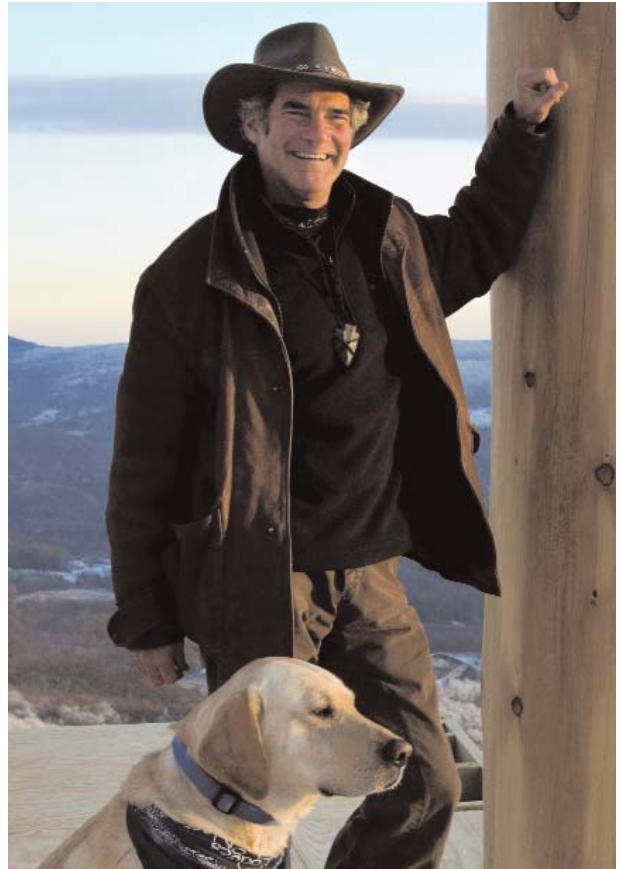






KNOCK ON WOOD: John Turchin (right) and pup, Bimini, have an eagle's eye view at the Lodges at Eagles Nest. Natural materials in the kitchen (opposite) and in architectural structures (above) reflect the surroundings.



living LODGE



At home on his mountain,
 John Turchin is on top of the world.

Written by *Lori K. Tate*

John Turchin is not your typical developer. You won't find him wearing a golf shirt and khakis. You won't find him negotiating a deal on the 18th hole. And you won't find him eating Sunday brunch at the local

country club. Wearing a Western shirt with Wrangler jeans, this fit 51-year-old plays by his own rules — and nowhere is that more apparent than on his mountain in Banner Elk.

"I don't put my dog on a



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RUSTIC RETREAT: Hardwood floors and trims complete the architectural signature for the mountain homes.

leash. I ride motorcycles. I have friends that show up in RVs. I shoot fireworks off. I don't wear a jacket to dinner with a tie," says Turchin, sitting in his rustic office as his yellow lab, Bimini, snoozes on his cow skin rug. "I have a good time."

A good time is what he hopes others will have at his latest creation, The Lodges at Eagles Nest. "I'm building a place to spend the rest of my life," says Turchin as he pulls sketches from his cluttered desk (the true sign of a creative person). "Everything

has to be functional and work, but it has to become fun — the architecture, the design, the concepts."

On more than 1,300 acres, Turchin has designed a giant playground atmosphere for adults, complete with a toy barn. The antithesis of a golf community (to start with, there's no golf course), this development is about enjoying life no matter what age you are.

PLANNING PARADISE

In 1999, Turchin expanded his modest purchase of 35



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TREE BELIEVER: Bark walls and expansive views create a treehouse-like experience.
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acres — and eventually bought the whole mountain. For a few years he wondered what he should do with it. He hiked it on a regular basis and now wears an arrowhead around his neck that he found on the property. “All types of things pop out of the mountain,” he says. “When I’m walking by, they seem to just come out of the earth. I just pick them up.”

He originally started with 250 acres and had thoughts about building two home sites on it, but that didn’t make much sense because

accessibility was difficult. Therefore, he bought the accessibility, which gave him direct highway access. “I built five miles of highway roads, and when I built the road to the top of the mountain, I got up there and thought, ‘I should buy all this land adjoining the mountain.’”

Of course, Turchin is not going to build every home on the mountain seeing as how there are approximately 250 sites starting at \$225,000, but he is setting a standard. He’s also putting a limit as to how big of home someone can

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“Everything has been taken into consideration — the views, the relationship to the houses next to it so nobody is on top of each other ...”
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build. The limit right now is 5,000 to 6,000 square feet, unless you can convince him you need more space. “Do you need it because you have a big family or just to build a 20,000-square-foot house for you and your wife because you can?” asks Turchin.

As we wind up our day together with lunch at Dunn’s

Deli, a local spot where everyone knows everyone else, he can’t stop talking about his plans for the mountain.

“We’re raising the level of our little town without exploiting it,” Turchin says.

“What I’m doing is opening my world up to other people and showing them how to have fun.” □



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ALL INCLUSIVE: Turchin's shopping emporium and gourmet restaurant ensure residents and guests have all they need.

base CAMP

John Turchin is into the turnkey concept for his clients, so he created a lifestyle shopping center for them on Banner Elk's Tynecastle Highway. Five years ago he bought the 33,000-square-foot building and opened an antiques store. He named it The Great Train Robbery after a 1960s South Beach head shop.

The center features an emporium filled with antiques, jewelry, vintage clothing, and more, plus a design center offering services to the residents of Eagles Nest. "If a customer doesn't like what we've done in a home, they just come in here and switch it," he says.

The Great Train Robbery also houses

Turchin's office and his newly approved Mountain Sotheby's International Real Estate franchise, which is big news for Banner Elk and North Carolina, in general. "The mountains are ready for a level of sophistication of services that hasn't been done here before," explains Turchin.

With sophistication comes good cuisine, and Turchin hasn't overlooked that with his restaurant, The Blackboard.

A daily-changing menu features items like crab cakes eggs benedict with orange tarragon hollandaise and grilled trout almandine with vegetable risotto. — *L.K.T.*

CHECK IT OUT



The Great Train Robbery
 2120 Tynecastle Highway • Banner Elk
 (828) 898-8645
www.thegreattrainrobbery.com

The Blackboard
 2120 Tynecastle Highway • Banner Elk
 (828) 898-2321
www.theblackboardbe.com



Blame it on the Morphine

Whenever Turchin's friends would visit (keep in mind that he's best friends with Donald Pliner, the luxury shoe guru, and has celebrities like Usher stay at his house in Miami), they would say, "Where do I get a place like this?" That planted the seed for The Lodges at Eagles Nest concept. That and a mountain that was for sale.

Being an adventure seeker, Turchin bought a four-wheeler for his son, Jordan, the day after he bought his mountain home in 1999. The next day, he broke three legs — his femur, his ankle, and his wife's leg.

"I'm sitting on the porch high on morphine, and I'm staring at this mountain and the Realtor comes along and says, 'You want to buy that mountain? You've got to close next week. Pay all cash and close next week,'" recalls Turchin. "High on morphine I said, 'Sure, I'll buy that mountain.'" — *L.K.T.*



PHOTOGRAPHY BY BRIAN GOMSAK

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BIG-BOY TOYS: Turchin's alternative to country-club living includes plenty of ways for adults to have fun.

Playtime

As we drive up to The Great Camp, Turchin has a proud look on his face like he's showing me his first newborn. "This really is what this mountain is all about. It's not about homes. It's not about unique houses with waterfalls," he explains. "This is what it's really about, the children."

The first thing you see when you enter The Great Camp section of the mountain is a ball field because Turchin, father of two, wanted everyone's first impression to be of kids playing and having fun.

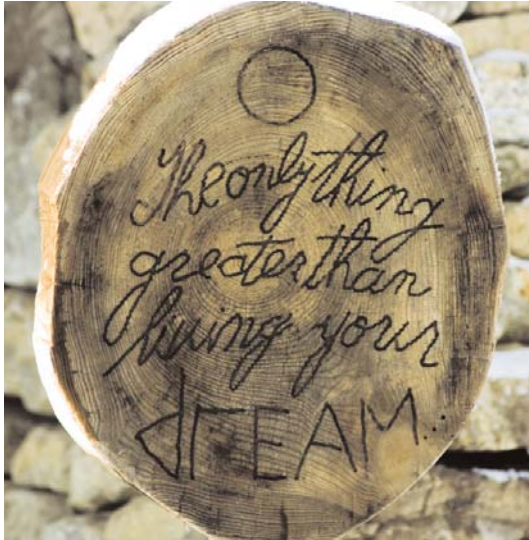
The Great Camp is essentially the nucleus of the fun system. This is

where the **barbecue pavilion, beach volleyball court, archery range, climbing tower, nine-hole disc golf course, sledding area, and the famous toy barn are located.**

The barn is also filled with **bicycles, Frisbees, kites, ski equipment, motocross bikes, a Ping-Pong table, and more.** Kawasaki Mules and John Deere Gators are also available for riding on the mountain. The rule is that people can borrow anything they want free of charge as long as they bring it back in the same condition.

"I'm a big kid here. I can do anything I want. I can be totally creative," says Turchin. "I have an unlimited palette to create anything and everything."
 — L.K.T.





PHOTOGRAPHY BY BRIAN GONSAK



Country club outcast

A third-generation developer from Miami, John Turchin's ties to Western North Carolina go back to the 1970s when his family built a vacation home in Seven Devils. When he graduated high school, he moved to the mountains to become an artist. "I became a starving artist quickly. Anyway, it was my passion," he says with a grin that lasts throughout our day together. After spending a few years in the mountains, he returned to Florida to get an education in construction management so he could pursue the family business.

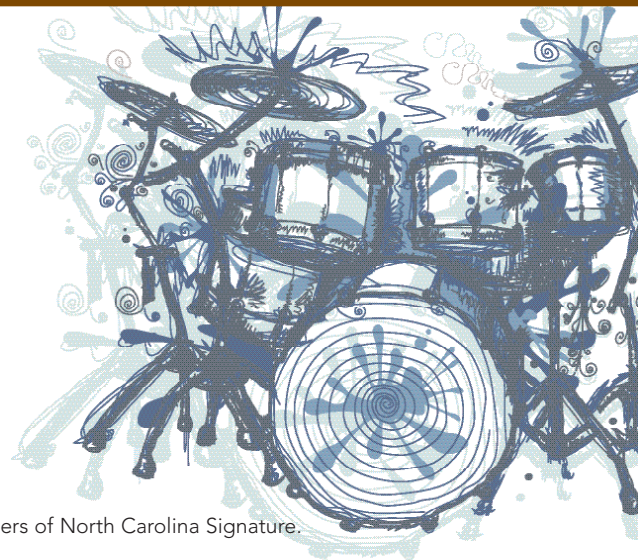
"I still had the passion for these mountains," says Turchin. "We still had a house up here so we'd come up every summer and visit." Eventually, he and his wife, Susan, who he met in junior high, decided to build their own place in the mountains.

"I didn't fit in with the country club community," he explains, citing that his wife was chased off a golf course for rollerblading. "Your alternative in living up here is to live in a country club community based around a golf course community, which is basically a retirement community built for my parents' generation, wonderful for that generation ... but it wasn't for me." — L.K.T.

Calling artists & musicians

Beside the ball field is The Heart Rock Amphitheatre, similar to Colorado's Red Rocks Park and Amphitheatre (think U2's legendary concert in 1983). The amphitheatre features logs and stone while the mountain landscape serves as the backdrop. Turchin hopes to lure musicians here while they tour the Southeast.

Next to the amphitheatre is the library, which closely resembles a bungalow tree house. A wooden sign that reads, "**The only thing greater than living your dream is sharing it,**" greets guests. Turchin carved out his mantra himself. "We try to surround ourselves with art," he says pointing out the carved sculptures surrounding the library. "I see this place turning into a complete evolution of artists living here." — L.K.T.





A Glass Act

Ryan Blythe was studying industrial design at the Rochester Institute of Technology in New York when he saw some glassmakers working. "I decided that's what I wanted to do," says Blythe, who has since worked with such glass masters as Dale Chihuly, Lino Tagliapietra, and Dino Rosin.

A job for a client in Fort Lauderdale led the glass artist to John Turchin. "After seeing his work I said, 'I'll build you a studio and I'll build you a house."

Come spend the rest of your life on our mountain," recalls Turchin.

Now Blythe Glass Studio is located behind the equestrian center at The Lodges at Eagles Nest, and Blythe lives on the property.

Much of Blythe's work takes inspiration from nature, like the chandelier he designed for The Blackboard, Turchin's restaurant. **The 1,000-pound piece features acorns and brilliant gold- and apricot-colored leaves.** He is also focused

on commission work, including a piece he created for Gil Dezer, one of Donald Trump's partners. His pieces range in price from \$500 to a million dollars.

Blythe works about seven days a week starting at 6 a.m. "I have to fire up the holes so that they're warm. When the team [he has four assistants] comes in around seven, everything is ready to go," says Blythe. "You can't make glass of any scale or caliber by yourself. You've got to have a good team to work with."

www.blytheglassstudio.com

— L.K.T.



to **the way** **BUILD**

Incorporating post and beam construction with hints of mission and Adirondack styles, the homes that have already been built at Eagles Nest blend naturally into the environment. Any rock used in construction is taken from the mountain, including the rock used in the stacked-stone wall at the entrance, which has become the development's dominant architectural feature.

Turchin bought raw steel to create the roofing for the homes. "They don't sell [tin roofing] raw, and I wanted it to look like old tin roofs, so I bought raw steel, had it all bent for me, and let it rust," says Turchin. "Our whole architectural design concept is to make this place feel like it's in a national park and that it's been here 100 years. ... I'm trying to do the right thing and develop responsibly."

"We cut every driveway in and established every unique home site on the mountain — not how many lots we could create," says the self-admitted perfectionist. "Everything has been taken into consideration — the views, the relationship to the houses next to it so nobody is on top of each other

"I do most of the design work with artists and then I hand it to architects and engineers," says Turchin. "This isn't one person's dream. This is a collaboration of minds to create this."

— L.K.T.