

ORGANS OF GLASS p. 41 | PICKLE PALOOZA p. 80 | BARBOURSVILLE TURNS 50 p. 91

VIRGINIA

LIVING

MOBJACK MAGIC

Oyster Culture in the Bay

WWW.VIRGINIALIVING.COM

OCTOBER 2026 \$9.95

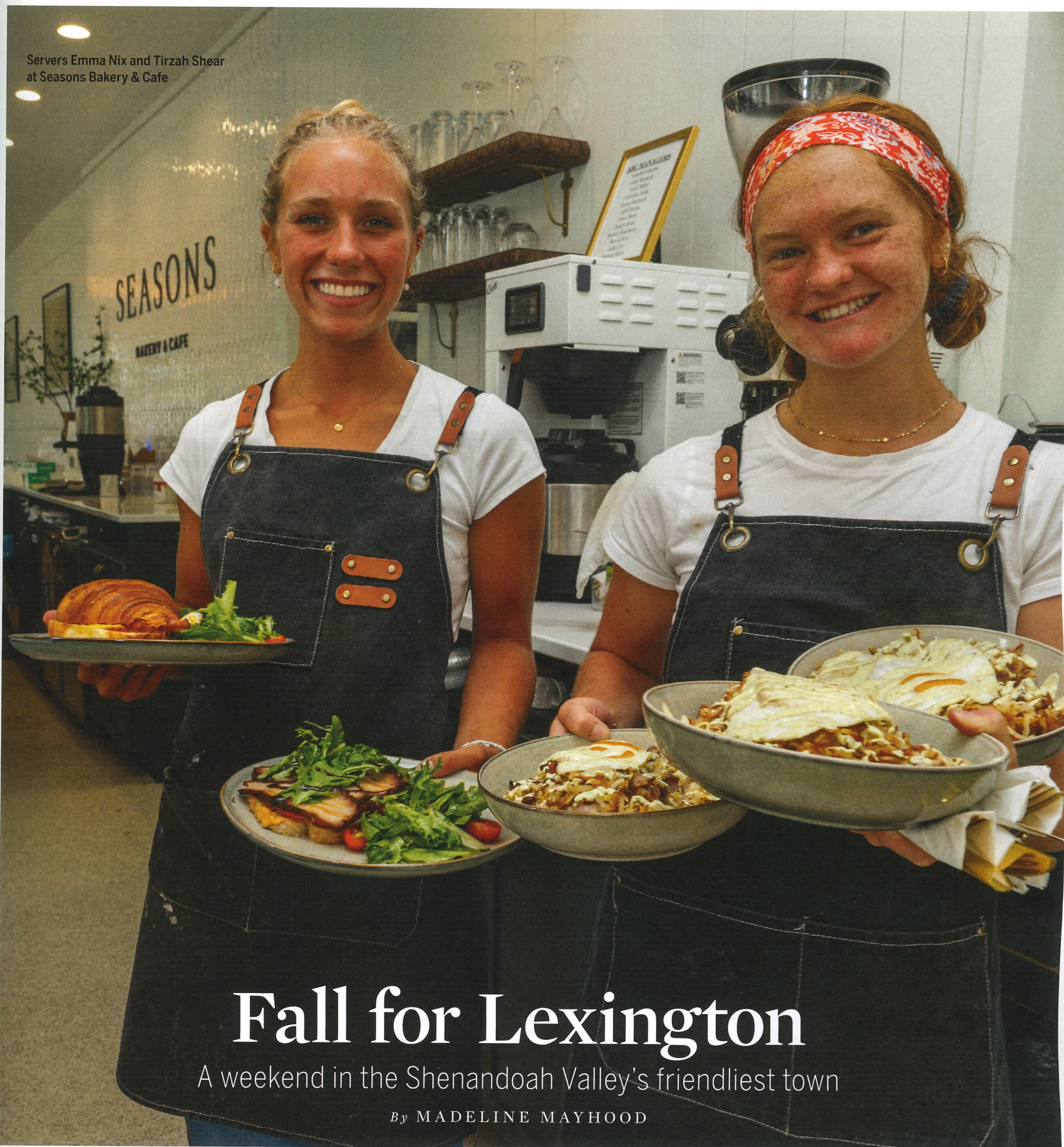


TENDING ASHLAND
A LEGACY WORTH
KEEPING p. 47

BALLET ON HORSEBACK
DRESSAGE IN
VIRGINIA p. 53

CHIEF OF CHOCOLATE
GEARHART'S
SCORES BIG p. 75

Servers Emma Nix and Tirzah Shear
at Seasons Bakery & Cafe



Fall for Lexington

A weekend in the Shenandoah Valley's friendliest town

By MADELINE MAYHOOD

There's a particular kind of quiet that settles over the Shenandoah Valley in the late afternoon, when the light turns the color of bourbon, and the limestone hills go soft at the edges. Lexington sits inside that quiet like it was meant to. Two colleges, a Main Street that never got the memo about strip malls, a hotel good enough to make the whole town feel like a discovery rather than a detour, and a

friendly, welcoming spirit that invites visitors to return.

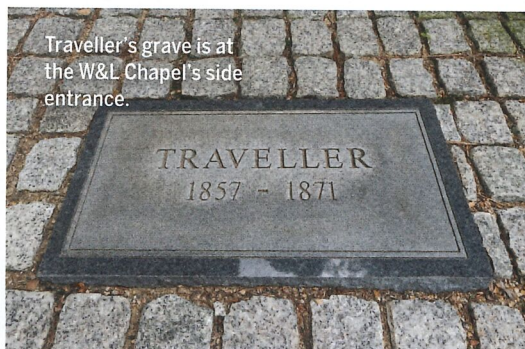
Founded in 1777, Lexington has always taken itself seriously without making a show of it. History here is not incidental—it's underfoot, in the churchyards and the columned campuses and the names on the buildings downtown. But what makes it worth a weekend isn't the past tense at all—it's a town that's figured out how to be genuinely good at the present.

The Washington & Lee University campus and its brick buildings with white-columned façades; the W&L Chapel is in the lower right corner.



Founded in 1777,
Lexington has
always **taken itself**
seriously without
making a show of it.

Traveller's grave is at the W&L Chapel's side entrance.



A Town Built on Three Hills

Start where the town itself does—because in Lexington, you're never more than a few blocks from a college campus, and the two here set the rhythm for everything else.

Washington & Lee University rises on its own hill at the west end of town, all white columns and red brick in a formal, unbothered Georgian symmetry that makes you instinctively lower your voice. The campus takes its name in part from George Washington, an early benefactor, and it's worth a slow, unhurried walk around the quad simply to take in the architecture before the day gets going. Stop by the W&L Chapel, and look just outside for Traveller's grave—General Robert E. Lee's beloved horse—where you're likely to find an apple or a carrot left as a small, quiet memento.

A short walk brings you to Virginia Military Institute, the Commonwealth's senior military college, which runs on an entirely different cadence—close-order drill on the parade ground, gray-clad cadets moving with a synchronized purpose that's genuinely something to watch. But ask anyone on post who the most popular figure at VMI is right now, and the answer won't be a general. It'll be CAVU.

CAVU is a golden retriever who joined Chaplain John Casper's office in 2024 as a facility dog, trained to support cadets through grief, stress, and the particular pressures of military college life. This honorary brigadier general's name is naval aviator slang—Ceiling and Visibility Unlimited, meaning ideal flying conditions, which tracks, since cadets describe him as exactly that



VMI Chaplain John Casper & CAVU

Built in 1896, this stately Renaissance Revival building on South Main Street served as a courthouse until 2009. Now, it houses offices and meeting spaces for W&L's faculty, students, and other community members.





TAPS at The Georges, the perfect spot for winding down

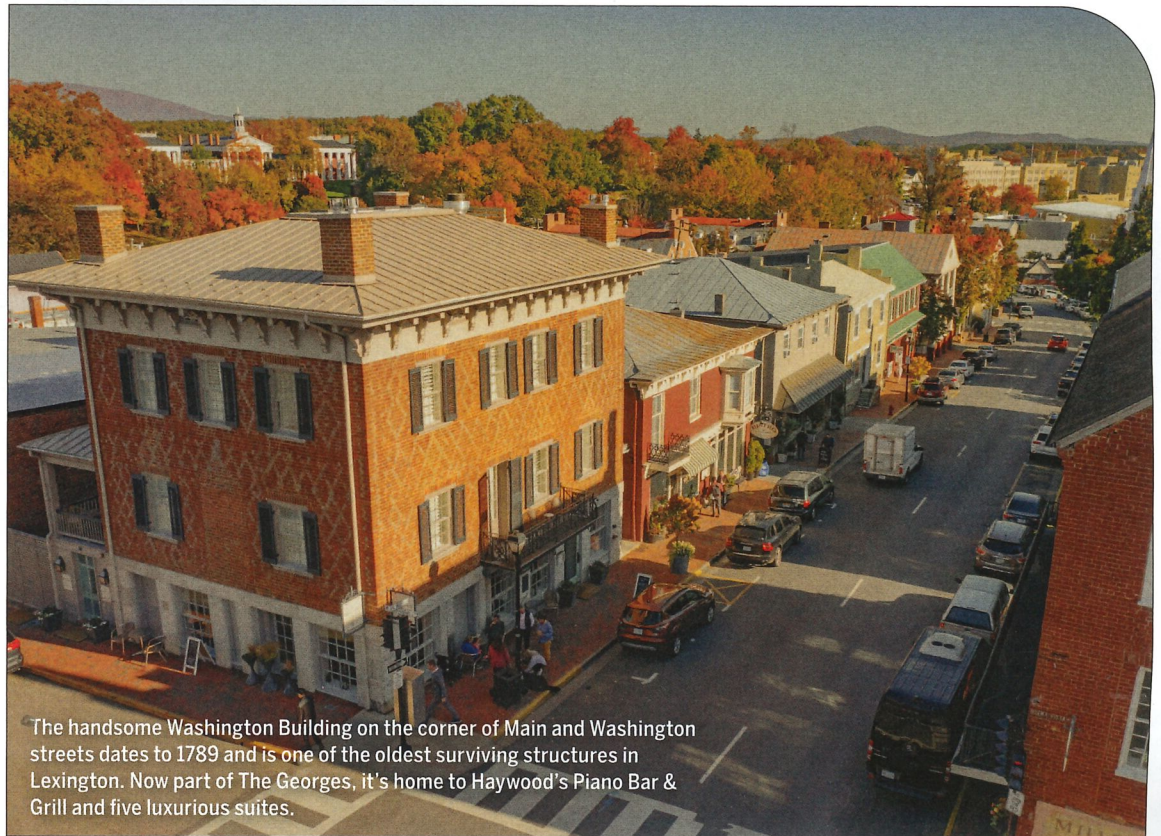
kind of presence: the thing that clears the air. Look for him trotting across the parade ground, one star on his vest, tail going the whole time.

A Place to Stay

For most of Lexington's recent history, lodging was sometimes considered the town's one weak spot—charming bed-and-breakfasts, reliable chains out by the interstate, but not much that matched the polish of the place itself. The Georges fixed that, decisively.

The hotel exists because of a very specific kind of parental problem-solving. Ann Parker Gottwald and her husband Teddy raised five boys, several of whom cycled through cadet life at VMI, and after years of visiting with nowhere satisfying to stay, they decided to build the solution themselves—buying up buildings downtown with the goal of opening a proper boutique hotel.

Set across a cluster of restored buildings dating between 1789 and 1887, including the Washington Building, the Marshall Building, the Livery, and Lawyers Row, The Georges, which opened in 2014, is the rare boutique hotel that understands restraint is a design choice, not an absence of one. The exterior along Lawyers Row alone is reason to slow down: dignified brick facades, deep window surrounds, and the kind of patina that



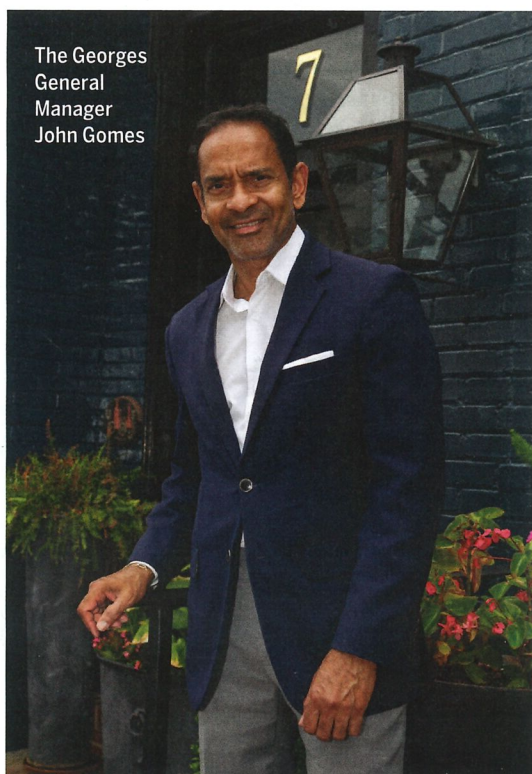
The handsome Washington Building on the corner of Main and Washington streets dates to 1789 and is one of the oldest surviving structures in Lexington. Now part of The Georges, it's home to Haywood's Piano Bar & Grill and five luxurious suites.

only comes from centuries of quiet aging. Inside, across 33 rooms spread over five buildings (soon to be six), the details lean into serene luxury—Frette linens, Peacock Alley blankets, original artwork, spa bathrooms with heated floors, and towel warmers. No two rooms are alike, which feels right for a hotel named, fittingly, after two Georges: George Washington and General George Marshall, VMI's most famous alumni. Another George gets a shoutout on the property, too: an event space, The Patton Room, is named for General George Patton.

"Lexington is truly a hidden gem," says John Gomes, The Georges general manager. "It's the perfect blend of history, culture, natural beauty,

“We’ve lived in Lexington for over 20 years, and we love it here. It’s a small town with a big heart. We really wanted to give back to the folks who live here by providing a welcoming place to gather and supporting local farmers and artisans.”

—Jenefer Davies, Co-owner, Heliotrope Brewery



The Georges
General
Manager
John Gomes

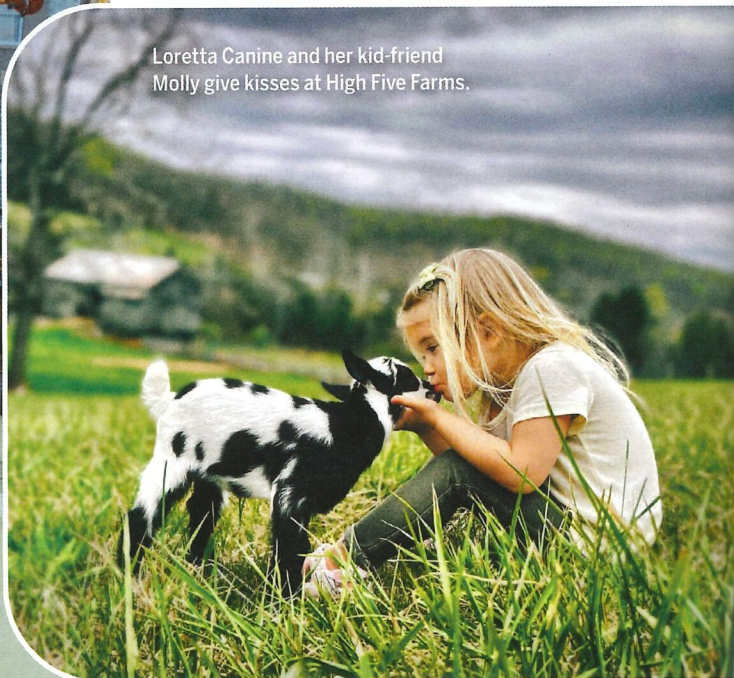


Specialty cocktails are a TAPS signature. L–R: Mojito, Spiced Cherry Sazerac, Winter Kiss

PHOTOS (CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT): COURTESY OF VIRGINIA TOURISM CORP. (3); BY LYNDA RICHARDSON (2); COURTESY OF VIRGINIA TOURISM CORP. (3); BY LYNDA RICHARDSON (2)



Loretta Canine and her kid-friend Molly give kisses at High Five Farms.



Beer, Pizza, and Patios

Heliotrope Brewery earns a reputation that travels well past Rockbridge County, and it starts with an origin story that's more thoughtful than most. "Erik went to brewing school specifically so we could open up a small brewery that makes interesting, hyper local beer," says Jenefer Davies, who co-owns Heliotrope with her husband Erik Jones. "When we were creating our business plan, we recognized that, if we also offered food, then people may want to stay longer, chat with friends, play games, and socialize more. Since community is at the heart of our business plan—and since pizza is the natural sister of beer—we decided to create a brewpub."

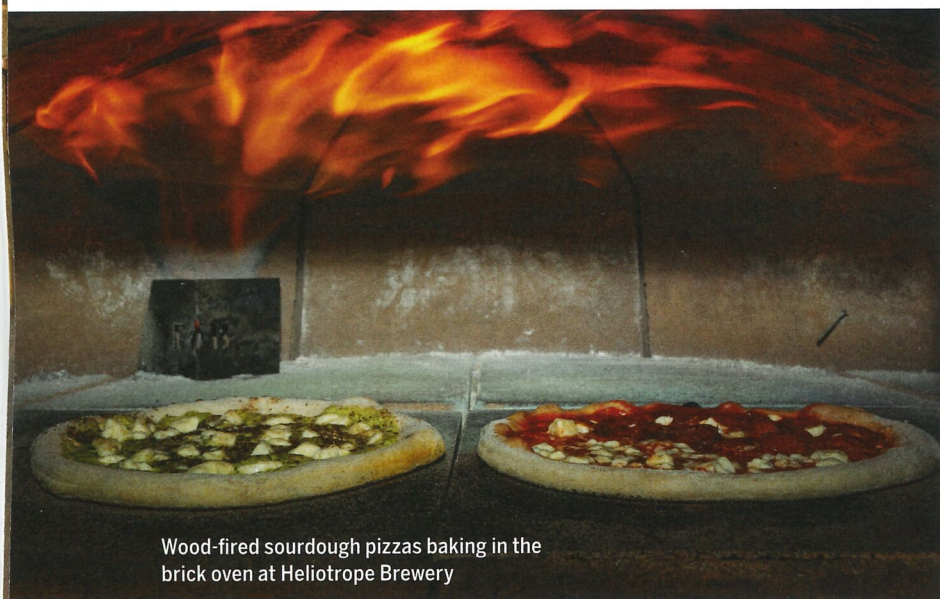
That community-first instinct shows in the details: local produce, barley malted right here in Virginia, rotating local artwork on the walls, and community tables built to promote conversation. "We've lived in Lexington for over 20 years, and we love it here," Davies says. "It's a small town with a

Out in the county, **Ecco Adesso Winery** is an architectural surprise dropped into the middle of Rockbridge farmland—anchored by a striking "chateau" that looks like it belongs on a movie set or in the Italian Alps.

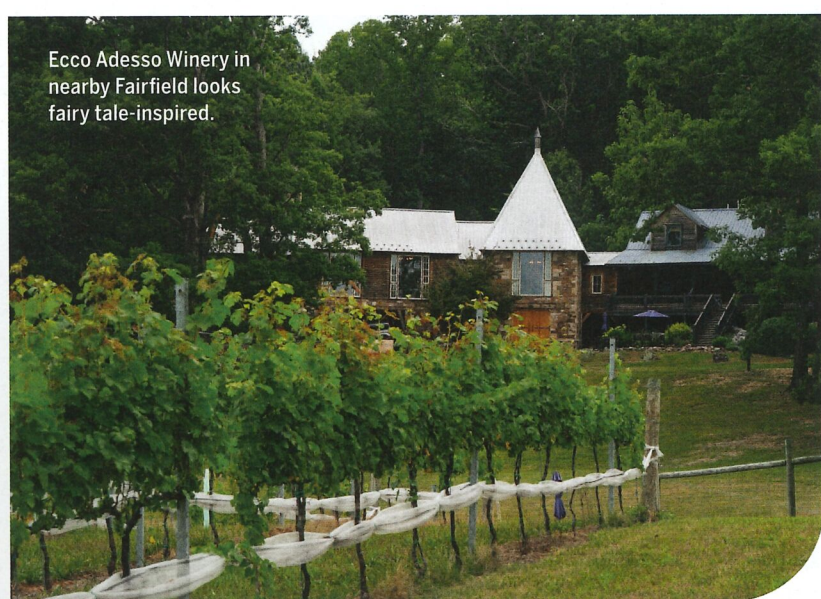
and genuine Southern hospitality." Gomes knows a thing or two about creating memorable guest experiences, having spent his career in global leadership roles at The Ritz Carlton, Four Seasons, and Loews. "At The Georges, we want our guests to feel not only that they have discovered something special, but that they have found a place they will want to return again and again," he says.

TAPS is the hotel's main bar and lounge, and it's equally suited to a glass of wine after a town walking tour or a day spent visiting the county's vineyards and breweries. Haywood's Piano Bar & Grill, across the street, is a bit more polished, offering a sophisticated yet inviting dining experience with stylish dishes, quality wines, craft cocktails, and the soothing sounds of live piano jazz.

Given everything else on this itinerary, book The Georges first, and build the weekend around it.



Wood-fired sourdough pizzas baking in the brick oven at Heliotrope Brewery



Ecco Adesso Winery in nearby Fairfield looks fairy tale-inspired.



Mason Canine cuddling with Miso the hen and Mater the kid at High Five Farms

big heart. We really wanted to give back to the folks who live here by providing a welcoming place to gather and supporting local farmers and artisans."

The wood-fired pizzas are as good to look at as they are to eat—the Pig & Goat, with its rotating cast of pork and cheese, and the Diavolo, for anyone who wants their pizza to fight back a little, are the two to know.

Out in the county, Ecco Adesso Winery is an architectural surprise dropped into the middle of Rockbridge farmland—anchored by a striking "chateau" that looks like it belongs on a movie set or in the Italian Alps, with tasting rooms that take the wine every bit as seriously as the building's design. The winery sits in nearby Fairfield and is run by the Weatherly family, who found the property, called Skyline Meadows, after COVID sent them looking for land and a new chapter. Longtime lovers of Italy and all things European, they'd been crossing the Atlantic every year since 2005—until 2020 grounded them, and they turned their attention to the Blue Ridge instead, a place they'd always privately thought of as their own Tuscany in the U.S. What they created was a small compound of Italian, French, and German influences, including the grand main house (aka "chateau"), that felt like the piece of Europe they loved, tucked quietly into the Shenandoah Valley. It's worth the drive out for the building alone; it's worth staying for the wine. Four charming guesthouses on the property welcome overnight guests.

Bread + Cuddles, Farm-Style

No trip to Lexington is complete without a stop for bread—and the story behind it is as good as a loaf itself. Daniel and Fawn Shear's Seasons Bakery & Cafe is the second act of their original Seasons Yield Farm in nearby Raphine. The cafe would not be out of place in a city 100 times Lexington's size, and the bread flight—served with salted butter and garden jam—is an homage to breadheads everywhere and the thing to order. But in reality, *everything* is the thing to order—from their rotating daily breads, to bowls, sandwiches and salads, plus coffee, lattes, and espressos every which way. And their seasonal drinks

are reliably out of this world.

The Seasons' idea traces back to 2012, during Daniel's first deployment to Afghanistan, when Fawn mailed him a copy of Chad Robertson's *Tartine*—part sourdough manual, part story of one couple building a business around a shared passion for bread. The way Daniel tells it, the book, along with their shared interest in providing the most nourishing food for their growing family, was the seed that took root. The couple eventually settled in Raphine, where Daniel joined the Virginia National Guard and became a firefighter while the family built Seasons Yield Farm that (still) includes twice-monthly "bread days." Over time, bread days nearly went viral, revealing what people wanted most: their wild-leavened sourdough. That realization became Seasons Bakery & Cafe, which opened downtown in 2025 and has been a hit ever since.

Just outside of town, High Five Farms offers a perfect afternoon in the county with something the wineries and bakeries can't quite offer: friendly livestock who love cuddles. Run by Kate Canine, her husband, and their three children under a simple family credo—freedom, family, faith, food, and fellowship—the farm is where friends and families show up for an hour and end up staying for three. There's snuggling and hiking with a herd of some 70 goats, brushing and feeding sessions with the resident Highland cows, and photo ops that don't need much staging when the backdrop is this adorable. The farm's menagerie includes Nigerian Dwarf goats, Babydoll sheep, Great Pyrenees guard dogs (and, often, their puppies), alongside organic produce, free-range eggs, and a bread program of its own: fresh sourdough



Woodworker Richard Furman is a member of Artists in Cahoots, an artist co-op on Washington Street.



The mouthwatering lineup at Seasons Bakery & Cafe

and focaccia, ordered weekly. Wildflower bouquet workshops and the occasional goat yoga session round things out, ideal for anyone who came for the animals and stayed for the whole afternoon.

An Afternoon on Washington Street

Back downtown, Washington Street—the cultural and historical core of Lexington—features boutique art galleries, local dining, and specialty shops—and a slow stroll reaps heaps of rewards. At Violet Consignment, owner Sheila Glaesner traveled the world as a flight attendant for Delta, perusing markets and boutiques all over Europe as her schedule allowed. Violet, her maiden name, reflects Glaesner's sharp eye, with every item carefully and creatively curated—from clothes to shoes to decorative accessories. Nearby is Pumpkinseeds, a charming store full of gifts, apparel, cards, candles, and more.

Artists in Cahoots is one of several art galleries on Washington Street. A co-op run by its dozen member artists, it's worth much more than a passing glance. Woodworker Richard Furman's bowls, pens, and serving pieces are the kind of craft that makes you want to run a hand along the grain before you've even checked the price tag. He favors native species like maple, cherry, and oak, but occasionally works with claro walnut sourced from the Pacific Northwest, prized for its wild, swirling grain and rich, chocolate-toned heartwood. If you're lucky, you'll find Furman himself minding the gallery counter, meticulously turning one of his own bowls between customers.

The Pace of the Place

Lexington is a town meant for savoring. Leave room on the back end of the weekend for nothing in particular—another loop past the W&L quad in the morning light, one more coffee at Seasons, a luxurious soak in your spa tub at The Georges, or one more pass through Washington Street's storefronts before the drive home. By 10 p.m., the town goes very quiet. By that point in the weekend, that's exactly what you'll want. **VL**

Madeline Mayhood is the editor-in-chief of Virginia Living.



Fields of lavender at Tantivy Farm

WHERE THE LAVENDER GROWS

At Tantivy Farm, first it was horses, then it was herbs.

By HEATHER BIEN | Photography by LYNDIA RICHARDSON

PENNY ROSS GOT OFF A PLANE IN Maryland in 1975. Fresh out of a small town in Maine, she was set on a life focused on horses. She'd enrolled as a working student at the Potomac Horse Center, and on her first day, she cut through a barn on the way to the cafeteria. She remembers the moment vividly.

"There was a man walking on the upper level of the barn. White britches, black boots, English riding cap, tapping his riding whip," Penny recalls. "He was followed closely by an Australian shepherd. I became madly infatuated with that Englishman with the brilliant blue eyes."

She was a student, and he was an instructor, a few years older. Rather than becoming a romantic interest, Penny was stuck spit-polishing bridles and mucking out stalls.

Brian Ross, the Englishman, did notice Penny's bond with that shepherd dog, and at the end of the program, he said, "Poco loves you. Why don't you take her?"

She did. Penny moved back to New England and cared for Poco for several years, staying in touch with Brian only to update him on his former pet. But as all dogs do, Poco passed away—and in his passing, opened a door: Brian mentioned he'd be in Boston and suggested stopping by.

They married a year later.

Penny and Brian realized there might be an opportunity in those breathtaking fields of purple herbs.

Following the Horses

For decades, the couple built big careers in the horse world, eventually buying a farm in Rock-bridge County. Brian traveled the globe judging world-class dressage and eventing competitions. Penny raised their two boys at the place they named Tantivy Farm—after Brian's family sweet shop in England—while organizing as many as

25 horse shows a year. They were doing what they loved, and burning out in the process. Soon, it was time for something different.

They explored how to justify staying on their 54-acre property by looking to the land itself. Inspired by a 2016 visit to lavender farms in the



Owners at Tantivy Farm with their dog, Cooper

Pacific Northwest, they had over 350 lavender plants shipped in from Washington State. There was no business plan—just searching for a bit of joy in retirement and a reason to stay on the farm.

Learning From the Lavender

That first year, they learned from other lavender growers, trading knowledge and experience. They planted English and French varieties on the rocky hillside, letting them thrive in the dry, poor soil. With each harvest, they experimented with new uses—culinary touches like pepper and chocolate, plus shampoo, lotion, and healing salve. They took their wares to the Staunton Farmers Market, and a customer base quickly developed.

As Penny recalls, "People would ask us, 'Where's your farm? Can we come see the lavender?' and we thought, 'No, that's our home!'"

But the questions continued, and Penny and Brian realized there might be an opportunity in those breathtaking fields of purple herbs. In 2018, they built a gift shop, followed by porches and more lavender the next year. People began to trickle in. Then in 2020, with fresh air and open spaces at a premium, visitors showed up in droves. With mountains, flower gardens, and lavender as far as the eye can see, the setting is nothing short of magical.

More visitors pour in each year, ready to stroll the fields and sit for a minute with lavender ice cream. Tantivy Farm's offerings have grown accordingly, with workshops from local makers on growing lavender, teacup gardening, and lavender wreaths. Their mail-order business thrives too, with customers near and far restocking their simple syrup or salve as soon as it runs out.

It's been 10 years now, and the lavender has taken on a life of its own. For Penny and Brian, these herbs have become more than a respite from the horses—with each visitor in awe of the surroundings, each sip of lavender lemonade, this has become their way to share their land with the community. TantivyFarm.com

Heather Bien covers home, style, travel, and culture for Garden & Gun, Southern Living, Washingtonian, and more. Visit her blog, *C'est Bien*, at HeatherBien.com.