

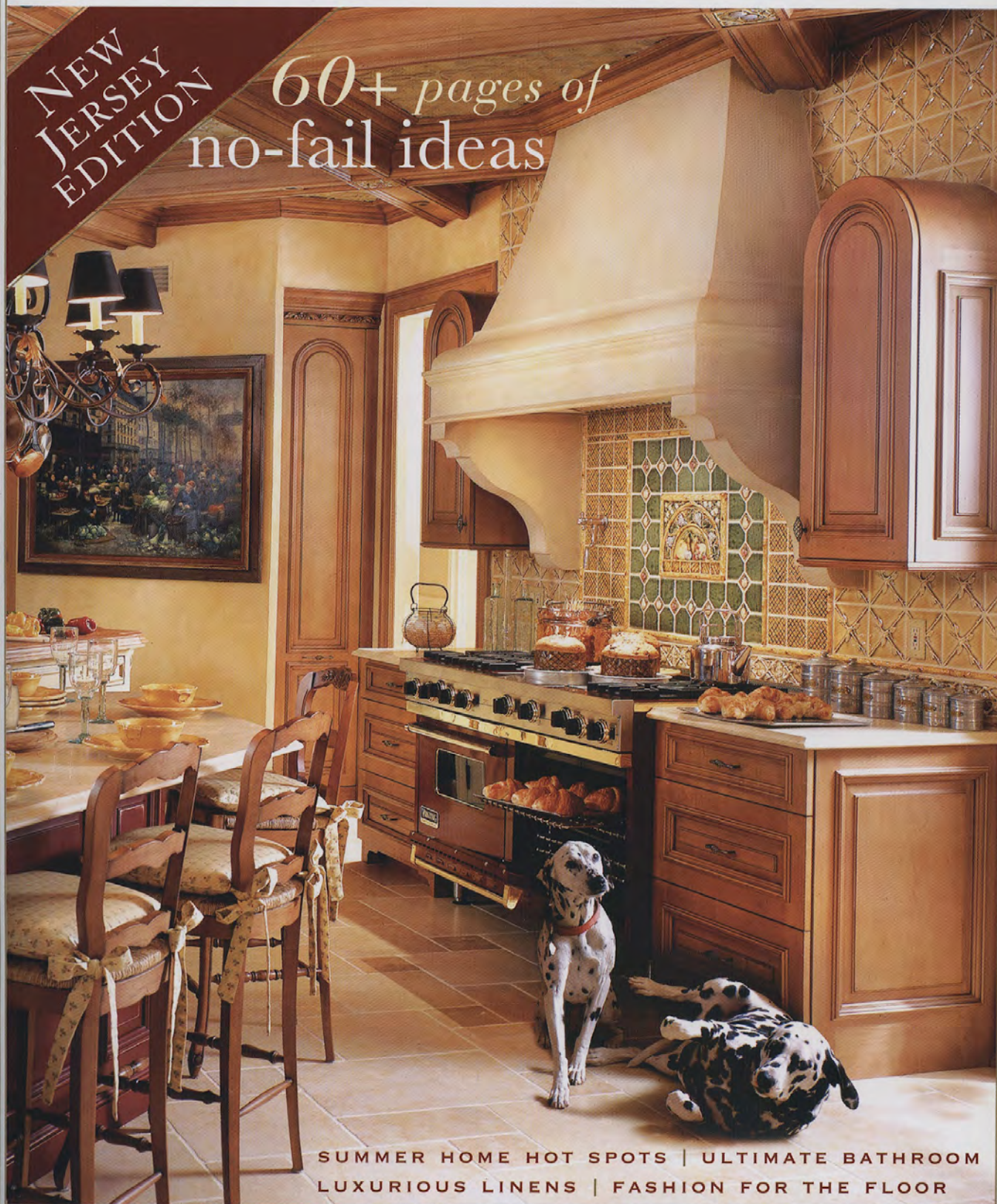
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Catskills collage

Photographers Steve Gross and Sue Daley have
pieced together a hilltop farmhouse retreat
full of found-object art and furnishings

TEXT BY **DONNA BOYLE SCHWARTZ**

PHOTOGRAPHY BY **STEVE GROSS AND SUE DALEY**





THE LATE AFTERNOON SUNLIGHT SLANTS gently through a wall of windows, suffusing the entire interior of this Catskills country farmhouse with a lambent glow, reflecting the golden patina on the polished wooden floorboards.

It was the quality of this light radiating throughout the aptly named River View Farm that first drew Manhattan photographers Steve Gross and Sue Daley to remote Schoharie County (west of Albany) in 1987. And it is the stunning mountain vistas and soothing burble of the nearby river that continually lure the pair back to their weekend retreat from photo shoots all across the U.S. "The original owners definitely knew what they were doing when they situated the house and windows," says Daley. "The light and the views are just amazing."

With six coffee-table books to their credit, Daley and Gross are no strangers to beautiful homes and landscapes. "We travel all over the country, but we've found a place here that is as beautiful as anyplace else we've ever visited," says Gross, who has been Daley's partner and co-worker since college.

The two-story, three-bedroom home, which snuggles into a picture-postcard panorama about halfway up a hillside, was built circa 1905; the massive red barn behind it dates back to the 1880s.

This 300-acre former dairy farm features an 1880s red barn, left, and a newer construction, glimpsed through the kitchen window: a free-standing, screened room perfect for summer dining.

CONTINUED



In fact, the 300-acre property was a dairy farm until the mid-'70s, when the farmers retired and sold the plot, splitting off the house, barn and 10 acres of the land into what is now River View Farm. The remainder is still farmland today. "Many of our neighbors are either farmers or artists," notes Gross.

Although structurally sound, the house was in sad shape when the couple purchased it. A group of hunters originally bought the house and "totally trashed it," Daley recalls. Another purchaser started renovations but didn't get far. Substantive work, therefore, fell to Gross and Daley, who have become expert do-it-yourselfers in an ongoing labor of love. Gross did much of the plumbing and electrical work, while Daley focused on design and décor.

Scouring local auctions and yard sales, the couple created an interior that celebrates the beauty of "found" objects, ranging from a massive cast-iron woodstove to a primitive sideboard and cabinets. The riverbank provides an endless supply of flotsam, which Gross uses to create furnishings: The coffee table is constructed out of a salvaged barn door, bookcases are crafted from reclaimed lumber and a curio cabinet is made from twisted driftwood

In the airy front room, above, the straight-backed chairs are all business. But look closer. Trophy-sprung figures dangle from the chandelier, and spark plugs are imbedded in the picture frame. The woodstove-warmed library, right, boasts a bookcase crafted from lumber found near the Schoharie River.









"Doing photo shoots over the years, we've had to improvise—find props, pull things together at a moment's notice, often without any budget," says Gross. "So our house is all about that kind of impression." It was an ingenious neighbor who created the unique shelving, right, out of driftwood and sycamore branches.





and weathered planks. One of the most stunning pieces is a large, gnarled sycamore root, stripped bare by the river rocks and bleached by the sun, which has taken up residence in the living room.

The dining room chandelier and kitchen door pulls were created using the tops of old trophies, including figures of bowlers and golfers. A guest-bed's frame is made with old bowling balls, and a rattan chaise is strewn with vintage tarot cards, strategically glued in place to cover up holes.

Midway between the house and barn, the couple built a freestanding, screened room furnished with old Adirondack chairs—an ideal place to relax on warm evenings. The entire tableau is presided over by the friendly sentinel Mabel, a happy Norwegian elkhound who keeps the wandering herds of deer from decimating the gardens.

The home remains a work in progress—the couple never seems to run out of projects, but they wouldn't have it any other way. "There is just something about an old house," Gross muses. "You know that it's been here for 100 years, and it isn't going anywhere."

Obviously, neither are they. □

On and above a primitive sideboard purchased at auction, above, is an artful miscellany of the found. In the outdoor room, opposite, a resilient mullein plant grows through cracks in the floor.



