

MOUNTAIN MAGIC

Cathy Purple Cherry masterminds
her own family's idyllic escape
in Virginia's Blue Ridge

Seen from the rear, the
rustic home nestles on
57 rolling acres.

Text by JULIE SANDERS | Photography by DURSTON SAYLOR



The foyer (top, left and above) opens to both front and back; a vintage runner and hutch table conjure a casual, welcoming vibe. The cozy great room (top, right) takes advantage of panoramic, 195-degree views; Weather Shield windows let in the light.



Though she's resided in Annapolis for the last 43 years, architect Cathy Purple Cherry has had a lifelong love affair with the mountains. "My whole childhood was visiting Skyline Drive," she shares. "It's always been about the mountains for me."

When she decided to build a second home, there was no question about the location. For five years, she and her husband, retired yacht broker Mike Cherry, searched for the right property, eventually choosing a forested, 57-acre parcel in the Blue Ridge Mountains near Afton, Virginia.

She teamed with longtime collaborator Doug Croker of ILEX Construction on the project. The first order of business: siting the house on its hilltop perch. "It required some vision to picture what kind of views it could have," Purple Cherry recounts. "I wanted a 195-degree view from everyday rooms where we'd spend the most time." To make that panorama possible, she cleared eight acres and situated the house perpendicular to the south-facing hills, conceiving a glassy great room at one end. From there, she explains, "We can see the sun rise above the mountain range to the east, then it travels all the way around and we can see it set on the western side."

Architecture & Interior Design: Cathy Purple Cherry, AIA, LEED AP, principal, Purple Cherry Architecture & Interiors, Charlottesville, Virginia; Annapolis, Maryland; and New York, New York. Builder: Doug Croker, ILEX Construction, Inc., Charlottesville, Virginia. Landscape Architecture: Kevin Campion, PLA, ASLA, Campion Hruby Landscape Architects, Annapolis, Maryland. Landscape Installation: Planted Earth, Sykesville, Maryland.

Clockwise from this page:
The kitchen showcases
cabinetry by Barger's Custom
Cabinets; the countertops
and backsplash are quartz. A
Visual Comfort chandelier with
a branch motif hangs above a
whitewashed wood dining table
and chairs, all from Century.
Tufted Cisco Home ottomans
and slip-covered seating from
The MJT Company face the
blackened-steel fireplace.
In the handy back kitchen, floor-
to-ceiling shelves display an
extensive pottery collection.





Lined with built-ins, Purple Cherry's art studio centers on a vintage table from Schwung that doubles as a work surface. Baskets are from Memoire Design.



“I wanted an agricultural form that would look like it had been there a long time.” —CATHY PURPLE CHERRY



The exterior embraces an agrarian vernacular. “I’d say Cathy wanted to create a home that would honor the mountain environment in a humble and natural manner,” Croker says. A board-form concrete foundation supports vertical hemlock cladding, chosen for its resistance to wood-boring bees that infest the region. The Corten steel roof has already weathered to a rust hue that blends into the surroundings.

With Purple Cherry and her husband in their mid-60s and -70s respectively, the 6,000-square-foot abode’s layout was designed for aging in place. The main floor “is totally flush, with not a single step,” the architect points out. The foyer is a hyphen that opens to the outdoors via steel-framed glass entry doors accessing front and back. To one side, a three-car garage/workshop is topped by a two-bedroom, two-bath apartment. Complete with a kitchen, it’s intended to host the couple’s grown children and their families.

On the other side, a hallway leads past the primary suite, laundry, powder room and back kitchen to arrive at the great room, with its vaulted ceiling and reclaimed white oak beams. Living and dining areas and the front kitchen flow together, anchored by a fireplace. In the middle of it all sits a glass-walled art studio where Purple Cherry plans to paint when she has time—a second love “after architecture,” she says. The dramatic, 195-degree panorama unfolds beyond floor-to-ceiling windows and sliders that spill out to a covered porch and wrap-around deck.

In lieu of a second floor, a lower level was built into the natural slope of the land. There, another self-contained zone for visiting



Clockwise from opposite, top: With its hemlock siding and rusted Corten steel roof, the home feels “of the mountains,” Purple Cherry says. The lower-level family room, furnished with a sectional from The MJT Company and a Century coffee table, spills out to the backyard. Fulfilling her daughter’s request to paint the adjacent kitchen cabinets yellow, the architect opted for Sherwin-Williams’ Yellow Bird, keeping it sophisticated with countertops and a backsplash in marble-look quartz. Nearby, an RH wingback chair—one of two—sits beside a vintage table and chairs from Schwung.



The primary bedroom (below and right) exudes a bohemian vibe, with a custom velvet headboard fashioned by The MJT Company and a throw by Aloka Home made from Indian saris. A BainUltra soaking tub takes in the vista from the primary bath (above), which boasts an RH vanity with a steel base and a vintage, glass-fronted cabinet.



family members features two ensuite bedrooms, a gym and a rec room with a full kitchen. “Even when we’re all here, everyone can do their own thing,” says Purple Cherry.

This is where the animals come in. The couple’s daughter, who checks into the lower level, brings four cats and two ferrets on her visits, while their son (who is allergic to cats) and his wife lodge above the garage with three large dogs. Purple Cherry and her husband have five dogs of their own. “I’m not a fancy person,” avers the architect, who tiled the whole main level in wood-look porcelain and used poured, sealed concrete on the lower level for obvious reasons. “If something breaks, it’s not precious to me.”

Despite her avowal, the vibrant interiors of this mountain retreat feel carefully curated in what the architect calls bohemian

style. Bursts of bold color, pattern and texture abound in fabrics, throws and vintage rugs. The back kitchen is blue while the downstairs kitchen cabinets pop in a vivid marigold hue.

An eclectic array of furnishings was gleaned from various sources. “I had no time, so I didn’t work with my team,” Purple Cherry explains. “I didn’t buy for specific locations; it was fun seeing where everything ended up without knowing ahead of time that I was going to assemble it that way.” Comfortable seating is slip-covered and wood pieces from hutches to farmhouse tables add warmth. Lighting from Visual Comfort in a range of styles adds drama.

While the property remains mostly untamed, Campion Hruby Landscape Architects surrounded the residence with greenery

and planted a field of wildflowers that unfurls beyond a fenced expanse where the dogs run free.

Purple Cherry’s growing firm opened a Charlottesville office in 2018, and its busy founder completed her family retreat in 2023. With both office and home now functional, she hopes to spend more time in the Blue Ridge. For now, though, “The house is really a place to run away to,” she admits. “Because of the views and how it connects to its setting, it really feels like an escape.” ♦

SOURCES OF NOTE: Kitchen, Studio & Lower Level Cabinets: bargerscustomcabinets.com. Lighting: visualcomfort.com. Living Room Pedestal Table & Bedroom Bench: madegoods.com. Antique Work Table in Studio: collectedby.schwung.design. For a complete list of sources, see homeanddesign.com.