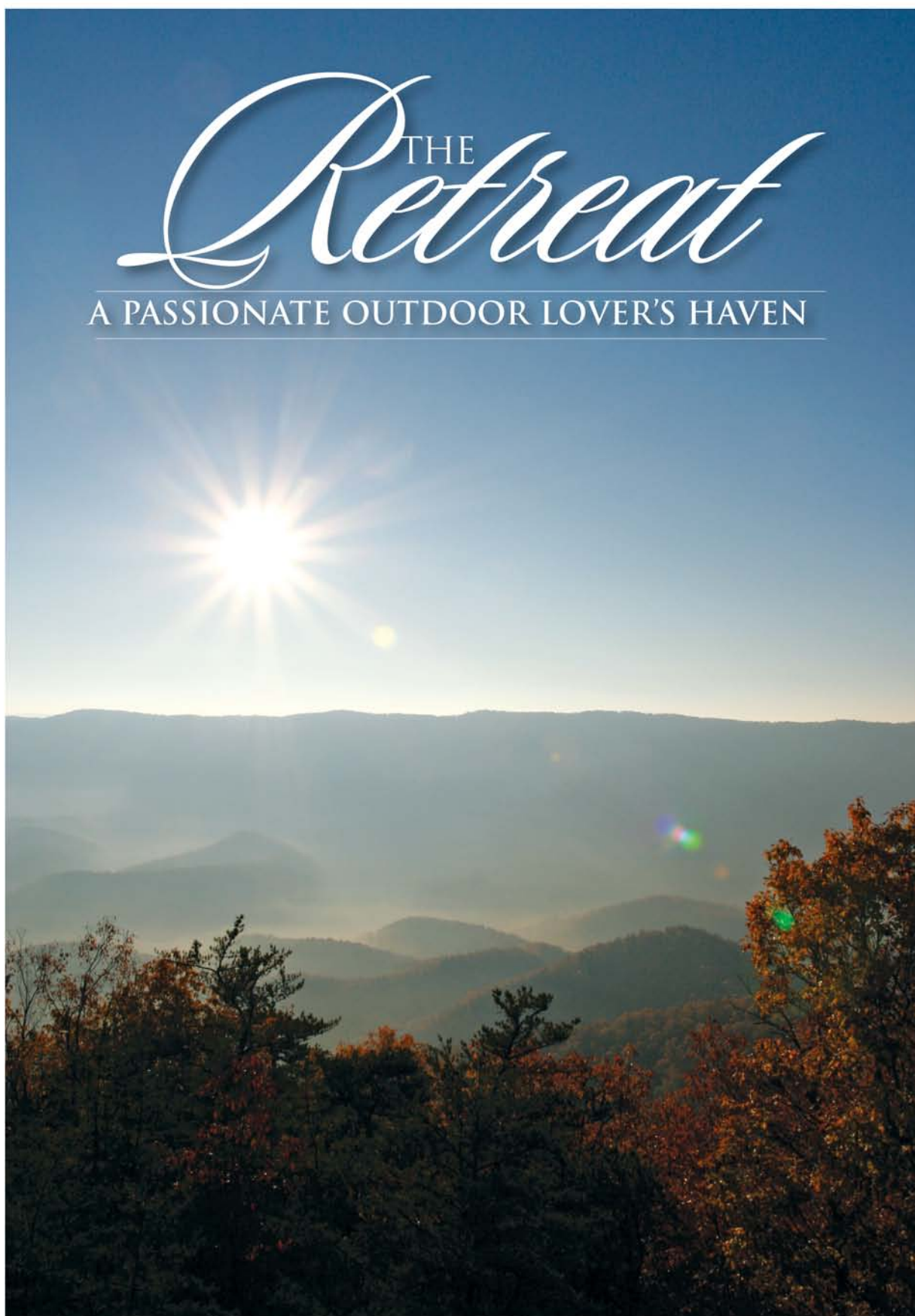




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THE  
*Retreat*  
 A PASSIONATE OUTDOOR LOVER'S HAVEN

*Rustic architecture syncs with the natural beauty of White Rock Mountain to make The Retreat a nearly perfect mountain community.*

BY DEBORAH HUSO  
PHOTOS COURTESY OF THE RETREAT

*He is a man from humble beginnings who went from a blue-collar job to a thirst for shaping the land and the homes it enfolds. Today Charles Ausburn has a multitude of developments to his credit with The Retreat in West Virginia as the most recent jewel in his crown. Here in these spectacular mountain peaks, the South Carolina native has brought together his many loves: nature, building and sky-high living.*



*The Retreat is four miles from Lewisburg and offers endless possibilities for outdoor recreation. The location is good, but the reason people come here is for the view.*

**W**ith multiple homes of his own and pockets deep enough to be funding the development of several mountain communities all at once, it's hard to imagine that 60-year-old South Carolina native Charles Ausburn had such humble beginnings. Still, he began his career as a teenager in the automotive industry, starting out as a mechanic, then gradually working his way up through the ranks until he became owner of his own Chevy-Olds dealership.

Despite his status as a self-made man, he wasn't satisfied.

"All my life I was fascinated with land and building," he says. "The older I got, the more I loved it."

#### **A Mid-Life Change**

So at 37 years old, almost on a whim, he sold his dealership and went "cold turkey," launching a new career in real estate by buying up old houses, then renovating and reselling them. In the last two decades, he has gone on to develop six large communities, including Doe Mountain in east Tennessee and several smaller ones.

Among his latest ventures is The Retreat just outside Lewisburg, W.Va.

This 900-acre parcel on White Rock Mountain has a lot to offer – easy access to The Greenbrier and eclectic downtown Lewisburg, as well as proximity to endless outdoor pursuits such as the Greenbrier River Trail. But what caught Ausburn’s eye were the views.

“The views were just fantastic,” he says. From the community’s clubhouse, which purposely occupies the best lot on the mountain, one can see four ridgelines on a clear day with pristine glimpses into the Greenbrier State Forest and even the Jefferson National Forest in Virginia.

“From here,” says Retreat salesperson John Sockriter, “everyone gets a million dollar view.”

### **Making the Most of the Great Outdoors**

While the clubhouse may occupy the hottest spot on White Rock Mountain, the

other lots at The Retreat are nothing to be sneezed at. Nearly all of the 165 home sites are located on three main ridgelines at elevations of more than 3,000 feet at the top of the mountain. That means every homeowner will be looking into national or state forest, the picturesque Greenbrier Valley or the luxurious grounds of the adjacent Greenbrier Sporting Club. More than half the mountaintop will remain undeveloped, leaving plenty of space for hiking trails and camping sites.

And that’s really what The Retreat is all about – enjoying the great outdoors.

Certainly, that’s what drew northern Virginia residents Jim and Jeanne Purden to the community.

### **A Happy Choice**

“We had been looking for a second home for nine years,” Jim says, noting that he and



*Nearly all the home sites in The Retreat are located on ridgelines near the top of the mountain, so every homeowner has a breathtaking view of either a national or state forest, the picturesque Greenbrier Valley or the luxurious grounds of the Greenbrier Sporting Club.*



*Historic Lewisburg, W.Va. maintains a small-town feel while offering metropolitan pleasures like Carnegie Hall, the Greenbrier Valley Theatre, art galleries, antiques and a variety of good restaurants.*

his wife made 12 trips to the Northeast and nine to the East Coast, as well as others to the Rockies in Colorado. “My wife wanted to be close to water or mountains,” Jim explains, “but she wasn’t interested in living in a controlled environment.

“We’re not golfers. We’re hikers, canoers, and fisherpeople. We didn’t want to pay for amenities we weren’t going to use.”

In the fall of 2005, the Purdens decided to start looking for a second home in West Virginia or North Carolina. Jeanne searched on the internet and found a cabin that caught her eye near Lewisburg.

“We didn’t know then,” Jim says, “that it was in The Retreat.”

The Purdens made the trek south to see the mountain cabin made of 150-year-old reclaimed logs and were instantly sold.

“My wife actually hugged the front door,” Jim laughs. “It was exactly what she had been looking for, and it just happened to be at The Retreat.”

Not only did the Purdens’ new house feature the antique look that Jeanne so admired – with its logs reclaimed from a cabin in West Virginia, a barn in Pennsylvania, and an 1850s building in Ohio – it also offered the couple access to all the outdoor activities they so enjoy.

“It’s a very comfortable place,” says Jim. “That house feels like a warm blanket on a cold winter night.” And, with its 400-year-old red oak floors, it should feel so familiar. The Purdens’ home is, in many ways, exactly the kind of place that Ausburn envisioned for The Retreat.

### **Blending into the Landscape**

“I thought The Retreat was an excellent place to use reclaimed materials,” says Ausburn whose



*Kimberly Staton enjoys the perfect place to relax at the community’s clubhouse, set on the location’s most spectacular site so “everyone gets a million-dollar view.”*

own home on the mountain was built using 100-year-old logs. "It's a great feeling to have old materials combined with modern convenience."

While not all homes at The Retreat are built using reclaimed wood, all have a rustic style that blends into the mountain setting. And Ausburn has designed the community to offer homeowners views without intruding on the landscape.

"We only allow people to cut out trees enough to build their houses," he explains.

Mountain, it looks like any other forested mountain.

There is no trace of cutouts for roads. No houses are visible through the trees.

"People can come with their own home plans," Sockriter says, "but they must have the feel and flavor of The Retreat." He notes that Ausburn is proactive about helping homeowners with house plans and essentially acts as the community's architectural review board.

"He wants us to build in sync with nature," notes



*Developer Charles Ausburn is passionate about maintaining the natural landscape at the community, which is designed so that no houses or cutouts for roads are visible from below. As a result, White Rock Mountain looks like any other forested mountain.*

"They can also cut out three view windows, but we don't want houses to be visible from below." Ausburn's own home on the mountain is built around a natural rock formation that is the centerpiece of his front yard.

Sockriter says the last thing Ausburn wants is for these ridgetop homes to look like they're "hanging off the side of the mountain." In fact, as one approaches White Rock

Kimberly Staton, who handles public relations for The Retreat. "He has a passion for maintaining what is already there."

Ausburn also has a passion for mimicking nature in construction.

### **Wonders To Enjoy**

The Retreat's lodge is a vivid example. Built of hand-cut sandstone and hemlock logs with a cedar shake roof,

the structure's color and texture melds into the hardwood forest around it. Inside, homeowners have plenty of space to relax in sitting rooms with stone fireplaces as focal points, a caterer's kitchen, and a spa encircled by native stone with artfully lit waterfalls. Outside, the rear deck and infinity pool overlook the mountaintop's most stunning view of ridgeline after ridgeline folded like green blankets up to the sky.

Beneath the lodge is an even more interesting treat – a cave that Ausburn refers to as The Grotto. Built of concrete but made to look like native rock, The Grotto houses an unusual underground spa overlooking the Greenbrier Sporting Club. The whimsical underground spa is a feature that may surprise most new owners, but not Tom Ricketts, who recently purchased a home site at The Retreat with his wife Christine. Ricketts just came on board as the community's director of sales and marketing. "Everything Charles does is over the top," says Ricketts.

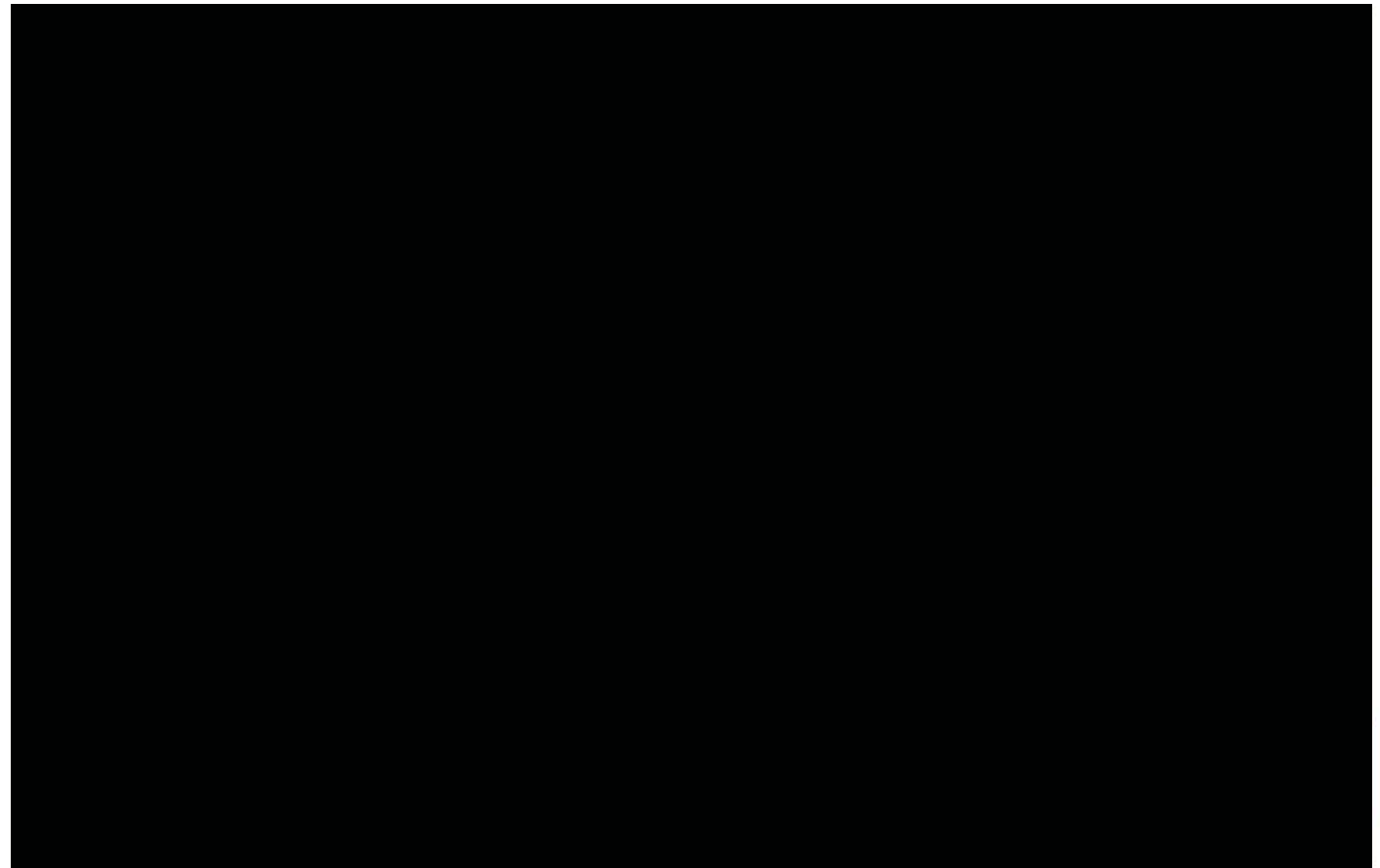


*Although there is no golf at the community, homeowners, who are more inclined to hiking and outdoor adventures, can relax near one of the clubhouse fireplaces or enjoy the infinity pool, spa or fitness center.*

#### **A Picture-Perfect Getaway**

Ricketts says one of the best things about Ausburn's communities is that they are fully financed.

"He puts in the infrastructure," Ricketts says. "There's never a concern about there being money to finish a property."





*After nine years of looking, the Purdens fell in love with this cabin built from 150-year-old logs and now regard it as their own cozy getaway.*

The Retreat has 165 total home sites, most just over an acre, and has more than 60 sold since the community opened two years ago. According to Ricketts, The Retreat is designed for people who want to live there, whether first or second homeowners, not for investment seekers.

One of the community's surprises, Sockriter says, has been the number of Lewisburg residents who have bought property at The Retreat and intend to live there full-time. Most second and third homeowners hail from Virginia, though the community also has owners from North Carolina, West Virginia, even Georgia.

Ricketts and his wife, who also have homes in Old Town Alexandria and Beaufort, S.C., plan to spend much time at The Retreat once their house is built.

"It's easy to get in and out," he says. "We're right on Interstate 64, and there are an amazing number of good restaurants here."

Lewisburg is also home to a variety of eclectic shops, an extensive historic district, and Carnegie Hall, where musical and dramatic performances are held throughout the year. For residents of The Retreat, it offers culture, shopping and dining only four miles away.

"People want the mountains," Sockriter points out, "but they don't want to be in the middle of nowhere."

Ausburn credits White Rock Mountain's proximity to Lewisburg as a deciding factor in his purchase of the property.

"Lewisburg is a picture-perfect small town," he says.

The Purdens agree, noting that they plan to retire either at The Retreat or in Lewisburg one day. But for now, they're happy with their picture-perfect cabin on the mountain.

"It's our getaway," says Jim. "Our blood pressure goes down the minute we get in the car and start heading for The Retreat." ■■■