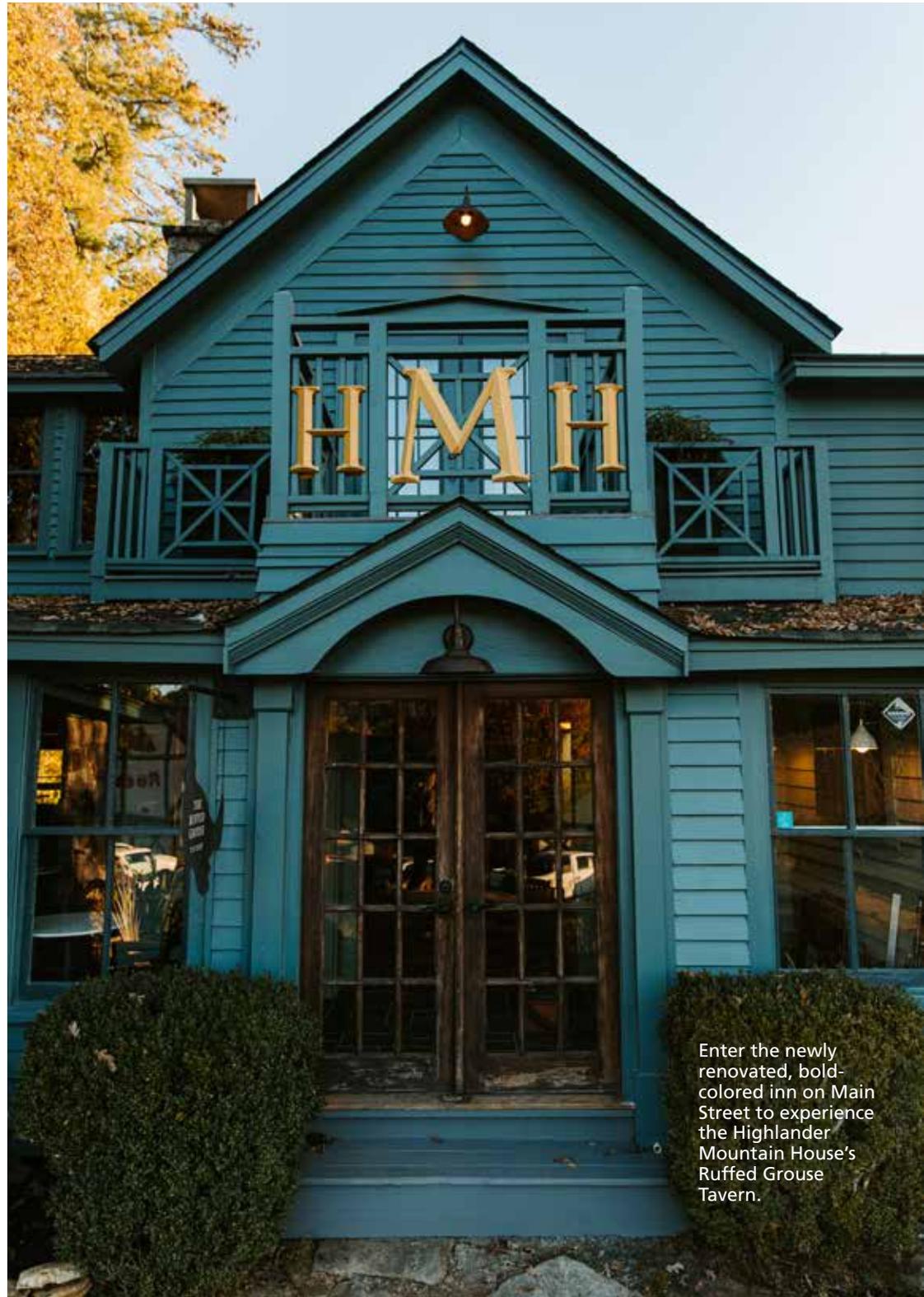
By KAT FORD » Photos by MAGGIE BRAUCHER

ENTERING THE HIGHLANDER Mountain House, a warm fire greets you in a cozy common area accented by eclectic décor and encapsulated by soothing gray walls. The vintage wicker fishing creel hanging behind the front desk might catch your eye. As you turn left to make your way into the adjoining tavern, you may even catch a glimpse of the Black Mountain College poster and “The Foxfire Book” on the writing desk. If you were savvy enough to spy those details, you likely also noticed the bold abstract hanging down the brightly wallpapered hall to the right or the hauntingly alluring photograph opposite the inn’s entrance. Once in the tavern, vignettes of overstuffed couches and marble-topped pub tables beckon you to sit, converse, dine and drink. While the casual observer will feel at home in the inn’s relaxed cabin luxury, those in the know will see the inn for what it is— a love letter to well-used space, the arts and the history of Southern Appalachia.

A relationship with space

Born in Lexington and raised in Richmond, VA, owner Jason Reeves spent his undergrad years in Sewanee, where he received a bachelor’s degree in economics. When he moved to Charleston, SC, he was employed by a high-end restoration contractor, restoring old houses in the historic district, focusing on 18th century craftsmanship and methods. Inspired, Reeves moved to Boston to pursue a master’s degree in historic preservation and worked for the Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities. He became more interested in the concepts of urban infill development and adaptive reuse. The writings of Jane Jacobs and a quote by Philip Johnson regarding the relationship of power between architecture and development stirred him.

Reeves attended Harvard, received a second master’s degree in design studies focusing on real estate development, and



Enter the newly renovated, bold-colored inn on Main Street to experience the Highlander Mountain House’s Ruffed Grouse Tavern.



Whimsical Victorian taxidermy, over a hundred years old, is displayed alongside abstract art, oil portraits and landscapes.



As seen here in Rooms 9, 6, and 5, the 18 rooms are uniquely decorated with European wallpaper, custom velvet headboards and antiques.

spent the next fifteen years in New York City. He worked for firms like Tishman Speyer and Zeckendorf Development on projects including 15 Central Park West, then the private equity group Garrison Investment Group, where he focused on repositioning transitional commercial real estate properties throughout the country. Six years ago, with a need to further fulfill his creative instincts, Reeves joined a new boutique hotel company with three other partners. Much of their work focused on adaptive reuse, historic restoration and preservation of vintage motor lodges in cities like Santa Fe and Dallas.

When Reeves closed on the previous location of the Main Street Inn in February of 2020, he brought with him a vision to create spaces that were intriguing, warm and inviting for both guests and locals. This regard for renovation, location and community was not just the work of an astute developer but a labor of love for someone who had built an intimate relationship with place and function over the last two and a half decades. For Reeves, there should be an effortless movement when interacting with the downstairs areas of the Highlander Mountain House. La Colombe espresso and pastries in the morning, lunch with a laptop while working remotely next to the fireplace at noon, evening cocktails or a nightcap after dinner in the Ruffed Grouse Tavern.

The inn intends to be just as much for inhabitants of the plateau as it is for curious travelers. “I want locals to feel comfortable sitting in front of the fire and

reading the paper. In historic homes, the heart of the space is a fireplace. Weather permitting, we will always have a fire to welcome. Fire is primal. It feels good,” says Reeves. This consideration for how both residents and visitors interact with a common space speaks of Reeves’ regard for thoughtful urban planning, even when used in a rural setting.

The art of storytelling

The Highlander Mountain House was created to be equal parts Appalachian lodge and refined English country house. While Appalachia is where Reeves was born, his time vacationing in the Cotswolds- his appreciation for country pubs, coaching inns and country houses, provided him a British perspective. He drew from cherished intimate hotels, motels and mountain houses throughout the Hudson Valley and Catskills around Woodstock in upstate New York to round out the balance. In a way, you could say that Reeves pulled from every piece of his background to birth this project.

Reeves wanted the inn to appear as though it had been owned by a single proprietor for generations, with layered visual commentary chronicling the years. This can be found in the 18 unique guest rooms, where colorful and patterned William Morris, Pierre Frey, Scalamandré and Zoffany wallpapers juxtapose sleek-lined Stilnovo midcentury modern sconces. It is identified in quirky Victorian taxidermy, intoxicatingly evocative of the naturalists’ pursuit of science, displayed alongside abstract art, oil portraits and landscapes in

the Ruffed Grouse Tavern.

The wealth of aesthetic and venerable objects creates an experience akin to walking through a curated gallery. Two Sally Mann originals from her “Deep South” series and several works by Josef Albers adorn the walls. The Mann pieces hold sentimental value for Reeves, as Mann is also from his native Virginia. An eye for antiquated items and relishing in their power of narrative is a family trait. His mother was a curator of historical museums, an antique appraiser and active in nonprofit historical restoration projects.

“Hospitality is storytelling and my favorite properties immerse their guests in their surroundings and help them understand their context and history,” says Reeves. In this case, interests include storied layers rooted in the Highlands-Cashiers Plateau and Western North Carolina- from the Cherokee to Scots-Irish homesteaders, loggers to moonshiners and outliers. The rich tradition of Appalachian artisans and craftsman are especially noteworthy to Reeves, as is the area’s heritage in old-time and bluegrass music. A personal favorite is the avant-garde art movement that came from Black Mountain College. Reeves is continually seeking to add to his collection of artists from the era, another midcentury treasure to place for the savvy connoisseur to find as they wander the halls of the inn.

Reeves hopes to create programming, particularly in the slower winter season, that echoes his admiration for the past, the arts and a delight in learning and sharing.



Possibilities include artist residencies, lecture series and stripped-down concerts. He has a strong desire to contribute to the community and is looking forward to creating partnerships to help continue the traditions of Western North Carolina.

A matter of taste

For design enthusiasts, the inn's elegant rooms will not disappoint. In the Main House, with a backdrop of European botanical wallpaper, custom velvet headboards, Adirondack furniture and English antiques emit an ambiance of traveled eclectic style with a dash of whimsy—reminiscent of the work of London's Ben Pentreath. In the pet-friendly two-story Highlander Bunkhouse located behind the Main House, hickory beds crafted in North Carolina are draped with Pendleton blankets, creating a more cabin-like experience. Some baths boast walk-in showers lined with new Moroccan Zellige tile and marble floors, while others are European-style wet rooms with six-sided penny tile and custom English washstands. While no two rooms are alike, Wright mattresses, Bellino Italian linens and towels and Malin + Goetz bathroom necessities provide sumptuous comforts to wash the road off your gypsy soul.

While Reeves gleaned from hotelier Sean MacPherson's work at The Bowery Hotel and The Marlton for use of communal space and diverse art, he pulled from his favorite New York City restaurants such as Freemans, Blue Hill, and The Spotted Pig when seeking inspiration for the Highlander Mountain House's Ruffed Grouse Tavern. English coaching inns, such as The Wheatsheaf Inn in North-

leach, the Plough Inn and The Wild Rabbit in Kingham, THE PIG hotels throughout the UK and the Fife Arms in Ballater all played heavy hands in musing Reeves' masterpiece of collected experience. The well-traveled drop-in will undoubtedly enjoy finding visual and flavorful references to Reeves' pilgrimaged list for the Epicurean provocateur.

At the Ruffed Grouse Tavern, chef Charlie Hudson is focused on locally sourced seasonal foods and relies on Blue Ridge farmers and growers to stock the kitchen's pantry and build his regionally influenced menu. "We focus on good, clean, whole foods—where the ingredients are the star of the show," says Reeves. Breakfast, lunch and dinner are served daily. Reservations are strongly encouraged. The bar, where top-shelf liquors, a well-edited wine list focused on biodynamic, organic wines from small, family-run vineyards and a rotating selection of regional beers are offered, is first-come-first-served.

A natural connection

For the myriad reasons the Highlander Mountain House gives you to enter and never leave, its real purpose is to serve as the home base for your mountain adventure. It was, after all, a mountain retreat trip with his young children that endeared Reeves to Highlands. Encouraging travelers to reconnect with the landscape, the inn is just as much about promoting the plateau's trails, trout streams, gentle



The patio seating overlooking Main Street is a favorite for locals and guests.



The Ruffed Grouse Tavern focuses on regionally influenced, locally sourced and seasonal foods.

rivers, rushing waterfalls and temperate forests as it is art and design. "I've been fly-fishing since I was 13. I worked on a ranch on the Smith River immediately after college and fished throughout Montana and Wyoming. Later, I fished throughout New England during grad school. I love fishing in Western North Carolina and saltwater fly-fishing in Charleston," says Reeves. A true adventurer knows that while well-planned expeditions are exciting, it's the ones that unfold naturally that elate. That's why the Highlander Mountain House offers complimentary bicycles, fly-rods and Wellies at the front desk. Embark on your next self-guided escapade or ask for recommended exploration.

If you're looking for a sense of place, either through introspection in front of a roaring fire, exploring the natural beauty of the Highlands-Cashiers Plateau or over dinner with friends, pop into the newly renovated, bold-colored inn on Main Street. Saunter into the bar, grab your favorite vinyl album from the shelf—they have everything from The Band to Bowie, Waylon & Willie to Dr. John, and ask the bartender to give it a spin. Pull up a chair, take a deep breath and know that you've found a spot to relax. Owner Jason Reeves spent most of his life on a quest to design a space that ensures you enjoy the experience. ■

Highlander Mountain House

828-526-2590

www.highlandermountainhouse.com