

C A R O L I N A

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A New Feature: Designer Digs

The poplar bark shingles cladding the exterior are another important element

THE AGELESS CHARM OF MOUNTAIN RUSTIC

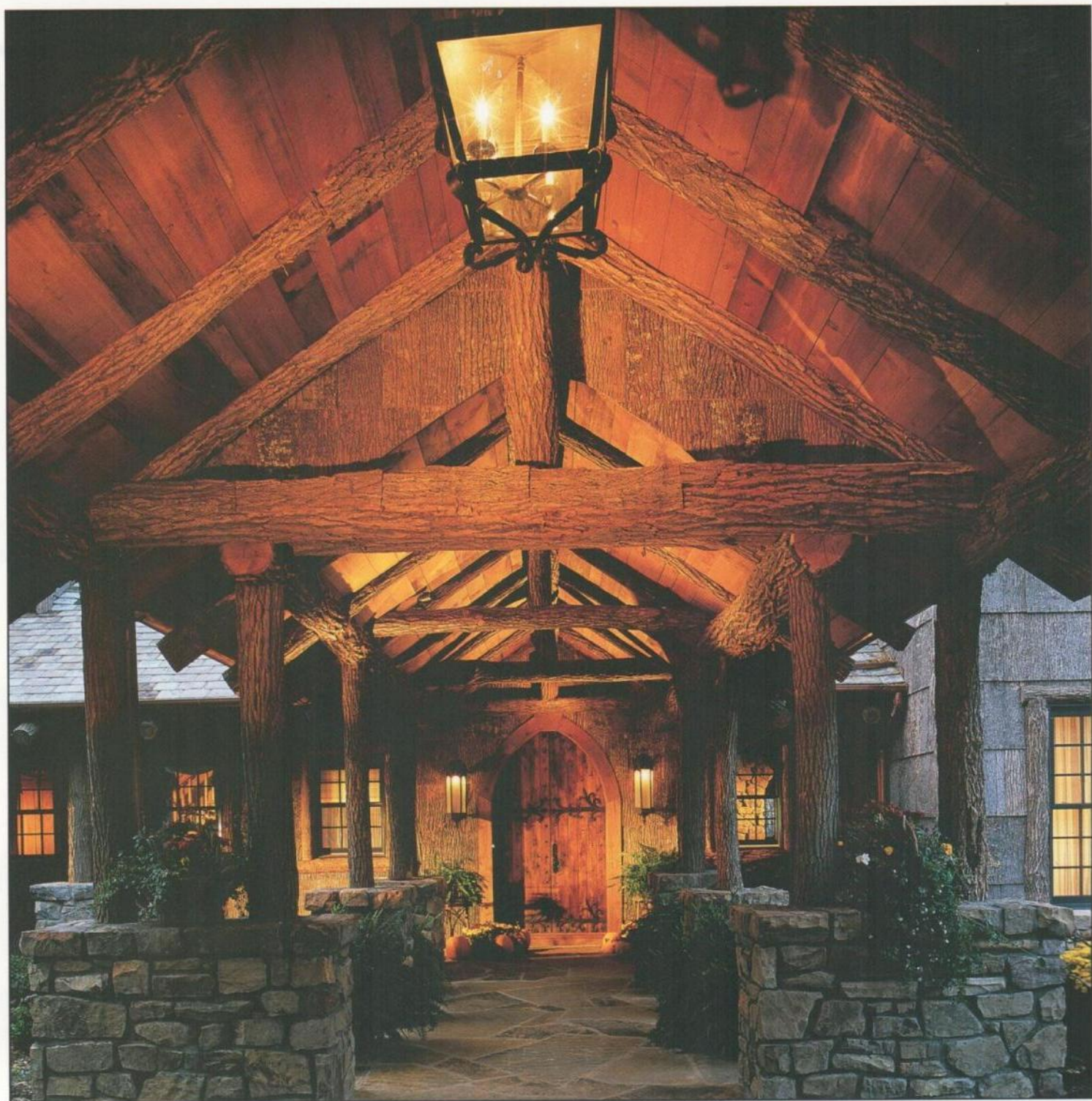
in establishing the rusticity the owners wanted. Bark siding is enjoying renewed popularity in mountain home construction, in keeping with the philosophy of famous architect Henry Bacon (designer of the Lincoln Memorial) to blend a house with its surroundings. Originally, chestnut trees were a major source for the tannin industry, their bark re-used for exterior siding on homes and resorts in the early 1900's. It was then that Bacon introduced the bark house concept to the North Carolina mountains.

His interest was to use indigenous, natural materials in his own variant of rustic styling, so when he noticed huge stacks of bark sitting around mills, he decided to use them for local application by squaring and sawing them into shingles.

Then in the late 30's and 40's blight hit chestnut trees, eliminating the bulk of that species. That, combined with WWII, followed by the post-war interest in modern architecture, and chemicals being introduced

to the tannin industry, spelled the end of bark siding for awhile, according to Marty McCurry, President of Highland Craftsmen. He is designer and producer of the new line of bark siding products used on Davant's house.

It was in 1992 that McCurry and wife Chris came across a house that was covered originally in poplar bark when it was built in the '30s. Poplar was abundant in the forests back then, and was used by the



Massive timbers, bark siding and stone were selected to articulate the “mountain rustic” styling the owners wanted in their new/old home.

decisions when she was ready to throw up her hands. “They contributed quite a bit by keeping their eyes open for pieces and ideas to incorporate.” She also challenged the designers and craftsmen to turn on their creative juices, so there was a synergistic bonus to the combined effort. “It became a project of Dianne Davant & Associates, plus

With a staff of 12 between her studio in North Carolina and the one in Florida, there’s a lot of talent from which to draw. Many are fully qualified designers in their own right, but some assist her on projects in order to cover the bases when she’s away. She and a former partner began the operation 26 years ago; the partnership

client, she acknowledges being one of the worst.

In contrast to her earlier Victorian-styled cottage filled with feminine style, Davant eschewed her past “girly” things in favor of her husband’s darker, more masculine things. “Mountain rustic” was the style of

furniture industry for structural wood and plywood. It's McCurry's theory that a frugal mountain man had sold his poplar timber and used the leftover bark for his house, which is still standing. That led the couple to believe that poplar might perform as well if not better than chestnut. An environmental lab affirmed his thinking, so the McCurrys took note of what was going on in the industry.

Bark peels in late Spring to mid-Summer,

and is skinned off the trees when the timber is pulled from the woods, or removed at the sawmill and discarded as mulch. So the McCurrys negotiated to acquire bark immediately upon the trees hitting the ground. They consider their company a green one by harvesting a highly usable product out of waste. Since the product has proven itself durable, no chemicals are needed to preserve it. Their process is to remove the bark when the tree is felled, wash off the dirt, and grade the bark for

surface texture and thickness to high standards. The bark is then properly kiln dried and sterilized under high heat to kill mold spore, dirt, fungi, and insect larvae to prevent transference to the home. Bark must be dried below yard and moisture conditions--8%-10% drier--which help prevent shrinkage.

As a contractor, designer, and manufacturer of the product, McCurry views it from all aspects so he can interface with a

