



GEORGIA ON HIS MIND

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Opening pages: Keith Summerour's seventy-foot stone tower residence in Georgia evokes a Tuscan farmhouse. Clockwise from top left: The entrance to the barn; vintage finds on his porch; stacked field rocks and firewood; the vegetable garden. These pages: The living room's linen-covered Josephine winged chairs are Suzanne Kasler for Hickory Chair. Verellen's Boris sofa is covered in a linen fabric. The rush-seat chairs and bench sit upon a Moroccan rug.



In certain fields of Georgia where cotton and jalapeño peppers once grew, there is now a different crop to be harvested: rocks of granite and quartz. In a region where farmers have tilled the soil since the 1820s, plowing the land once meant first digging up plenty of rocks and piling them in distant fields. When Atlanta-based architect Keith Summerour began designing his weekend home outside the tiny town of Gay, Georgia, he found most of what he needed to construct a seventy-foot-high tower residence in his three-hundred acre backyard.

"We are blessed here with large mounds of rocks left by the former farmers who worked these fields," says Summerour, who helped handpick the rocks that comprise his finished home. "The farmers salvaged them when preparing to plant and harvest, and now we've used them to build the structures, especially the main tower."

In this otherwise featureless, though picturesque, landscape of Georgia, Pine Mountain rises in the distance some 1,300 feet. "I positioned the house on high ground so I'd have views of the Pine Mountain range," says Summerour, "but there are also farm silos in the area, so the sight of my stone tower is not so startling." Summerour also cites remnants of old regional "shot towers," homegrown munitions factories where leadshot was made. The process involved pouring molten lead from towers into basins of water, the precise height being key to the spherical shape the bullets took. So Towerhouse Farm

The crocks on the mantle, the baskets, and center table are from the Willis Everett private collection. The photograph, *Story of a Winery*, is one of three prints by Ansel Adams showing Paul Cezanne's French vineyard.

is both an anomaly and a familiar shape in the region.

The architecture of Summerour's home, what he refers to as Towerhouse Farm, references disparate eras and forms. With its shallow pitched roof and deep wooden eaves set on vigorously articulated walls of stone cut with tall narrow windows, the tower evokes classic Tuscan-style buildings. "But it's also a really modern building," Summerour stresses. "If you strip away the textures, what results is a clean, simple, straightforward structure with a strong base. It's also reflective of Southern vernacular architecture. I love the collision of different design influences, and everyone who comes to visit here brings their own design dialogue."

That Southern vernacular dynamic carries to the interiors, a series of rooms stacked on five floors. "The one thing I forgot to put in was an elevator," laments Summerour. But where stone prevails on the exterior, wood is found inside. In the living room, or as he calls it, the lodge room, the walls and honeycomb-patterned ceiling are clad in river-recovered cypress wood. Generations ago, lumberjacks would float felled cypress logs down rivers, but not all of the trunks would make it to the mills; some would sink. "The wood I used in many of the interiors has had 100 years to soak in the minerals of the mud of a river, resulting in a grayish tone," explains Summerour. "I was fortunate that in the town of Gay there's a company called Vintage Lumber, which is able to expertly craft that recovered wood." Summerour explains that the living room ceiling's dense wood honeycombing pattern is found more typically in English manor houses, though in plaster.

History is omnipresent throughout the house, not just in the materials, but also in the décor, which bears the marks of the many interior designers over the years since the house





and its ancillary buildings were completed in 2010. “I’ve had a lot of good advice from the best-of-the-best designers,” says Summerour, “who helped pick and choose for me. It’s been a luxury and pleasure of mine to work with them.” For instance, in the kitchen, Summerour features as both décor and practical furniture, a row of chairs that line a ledge. “I purchased those from an antiques store, and it’s claimed they were made by Admiral Robert Peary’s men when they were stuck in the ice and needed something to do to occupy themselves. They’re very light and sturdy and made of walrus gut. When I need them for guests, I just take them down. They’re like my homage to those men.”

Summerour uses the home on weekends, and one of his favorite activities is to hunt quail, turkey, and deer, as well as fish in the Flint River, which courses the property. When not outdoors, he makes use of all five stacked floors. The entrance door is positioned midway between what he calls the lower-level hunt room and the living room, which melds with the kitchen. The second floor, reached via staircases of heart pine, contains a guest room, while the third floor is Summerour’s master bedroom, noted for an open ceiling that reaches to his art and architecture studio above. The top floor functions as an observation deck. His two sons, Harrison, seventeen, and Hugh, nineteen, have rooms in various nooks of the tower. An expansive porch, made of rough-sewn pine, is a generously scaled outdoor living space. “Given a choice, we will always eat there and not inside,” says Summerour. “We get a good eight months of the year out there.”

In a place where, as Summerour describes it, most people “grow fun as the main crop,” he nurtures a bountiful vegetable garden. “There’s a love of taking something you’ve grown and cooking with it. It’s one of the most pleasurable pursuits here. It can be difficult to leave on a Sunday, but I’m someone who likes the stimulation and the routine of the city along with the open space and quiet of the countryside.” ■

The homeowner, who likes to cook, especially with ingredients grown in his garden, had Atlanta-based furniture designer Skylar Morgan build a solid cypress table with concealed shelving beneath. The table is surrounded by vintage chairs covered in worn orange linen. The white Peruvian-style dishware is Montes Doggett.



The kitchen's hood and range are FiveStar. The collection of cast-iron skillet are part of the homeowner's collection. Right: A nook, where Summerour's son, Hugh, used to sleep, before choosing to move into a more private bedroom, features an antique iron bed and a vintage barrel side table.

Summerour intended to use the lower-level mudroom for boots, baskets, totes, hats, blankets and other items used while outdoors. But a slot in the stone wall by the kitchen entrance functions as a place to drop off and hang such items.









Left: The master bedroom's Candler queen bed is Suzanne Kasler for Hickory Chair. Floral-motif pillows are C&C Milano. The solid rustic walnut bedside tables, built by Skylar Morgan, are hand-scrubbed and oiled. This page: The freestanding cast-iron tub and tub fixtures are by Waterworks.



Although Summerour's architecture firm is based in Atlanta, when he's in the country, he rises early on weekends and works in his fourth-floor studio while the sun comes up. "It's a particularly inspiring workplace, and I often begin on a notebook full of ideas."



The spacious porch, well-sheltered and where Summerour and his sons often eat meals, is situated just off the living room, via a pair of arched iron French doors. The table, made of reclaimed pine, is vintage. The custom benches are designed by Summerour.