

# GREENBRIER

## VALLEY QUARTERLY

CULTURE > HERITAGE > ART

The Retreat  
North House  
Mountain Quest Inn  
Uniquely Union  
Going Native

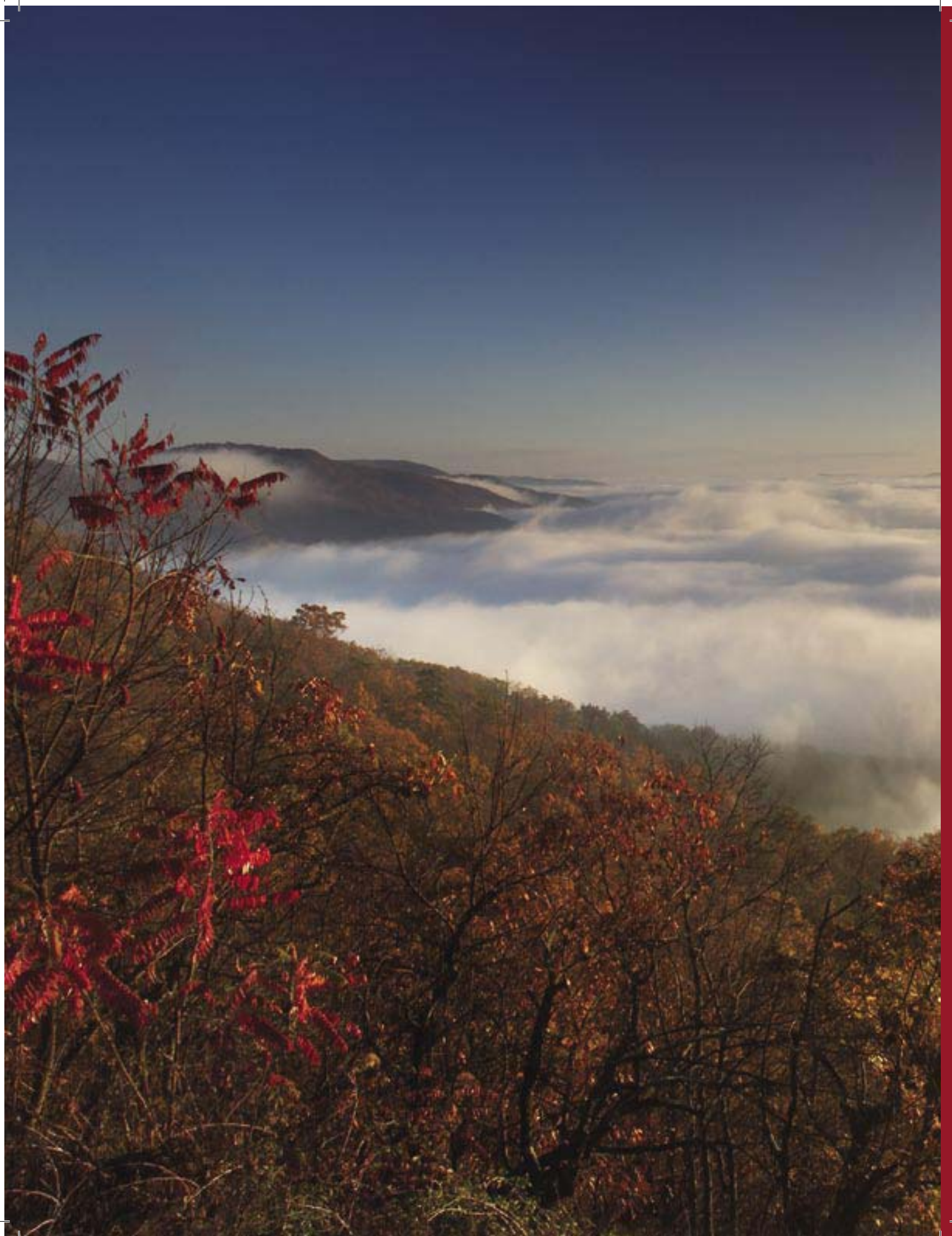
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ISSUE 4





## The Ausburn Agenda

story by Barbara Elliott  
photos by Ken Sherman and Brian Gomsak

HARLES AUSBURN HAS TRAVELED A LONG WAY FROM AN AUTO SHOP IN THE SOUTH CAROLINA LOWLANDS TO A MULTI-MILLION DOLLAR DEVELOPMENT ATOP WHITE ROCK MOUNTAIN IN GREENBRIER COUNTY. THE JOURNEY HAS BEEN BOTH SYMBOLIC AND REAL, AS AUSBURN HAS MORPHED FROM MECHANIC, TO CAR DEALER, TO CONTRACTOR, TO REAL ESTATE DEVELOPER OVER THE COURSE OF HIS CAREER.

It is in the latter incarnation that he has reached a professional pinnacle as the creative force behind the retreat, a mountaintop community that is a case study in his philosophy that development can and should work in harmony with nature.

Over the past decade Ausburn and his company, New Horizons Communities, have cut their teeth developing upscale planned communities, beginning with Beaufort Bluff Island and Islands of Beaufort on the Atlantic coast of South Carolina. His first venture into mountain development was Oleta Falls

near Hendersonville, NC. In addition to the Retreat, they are now developing other communities in the mountains of North Carolina and Tennessee.

West Virginia's Greenbrier Valley had been on Ausburn's radar screen for some time, and he was pleased to find that his instincts about the great potential in the area was seconded by Harry Trent in his book *The Roaring 2000s*. Not only did Trent project that mountain property would become highly developable during this decade, but he specifically cited southeastern West Virginia as a desirable location, Ausburn notes.

left to right: An old English bar that Ausburn had installed in his downstairs entertaining rooms; the kitchen and this beautiful stove are perfect examples of Ausburn's vision of marrying the old and the new; Ausburn on the front porch of the "House that Charles Built."



“When the opportunity came up on such a prime location, I just jumped at it,” Ausburn says of his decision to purchase the 900 acre tract on White Rock Mountain between Lewisburg and White Sulphur Springs. The 3200-foot peak offers sweeping 360-degree vista of Greenbrier State Forest, the Greenbrier Sporting Club and an undulating sea of mountain peaks that flow into the horizon.

It was more than just the breathtaking beauty of the property that made it ripe for one of New Horizon's distinctive planned communities, Ausburn explains.





“The quality of life here was a big draw. Lewisburg is small and has the charm of yesteryear, but our customers are very impressed by the cultural offerings like Carnegie Hall and Greenbrier Valley Theatre. There are also some great restaurants in the area. People are astounded when we tell them the population.”

Work on The Retreat began in 2004, but it wasn't until the spring of 2005 that the pre-construction phase moved into high gear and the company opened a sales office in Lewisburg's historic downtown district. White Rock Mountain is now laced with roadbeds and trenches for buried utility cables and city water lines, and at the summit an imposing lodge is being constructed of native West Virginia hemlock and stone.

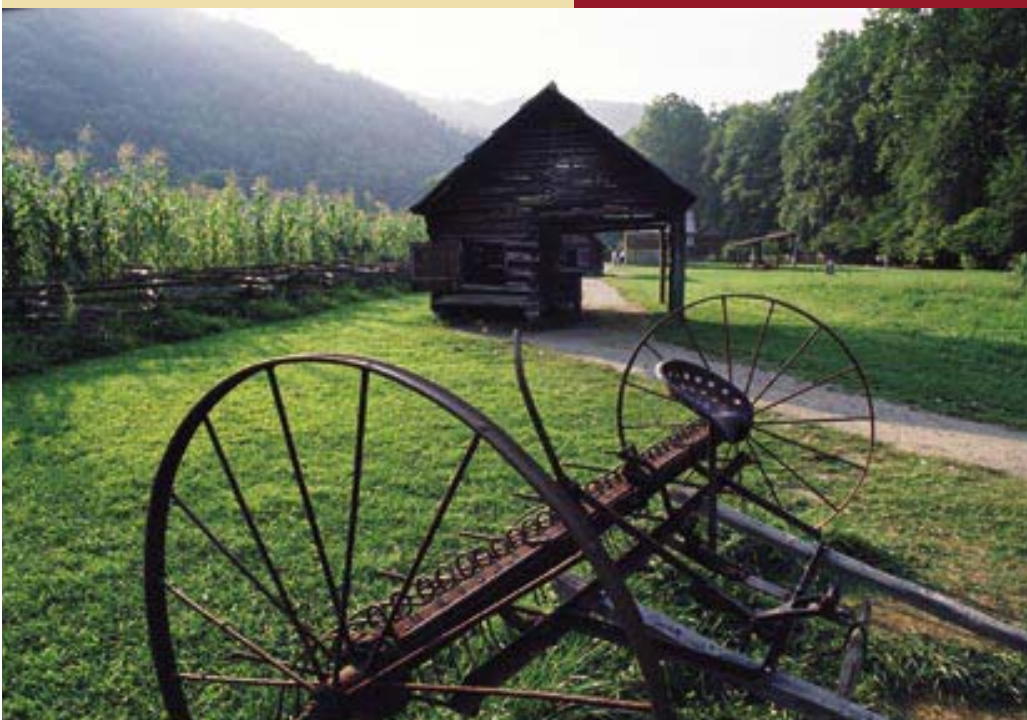
**DESPITE THE SIGNS OF DEVELOPMENT ALONG THE RUGGED CONTOURS OF THE MOUNTAIN, ONE OF THE FIRST THINGS A VISITOR NOTICES IS SOMETHING THAT HAS HARDLY BEEN TOUCHED—THE TREES. THE PROPERTY ENCOMPASSES ACRES OF HARDWOODS THAT HAVE NOT BEEN CUT IN GENERATIONS, AND AUSBURN HAS TAKEN STEPS TO MAKE SURE THAT THEY WILL BE THERE FOR GENERATIONS TO COME.**



“When I was growing up I went to the beach, and there you expected to be jammed together. In the mountains, you expect room. When I started developing mountain properties, I wanted less density and large parcels of undeveloped land,” he explains. “There is enough habitat here for deer and bear to exist with the development.”

His plan for The Retreat includes only around 160 home sites on the 900 acre tract, and more than half of the property has been placed under a protective covenant to prevent future development. Hiking and biking trails, a trout stream and picnic areas in the undeveloped portion of the site will lure homeowners to spend time enjoying the natural playground around them.

Although the emphasis throughout the project is on preserving as much as possible the natural setting of the home—use of wood, stone and brick in construction and limits on how many trees can be cut, for example—the lodge and homes at The Retreat will be far from rustic. Power and cable lines have been buried to maintain aesthetics and minimize interruptions in service. City water is being piped to the home sites, and all of the roads will be paved. For absolute indulgence, there’s the lodge with



top: Charles and his wife Janie in front of their downtown Lewisburg offices;  
bottom: The rustic charm of the region, quiet and tranquil

its panoramic views and luxurious amenities.

Universal Construction of Clintonville is the contractor for the lodge and the three homes that have been constructed on the property to date. Co-owner Richard Kirk is an enthusiastic guide on a walk through work in progress at the lodge, which will be the center of community life on the mountain.

One of the things he is most enthusiastic about is the use of reclaimed hemlock logs discovered at an abandoned sawmill within 30 miles of The Retreat, and stone from nearby Muddy Creek Mountain to build the structure, which is scheduled for completion late next summer.

“These are not fake. These are things that come right out of our state,” he states proudly.

The main level of the lodge will be used for community gatherings and special events, or simply as a refuge for reading or conversation. On the lower level a spa and locker rooms will open onto a patio where an infinity pool appears to flow off the edge of the mountain. Adjacent to the pool will be cavernous grotto spa looking out over sweeping valley views. An outdoor barbecue area and a nearby recreation building all add to a familial atmosphere.

A sense of community is key to Ausburn’s vision for The Retreat. With that in mind, he hired long-time Greenbrier County resident



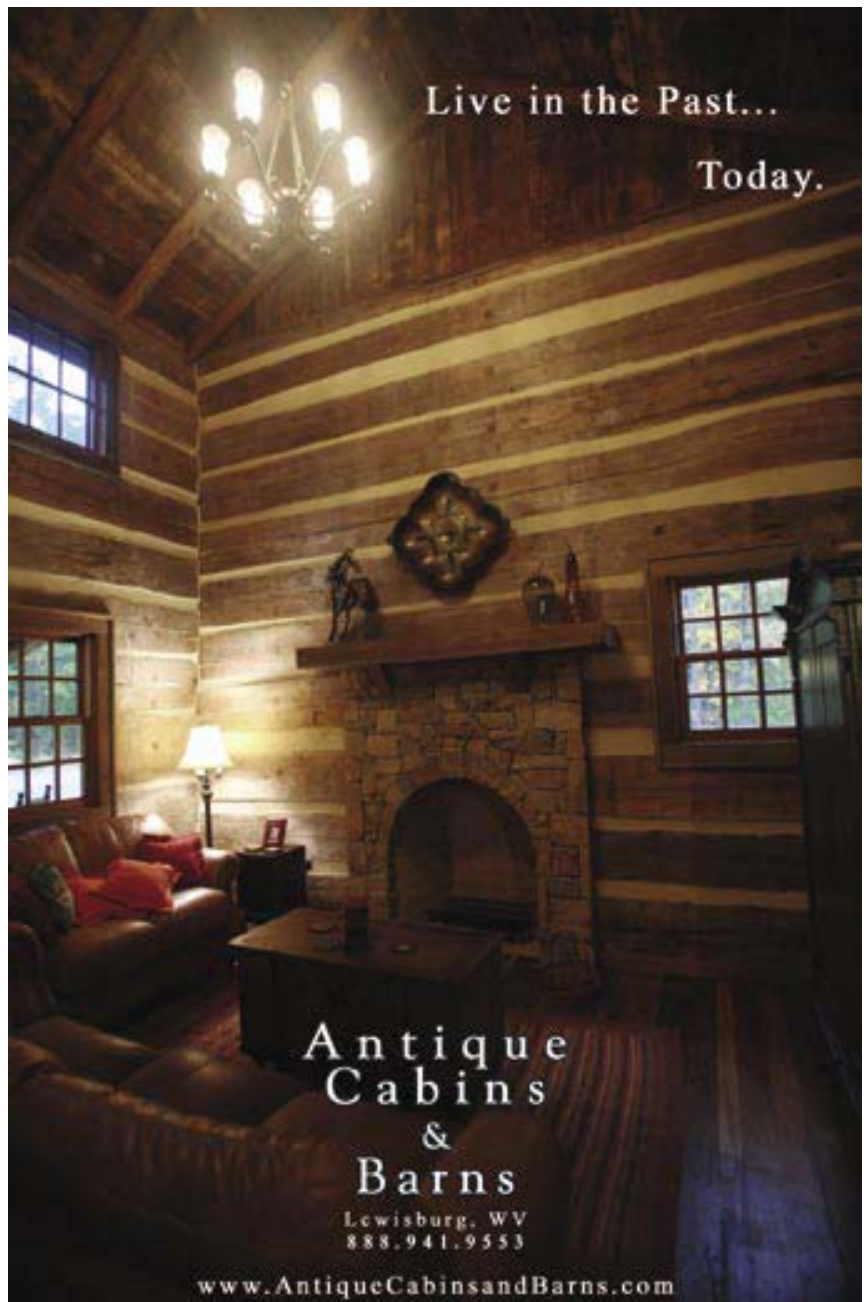
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and former travel agent Jan Hall for the unique position of Community Outfitter.

As the property is being developed, her mission is to help prospective homebuyers get acquainted with the area and with one another. Her duties can range from planning hiking and whitewater rafting outings to hosting group events such as an evening at Greenbrier Valley Theatre. She has also enlisted Craig Miller of Serenity Now Outfitters to assist in guided fly fishing trips on some of the popular streams throughout the region.

At the moment she operates out of The Retreat's sales office in Lewisburg, but as homes are built and occupied, she will relocate her operation to the lodge.

“I RECENTLY TOOK TWO WOMEN ON A HIKING TRIP TO PETERS MOUNTAIN, AND THEY JUST LOVED IT. WE TAKE THESE THINGS FOR GRANTED, BUT EVEN IF PEOPLE DON'T PURCHASE PROPERTY, I THINK THEY LEAVE WITH A DIFFERENT ATTITUDE ABOUT WEST VIRGINIA.”

She also loves the unpredictability of the job. Last Christmas Eve she found herself delivering a cedar



A rendering of the completed lodge. This view is from the back which will overlook the valley to the east.

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tree to the front porch of a family who were going to arrive just in time to spend the holidays in their new home.

As with his choice of Hall to be the link between buyers and the community, Ausburn has been careful to select local contractors and vendors who are familiar with the area and are comfortable with the challenges inherent in building on a mountainside.

His commitment to local craftsmanship has paid off. The first home built on the mountain, which was constructed by Universal Construction using reclaimed logs from Lewisburg's Antique Barns and Cabins, won the West Virginia Homemakers Association "Best Single Family Home" award in 2005.

These two companies were also used in Ausburn's own home on the property, and he brought in Greenbrier Communications to work their home automation wizardry, creating a home that speaks both to the past, as well as to the future.

According to sales representative Chuck James, many of prospective buyers who are visiting The Retreat are from the metropolitan Washington D.C. area or other cities and are seeking an escape from the stress, the noise and the speed of urban life. Quite a few are buying property now with plans to wait and build in two or three years when they retire. Others will build second homes here. But all are answering the siren call of The Retreat's credo--adventure, refuge and restoration.



This view to the eastern valley

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