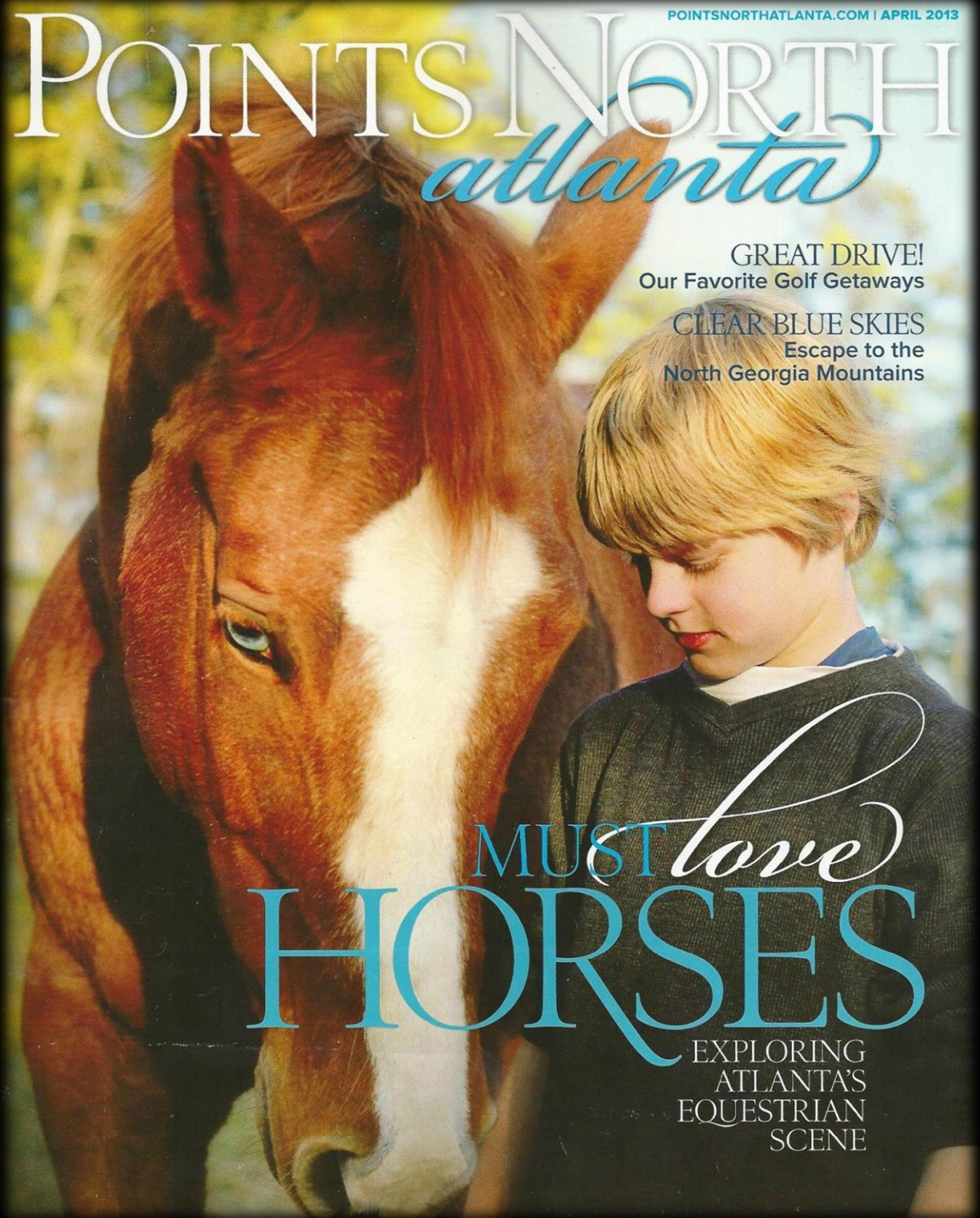


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POINTS NORTH *atlanta*

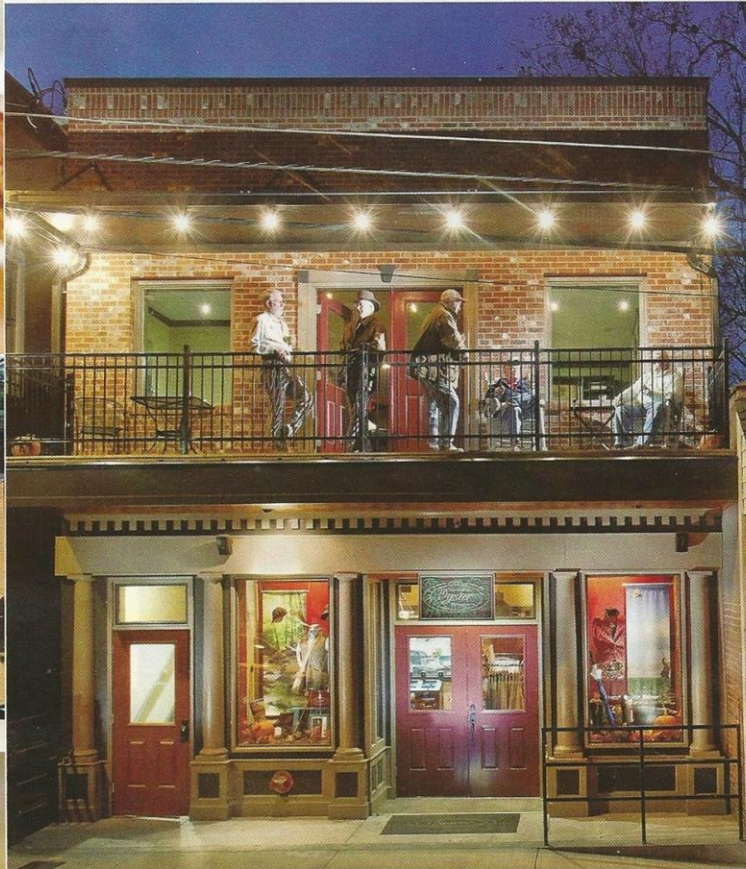
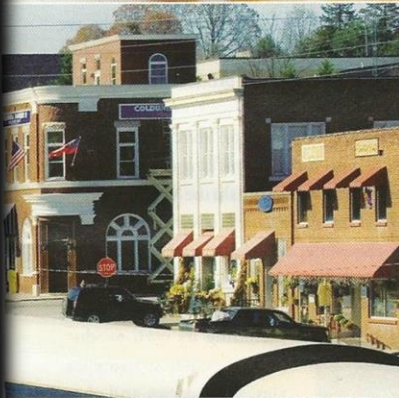
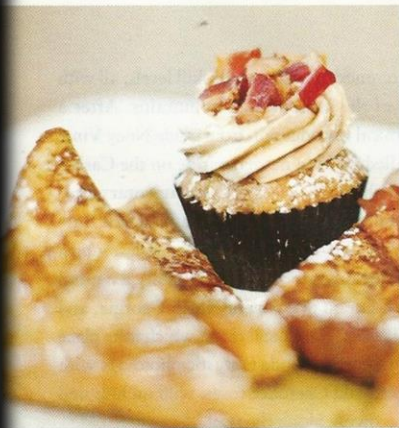
GREAT DRIVE!
Our Favorite Golf Getaways

CLEAR BLUE SKIES
Escape to the
North Georgia Mountains



MUST *love*
HORSES

EXPLORING
ATLANTA'S
EQUESTRIAN
SCENE

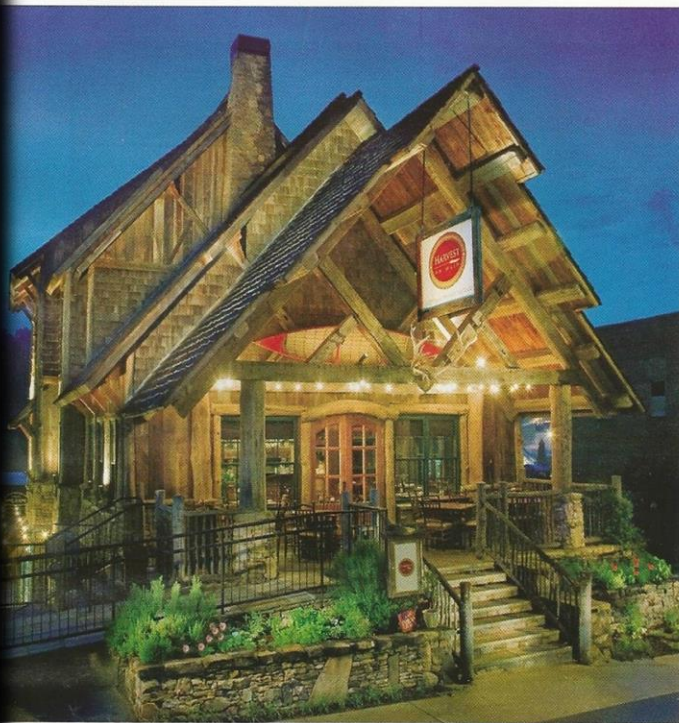


products from The Cooks Farm, the restaurant's own urban farm and learning center.

After a leisurely lunch of blackened salmon BLTs with house-smoked bacon and caper remoulade, we hit the streets for some serious shopping. By the end of the afternoon, we had plenty to show for our efforts — crocheted scarves from Posh on Main, specialty spice blends from Out of the Blue Gourmet, ceramic canisters from Wrapsoy in Blue and old-fashioned soaps from Huck's General Store. Gourmands will want to stash the shopping bags in the car to sample all the oil and vinegar pairings in Blue Ridge Olive Oil Company's cucina-style shop, while anglers should carve out plenty of time to explore Oyster Bamboo Fly Rods, where you can watch owner Bill Oyster handcraft and engrave his casting masterpieces or learn to make your own in one

CLOCKWISE: PHOTOS COURTESY OF THE SWEET SHOPPE; TOM HARPER PHOTOGRAPHY

Clockwise from top left:
Blue Ridge Olive Oil Company; French toast & bacon cupcakes at The Sweet Shoppe; Oyster Bamboo Fly Rod Shop and Cast & Blast Inn; hand-engraved reel seat for President Carter by Bill Oyster; Mercier Orchards; Blue Ridge Scenic Railway



Above: *Harvest on Main; right: Bill Oyster hand-crafting a bamboo fishing rod*

of his classes, which often book up months in advance.

Our need for retail therapy duly satisfied, it was time for a little more R&R, so we settled in for a few late afternoon flights of wine on the deck at Tastings of Blue Ridge

before dinner at Christy Lee's Courtyard Grille, where fire pits keep al fresco diners nice and toasty on cool evenings. We declined when our server offered dessert, opting instead to stroll across the courtyard to The Sweet Shoppe, which won season six of Food Network's "Cupcake Wars" with flavors like French toast & bacon.

Wide Open Spaces

The next morning, we ventured out early for a healthy dose of fresh mountain air on horseback. Just 9 miles northwest of town, Adventure Trail Rides of Cashes Valley offers leisurely trails as well as more advanced

terrain to accommodate riders of all skill levels, all with scenic views of the surrounding mountains. After a quick and comical introduction from guide Noey Vineyard, we saddled up for a moderate ride on the Cashes Trail. A writer himself, Vineyard's commentary provided additional entertainment as we traversed the trail. We learned about his special Fairy Cross rides, which double as treasure hunts for staurolite crystals, a natural phenomenon found in this part of North Georgia, and the "Picture-Perfect" botanical rides, which take place only in the spring and include fantastic photo ops with the azalea trees, wild Cherokee roses, wild orchids and lady slippers growing along the trail.

After leading our horses back to the stable, we slipped into the Trailside General Store to peruse shelves stocked with old-fashioned food products and country kitsch. It was the perfect precursor to our next great shopping experience — a visit to Mercier Orchards. Though fall is the time for apple-picking in the orchard, Mercier's store is a year-round shrine to the fruit — you'll find it fresh in all varieties, covered in caramel and dipped in chocolate, baked into pies, bottled into syrups, ciders and jellies, and that's just the tip of the iceberg. The store also peddles more fresh produce,

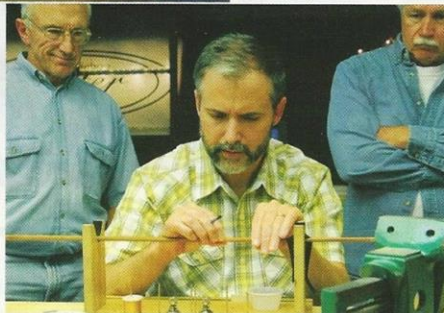
including its own production of peaches, strawberries, blueberries and cherries, every flavor of pie (and fried pie) you can possibly imagine, fudge, hand-dipped ice cream, gourmet goodies, country-chic home décor, old-fashioned toys, and plenty of trinkets. If you time it right, you can even pick your own strawberries

in Mercier's U-pick fields this season.

Now in its 70th year of harvest, Mercier is celebrating the past while plowing ahead into the future with its new designation as a farm winery. With the opening of a tasting room last May, the orchard is now able to serve and sell wine products, so we settled at the bar for a few samples. Currently available are peach and blackberry wine, with plans for more products in the works.

Cabin Comfort

With so much more to do in the area, it was hard to



PHOTOS COURTESY OF HARVEST ON MAIN; TOM HARPER PHOTOGRAPHY