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# Renewing the Senses at **BLACKBERRY FARM**

Don't let Blackberry Farm's secluded location fool you —  
a world-class experience awaits in eastern Tennessee.

By JEFF BARGANIER

It's our thirtieth wedding anniversary. Over the years my wife has begged to visit a certain exceptional mountain resort, but it has been so long since she mentioned it that I don't think it registers with her that that's where we are heading right now. I doctored their Web site directions, changing our destination's identity to The Blue Moon Resort — except I spelled it The Blue *Mold* Resort (that's another story). We're weaving down a nondescript mountain valley road in eastern Tennessee below Knoxville. Actually, we could be just about anywhere. There are no signs along the route, as the owners like to protect the privacy of their guests. The first sign she'll see will be at the entrance.

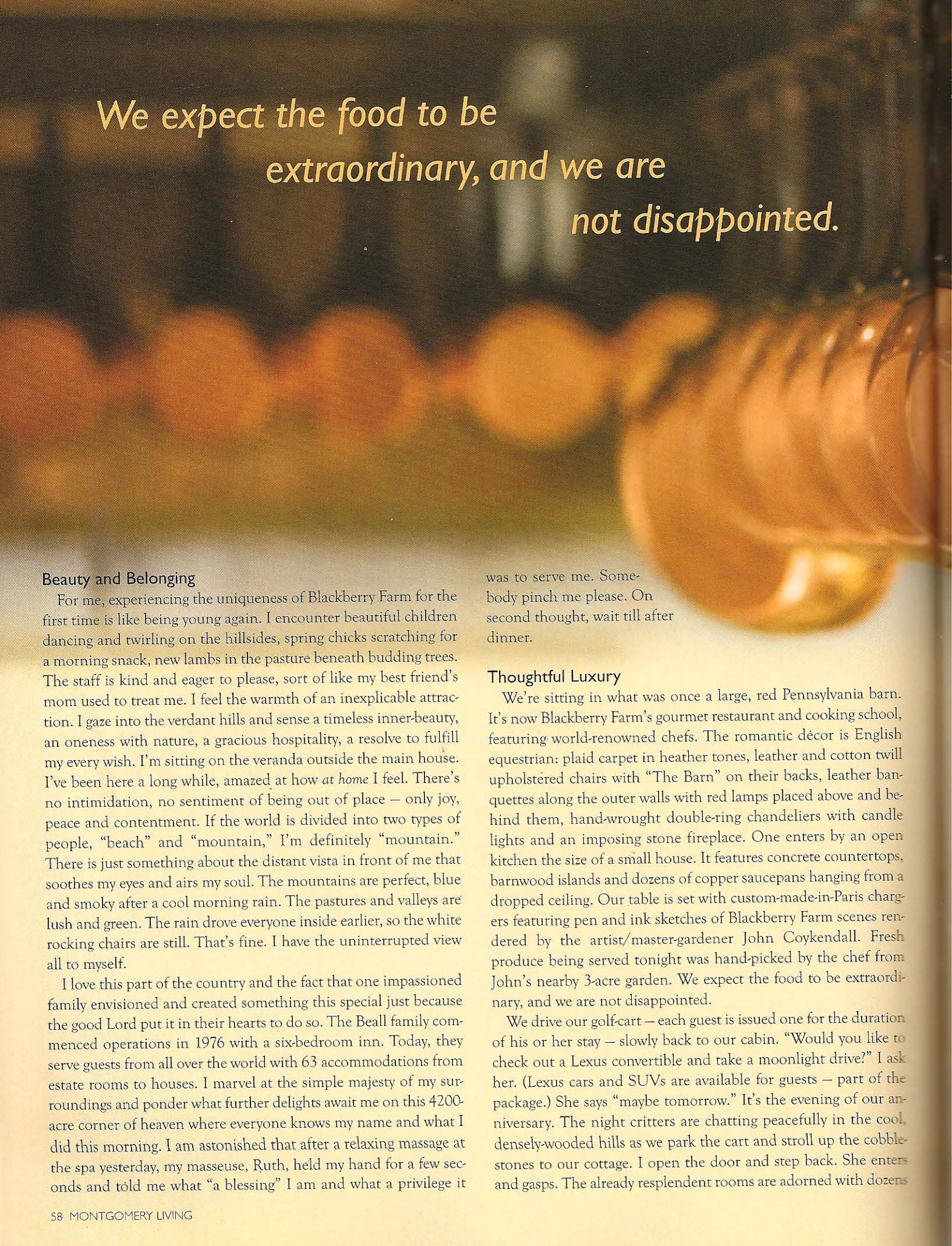
"How did you hear about this place?" she asks. I try to look embarrassed and reply that I got "one of those phone calls." She

points out that the directions say Blue *Mold* Resort. But I counter that I am sure the girl on the phone said Blue *Moon*. I opine that it's surely a typo and tell her that it's supposed to be *really* nice. She slumps in her seat, stares submissively out the window and says, "Well, if we have to sit through a two-hour timeshare presentation on our anniversary, we'll keep *that* to ourselves. We'll just tell everyone how nice it was." I'm feeling like a bum. Then, on our left, appears an eye-catching sign: BLACKBERRY FARM. She gazes in disbelief. Her face is suddenly flushed. Tears follow, and she screams "Blackberry Farm!"

I smile and say, "Now, honey, the Blue Moon is a little farther down the road. But, heck, here's Blackberry Farm. You wanna go here instead?"



Blackberry Farm's secluded cottages seem to grow organically from the surrounding trees.



*We expect the food to be  
extraordinary, and we are  
not disappointed.*

### Beauty and Belonging

For me, experiencing the uniqueness of Blackberry Farm for the first time is like being young again. I encounter beautiful children dancing and twirling on the hillsides, spring chicks scratching for a morning snack, new lambs in the pasture beneath budding trees. The staff is kind and eager to please, sort of like my best friend's mom used to treat me. I feel the warmth of an inexplicable attraction. I gaze into the verdant hills and sense a timeless inner-beauty, an oneness with nature, a gracious hospitality, a resolve to fulfill my every wish. I'm sitting on the veranda outside the main house. I've been here a long while, amazed at how *at home* I feel. There's no intimidation, no sentiment of being out of place — only joy, peace and contentment. If the world is divided into two types of people, "beach" and "mountain," I'm definitely "mountain." There is just something about the distant vista in front of me that soothes my eyes and airs my soul. The mountains are perfect, blue and smoky after a cool morning rain. The pastures and valleys are lush and green. The rain drove everyone inside earlier, so the white rocking chairs are still. That's fine. I have the uninterrupted view all to myself.

I love this part of the country and the fact that one impassioned family envisioned and created something this special just because the good Lord put it in their hearts to do so. The Beall family commenced operations in 1976 with a six-bedroom inn. Today, they serve guests from all over the world with 63 accommodations from estate rooms to houses. I marvel at the simple majesty of my surroundings and ponder what further delights await me on this 4200-acre corner of heaven where everyone knows my name and what I did this morning. I am astonished that after a relaxing massage at the spa yesterday, my masseuse, Ruth, held my hand for a few seconds and told me what "a blessing" I am and what a privilege it

was to serve me. Somebody pinch me please. On second thought, wait till after dinner.

### Thoughtful Luxury

We're sitting in what was once a large, red Pennsylvania barn. It's now Blackberry Farm's gourmet restaurant and cooking school, featuring world-renowned chefs. The romantic décor is English equestrian: plaid carpet in heather tones, leather and cotton twill upholstered chairs with "The Barn" on their backs, leather banquettes along the outer walls with red lamps placed above and behind them, hand-wrought double-ring chandeliers with candle lights and an imposing stone fireplace. One enters by an open kitchen the size of a small house. It features concrete countertops, barnwood islands and dozens of copper saucepans hanging from a dropped ceiling. Our table is set with custom-made-in-Paris chargers featuring pen and ink sketches of Blackberry Farm scenes rendered by the artist/master-gardener John Coykendall. Fresh produce being served tonight was hand-picked by the chef from John's nearby 3-acre garden. We expect the food to be extraordinary, and we are not disappointed.

We drive our golf-cart — each guest is issued one for the duration of his or her stay — slowly back to our cabin. "Would you like to check out a Lexus convertible and take a moonlight drive?" I ask her. (Lexus cars and SUVs are available for guests — part of the package.) She says "maybe tomorrow." It's the evening of our anniversary. The night critters are chatting peacefully in the cool, densely-wooded hills as we park the cart and stroll up the cobblestones to our cottage. I open the door and step back. She enters and gasps. The already resplendent rooms are adorned with dozens



of flickering votive candles. The bed is covered with rose petals as is most every other surface. She looks at me as if I had anything to do with it. (I didn't.) But I'm not feeling like a bum anymore. The staff is making me look like a genius. I wonder if our special hostess, Ann-Marie, who was in on the whole surprise from the beginning, is my co-conspirator. Wow! It's no wonder Blackberry Farm won the prestigious Relais & Chateaux 2009 Passion Trophy, presented to resort properties that "exhibit an exceptional personality, reflective of the extraordinary passion and creative vision of their owners."

The next day, we explore the hills, play some tennis, hang out by the pool, and stroll along the trout stream. We eat lunch on the veranda and dine late — another epicurean adventure at The Barn. It's our last night. A refulgent moon again lights our drive along the narrow trail to our cottage. We're turning down the comforter on our feather bed. What's this? Chocolate covered strawberries on a silver plate and a note:

"We hope you cherish the memories you've made at *The Blue Moon Resort* as much as we've enjoyed having you as our guests!"

—Your friends at Blackberry Farm.

My eyes moisten. Do we have to leave? Okay, you can pinch me now. **ML**

Explore Blackberry Farm's beauty online at [www.blackberryfarm.com](http://www.blackberryfarm.com).

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