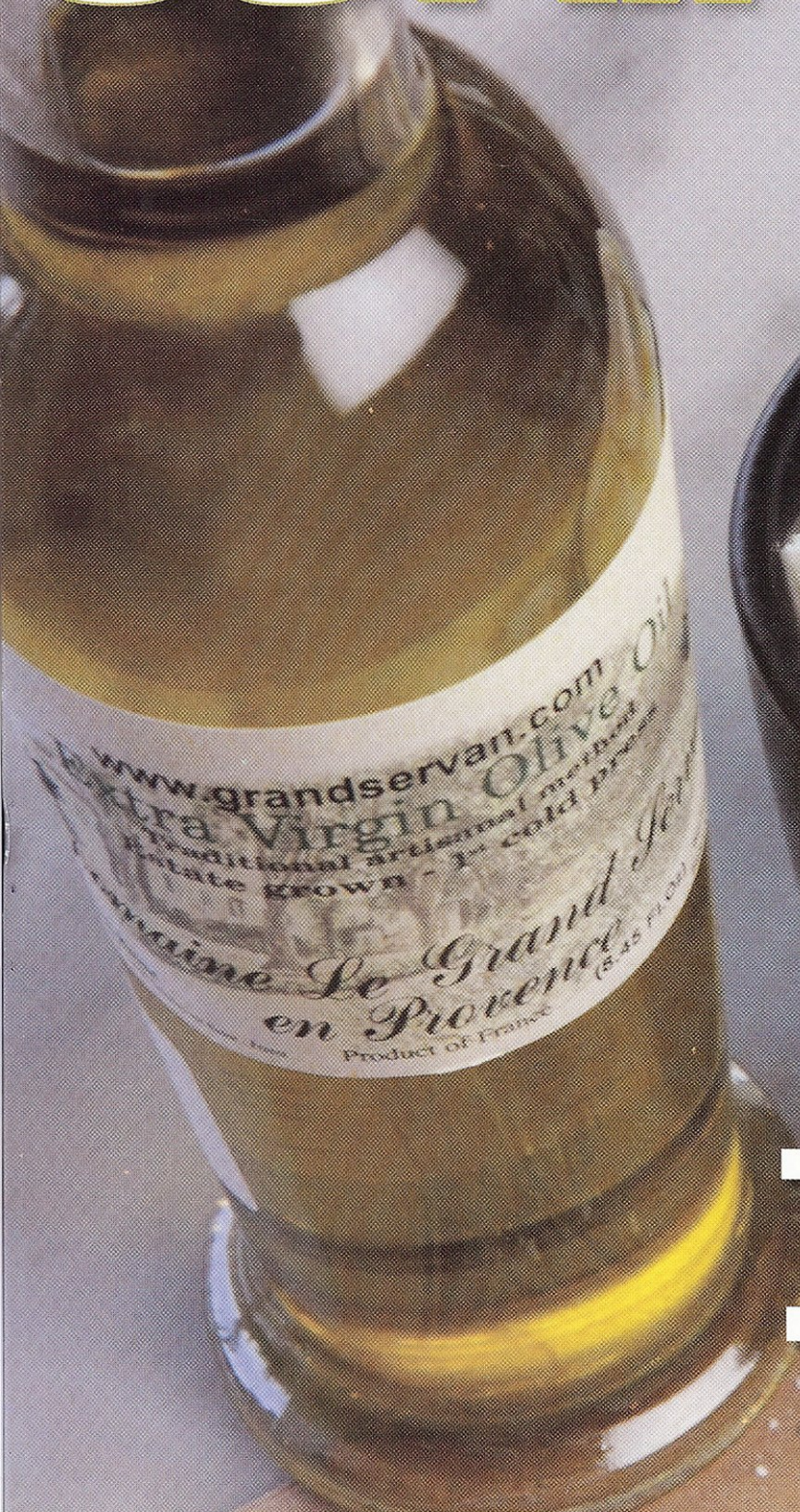


Adventure in the Bahamas (page 56)

US AIRWAYS

magazine



TOP 10 TASTES FOR 2008

(page 62)

The Best of Savory and Sweet

Ringo Starr Talks About
Then — and Now (page 86)





Poplar bark shingles from local trees dress the Inn at Ragged Gardens in Blowing Rock.



IT'S EASY BEING GREEN

"People already know this area for the natural greenery," says Robert W. Holton, chairman of Watauga County's Tourism Development Authority, "but now we're heading toward a new 'green' business environment as well."

In typical High Country fashion, that means a market-driven approach with community support. Holton has been a guiding force in crafting a green business plan that would use a certification process to help local businesses lessen their environmental impact while earning public recognition. "The Economic Development Commission is in the middle of developing this plan for the county, and we're going to encourage participation through the local chambers of commerce," he says.

Scoring would include such factors as use of alternative energy sources, waste reduction efforts, product life cycle impact, rainwater harvesting, sensible landscaping, and employee training. Benefits would include various levels of green certification for advertising and promotional purposes.

In addition, students at Appalachian State University voted overwhelmingly last spring to raise their own fees in order to help fund the installation of alternative energy sources at university buildings: solar power, wind power, and biodiesel. The university's technology department is a regional leader in research for user-friendly clean-energy systems.

Meanwhile, a new county high school under construction to replace the one existing — and technologically outdated — campus is going for Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design certification.

And local builders increasingly are relying on local, natural materials to help cut down on the effects of long-haul transportation and manufacturing: wood, stone, even low-tech but long-lasting poplar bark.

Home furnishings, too, are going green. Boone-based furniture maker Charleston Forge has introduced several high-end limited editions that integrate materials reclaimed from old buildings, like cedar from lake houses in Virginia and decorative metal grates from a veterans' hospital.

"We just let them be," says Charleston Forge owner Susan Barber of these components. "They're pretty natural." —NC

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