

WORTH THE TRIP

RED HORSE INN

BY CHARLES SOWELL | STAFF

FOR HER 21ST wedding anniversary Mary Wolters' husband Roger gave her a string of Wal-Mart pearls and a used bulldozer.

From that strange start, and a tremendous amount of sweat equity, came the Red Horse Inn – an upscale bed and breakfast style resort in the heart of the horse county near Gowansville.

The inn has made a lot of best lists – the Top 10 Romantic Destinations, Best Honeymoon or Anniversary Getaway, Top 25 Best Undiscovered Incredibly Romantic Inns – and Southern Living magazine.

"I had a guest hand me a business card at the end of her stay and ask me if I minded if she wrote us up in Southern Living," Wolters said. "Well, of course I said yes."

What makes the Red Horse Inn special is Wolters' eye for detail, a tremendous view, and a dedication to all things romantic.

Things like Wedgwood tiles facing the fireplaces and hand-made chairs in the great room of the six-room lodge.

In the lodge most of the furniture, and even the floors, are done in varying shades of blonde or white. "I wanted nothing to take attention away from the views," Wolters said.

In addition to the lodge the inn has six cottages clustered on a hill that also have stunning views of the mountain.

The attention to detail is what one would expect from two graduates of the School of Visual Arts in New York City. What is not expected is the

serendipitous, handyman run amuck aspect of the Wolters' story.

Wolters has come to be known in the Dark Corner area of Greenville County – and beyond – as Our Lady Of the Bulldozer.

Shortly after she and her husband graduated college they discovered just how hard it is to find work as an artist.

So they started putting their artistic talents to work refurbishing houses in the Westchester County area of New York state, a sort of learn as you go enterprise that supported the pair and their two sons.

Then came Black Monday, Oct. 19, 1987, when stock markets crashed worldwide and the booming real estate market in the New York area went with it.

"We sold the property we were living in and the one we had under construction and came to the Gowansville area," she said.

Her father, Dudley Stroup, was an Episcopal priest who had served at parishes in the area and Wolters remembered it fondly.

Roger found work in the area and Mary started developing a piece of property nearby for a bed and breakfast.

"It wasn't perfect, but it was what we could afford," she said.

Then came the great snowstorm of 1988 that devastated the area and set the Wolters' eyes wandering to a large tract of land owned by Bowater that was adjacent to their home.

This is where the serendipity sets in. Roger called a contact at Bowater for about a year, asking if the land adjacent to the Wolters' property was for sale. In



Greg Beckner/Staff

For her 21st wedding anniversary Mary Wolters' husband Roger gave her a string of Wal-Mart pearls and a used bulldozer. Wolters used the dozer to grade what would become the Red Horse Inn property.

the same week it came on the market, a woman made an offer to Mary for the property she was developing.

The bulldozer anniversary gift followed shortly thereafter.

Using three local workmen, and their two young sons, the couple built the cottages first, then the lodge using their own designs and the assist of a good architect.

"I really came to appreciate my sculpture professor who taught me how to build a box that would support an elephant," Wolters said.

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