MISSISSIPPI
Pearl

Two families joined forces to
build a rustic, but supremely
comfortable cabin they could share

INTERIOR DESIGN BY *Lisa Palmer*
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Opening page: A way to revel in Mississippi's serene beauty is from a hammock, here fitted with Moroccan blankets from SummerHouse, a pillow form Dransfield & Ross covered with Sunbrella fabric and another by Rebecca Atwood. Opposite: River Oak Cabin is sited on a bluff along the Pearl River. This page: In the downstairs media room, the Lagos bench by Noir sits below the Arabesque mirror from Bobo Intriguing Objects.

Above: The double-height, wood-clad main living space features a leather Chesterfield sofa from Lee Industries, a pair of chairs upholstered with a Schumacher wool fabric, and a zinc and metal coffee table from Restoration Hardware. Right: In the outdoor dining area, custom seating cubes slipcovered in a Peter Fasano pattern surround a concrete and teak Restoration Hardware table.
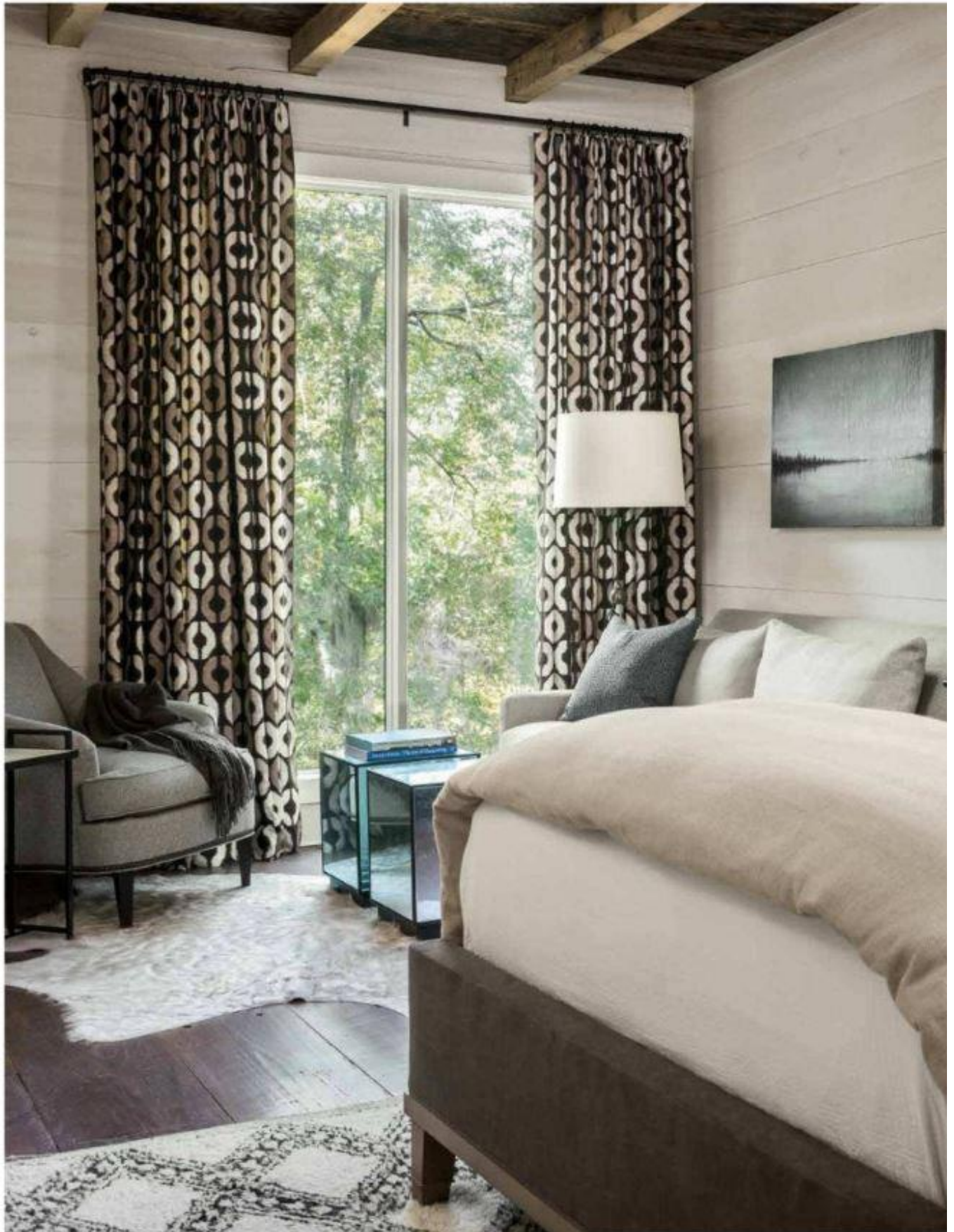
In one of the two master suites, designer Lisa Palmer diluted Benjamin Moore Sea Pearl paint to allow the natural grain of the wood to come through. The Barrett bed from Vanguard Furniture with a Romo fabric and armchair from Hickory Chair anchor the room. Drapes in a linen by Dedar. Bedding is from Legacy Linens.

DEEP IN THE WOODS of Mississippi, just south of the capital of Jackson, down a dirt road, over a cattle gap, and across a wooden bridge, is a plot of forested land atop a bluff along the Pearl River. Once, it was the site of a wooden "shotgun" house under an ancient oak, and before that to Native Americans who worked and hunted on the land, leaving reminders of their presence in the form of carved arrowheads that can still be found buried in the ground. Today, the remote, serene escape is a second home to two Jackson-based law partners and their families, complete with a spectacular three-story cabin aptly named River Oak.

It is here that interior designer Lisa Palmer executed a design plan in a way that only a person reared in the Magnolia State could, creating interiors that pay homage to Mississippi's unique topography and character. "For everything from the stains to the materials to the wood to the stone, I kept thinking about the moss that hangs on the trees all around the property," says Palmer, whose company, SummerHouse, has offices/showrooms in the towns of Ridgeland and Oxford. "So I kept it 'dirty' and distressed, with natural colors, because I really wanted the home to blend into the scenery from both inside and out."

The property was purchased on sight back in 2000 and originally served as a small hunting retreat with just a camper parked next to a small pond (allegedly home to a friendly gator). But the dream was always to build a home for the two families to use and enjoy. In 2013, that finally happened, and Palmer was along for the entire ride, from pinpointing the exact orientation of the house to capitalize on river views to making the decision to focus on natural, local materials.

"There's very little Sheetrock in the house," says Palmer. "It's all indigenous woods, and we worked hard to determine the specific species, the stains, the sizes of the boards and how it was all going to be run." Even wood from that old shotgun under the oak tree, left in its naturally distressed condition, was used on the walls and ceilings of the entryways of both master suites. "That was really fun," she adds.

The second of the cabin's three floors functions as the hub of all activity. Repurposed cyprus-clad walls, dirty pine ceilings, and a stone fireplace that stretches through all three floors bring the outside in, but not as much as the large glass windows, which remain free of drapes or shades—it is the middle of nowhere, after all. "I wanted it seamless," says Palmer. "When you are in the home looking outside, you see all of the beautiful trees, the hanging moss, and the edge of the bluff with the river running through. I wanted it to be as natural as possible, to feel like you are in the trees."

That mindset also guided the selection of fabrics and materials throughout. "You've got guys coming in with boots covered in mud, and the kids are out there on their ATVs running through the trails," Palmer says. "So all the materials had to be super durable, but I wanted them cozy and comfortable, soft, natural fibers to work with the natural feeling of the home."

Downstairs, the ground floor serves as both a media room and hangout space for younger members of the family, with a bunk room and an equipment and gear storage space filled with hunting accoutrement and trophies (of the former live variety). On the third floor, two cozy master suites flank the eastern and western sides, and additional bunk rooms bring the total sleep number to twenty-two. The third floor acts as a mezzanine that overlooks the living room, allowing for double-height vaulted ceilings that make for the "wow" factor in the main living space. "We knew we wanted to take advantage of the incredible height of this house," says Palmer.

Because of the families' love of the outdoors, the outside of the home was as important as the inside. Multiple porches allow for both property-wide forest and river views, and an extensive outdoor living, eating, and kitchen area—complete with a full-sized rotisserie—leaves plenty of space for entertaining. "The owners love to cook, and I'm willing to bet they've had more than a few turkeys they've hunted on that rotisserie," says Palmer. Finally, out where the river bends, a dreamy hammock hangs between two solid trees. "Who wouldn't want to be on that hammock overlooking the river, with a glass of wine and the sunset, right?"

"The home has a lot of love," Palmer adds. "It was born out of a love of the property, for this state and its natural resources, but also out of a love for their families. They wanted it to be there for their kids." ∎

Lisa Palmer was involved in every phase of the project. Now that her work is done and the families have settled into the property, she can assess the finished structure. "The house has a modern feel, and yet the warmth of the wood gives it an interesting aesthetic," she says.

"That's the thing about Mississippi, everything we do here has a story behind it."
—Lisa Palmer