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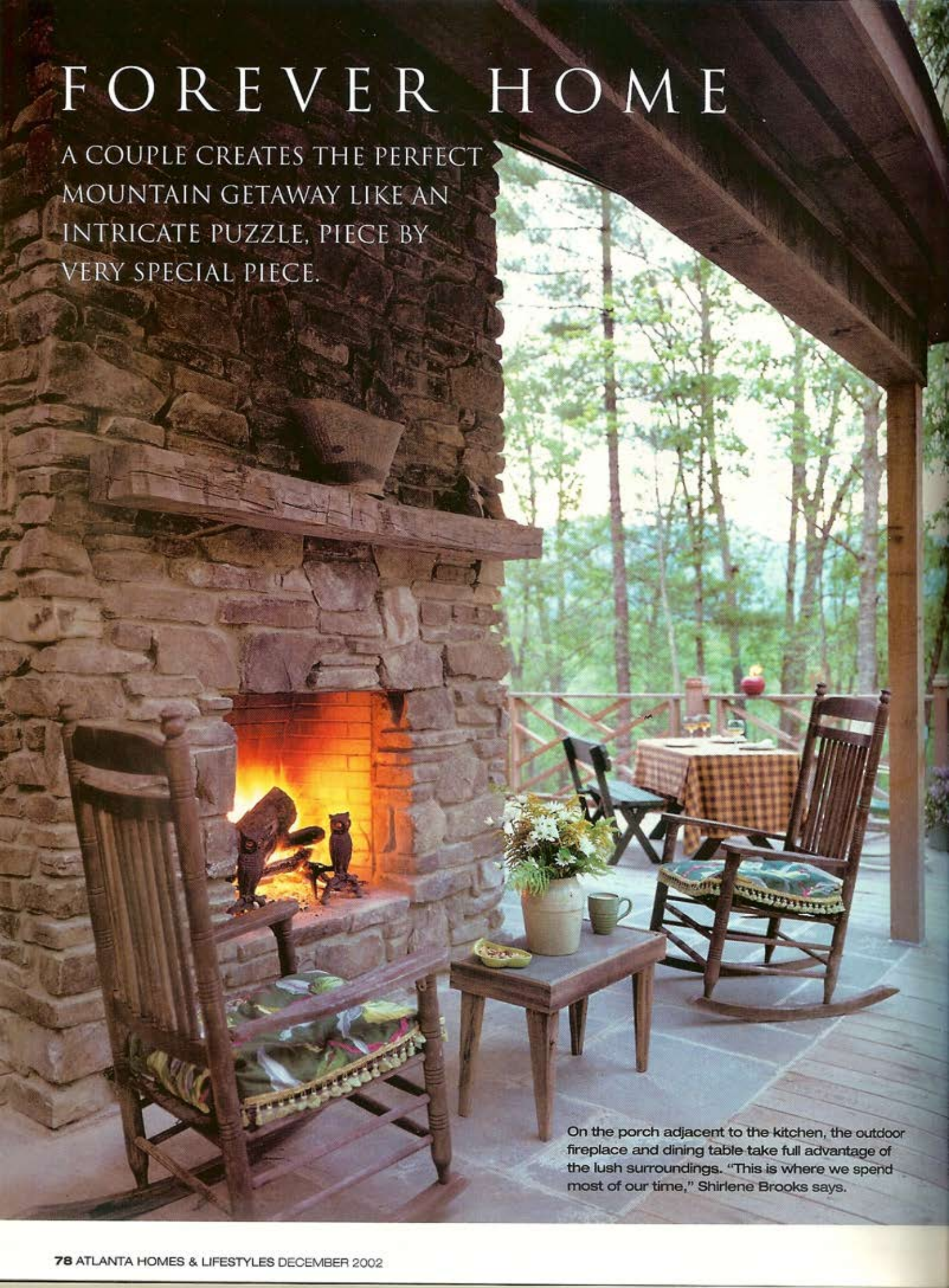
holiday STYLE



WELCOMING GUESTHOUSES FORCING BULBS
A TOAST TO CHAMPAGNE PRETTY PAPER ART
YUMMY HOLIDAY BREADS

FOREVER HOME

A COUPLE CREATES THE PERFECT MOUNTAIN GETAWAY LIKE AN INTRICATE PUZZLE, PIECE BY VERY SPECIAL PIECE.

A rustic outdoor porch with a stone fireplace, wooden rocking chairs, and a dining table overlooking a forest. The fireplace is made of rough-hewn stone and has a fire burning inside. Two wooden rocking chairs with patterned cushions are positioned in front of the fireplace. A small wooden table holds a vase of flowers and a mug. In the background, a dining table with a checkered tablecloth is set up on the porch, which has a wooden railing. The porch is surrounded by tall trees and a view of a valley.

On the porch adjacent to the kitchen, the outdoor fireplace and dining table take full advantage of the lush surroundings. "This is where we spend most of our time," Shirlene Brooks says.

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LEFT: The dining area is open to the kitchen so guests feel included in the action when meals are prepared. **ABOVE:** Shirlene loves to cook, and a combination of pretty and practical elements make the kitchen easy to use and enjoyable.

"The original idea was to find a little cabin on a stream so that Mark could fish," Shirlene recalls. But finding that ideal spot was a bit like learning to fly-cast perfectly—it just took time. "It took us more than two years to find the property," Shirlene explains.

Set on six lush acres just north of Dillard, Georgia, in the small hamlet of Otto, North Carolina, Shirlene and Mark's getaway is a private oasis from everyday life. There is a deep-water stream for indulging Mark's passion, and lots of hardwood and evergreen trees. Rhododendron and mountain laurel abound, and the craggy rock face of an old stone quarry acts as the perfect backdrop.

The discovery of the property opened the door for dreams of a cabin. "We knew we wanted something small and comfortable with an open living area," Shirlene says. The couple looked at log-cabin building kits, but found nothing that felt right. "The more we looked, the more we realized we could do our own thing. It just grew from there—and grew, and grew, and grew," Shirlene says with a laugh.

"We would come and camp by the stream and plan for the cabin. After we found and purchased the land, finalized the plans and decided on a builder, two years had passed. Then it took a year to build."



"WE WANTED IT TO LOOK LIKE IT FIT INTO THE ENVIRONMENT AND HAD BEEN THERE A LONG TIME."

—SHIRLENE BROOKS

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FACING: In the master bath, the backsplash wall is actually a former barn roof. Mark had the tin pressed so that the ridges would lie flat, and he and Shirlene scrubbed it clean of rust. The result is a textured, warm background for the rustic space, which also features an antique English sink. **RIGHT:** In the bath, rough woods and muted colors lend to the sense of relaxation and nature. **BELOW:** A window seat in the great room offers a cozy spot for reading or enjoying the view.



But that “lead time” gave Shirlene and Mark years to treasure-hunt and collect the layers of personal touches that make their second home so special—from recycled heart-pine flooring, to hand-hewn wall beams from former slaves’ quarters in Forsyth County, to antique blankets and linens. “We actually had two storage units full of stuff,” Shirlene admits with a grin. Every detail, from furnishings to individual construction components, has a story. As the couple found pieces that they loved, the house’s structural and interior elements came to life. They now joke that the weekend they received the certificate of occupancy, everything was already done. All that was left was to move it all inside.

Moving day was a story in and of itself. “It was a complete nightmare,” Shirlene reflects. It was worth the hassle, though, because the Brooks aren’t going anywhere. “This is our ‘forever’ house,” says Shirlene. “It even has a theme song, ‘Carolina In My Mind,’ by James Taylor. And each time the song comes on the radio we pause and go to Carolina in our minds.” ❄