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# COLORADO

## HOMES & LIFESTYLES

MAGAZINE

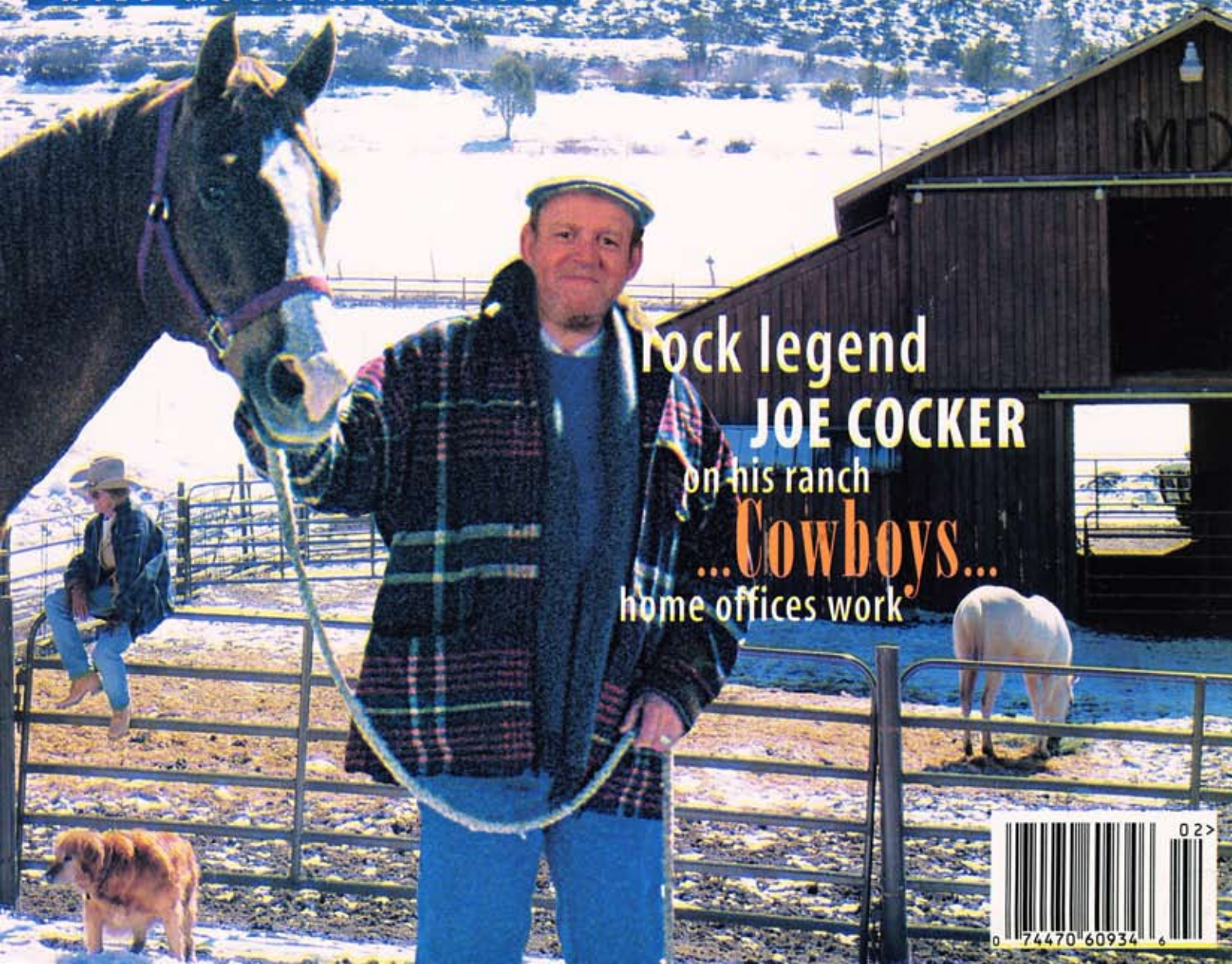
### Go Rustic!

WILD MOUNTAIN ISSUE

Rock legend  
**JOE COCKER**

on his ranch

...Cowboys...  
home offices work





Secluded atop a  
southwestern Colorado  
mesa, a new mountain  
home showcases a  
lifetime of treasured  
collectibles

# PRIMITIVE PLEASURES

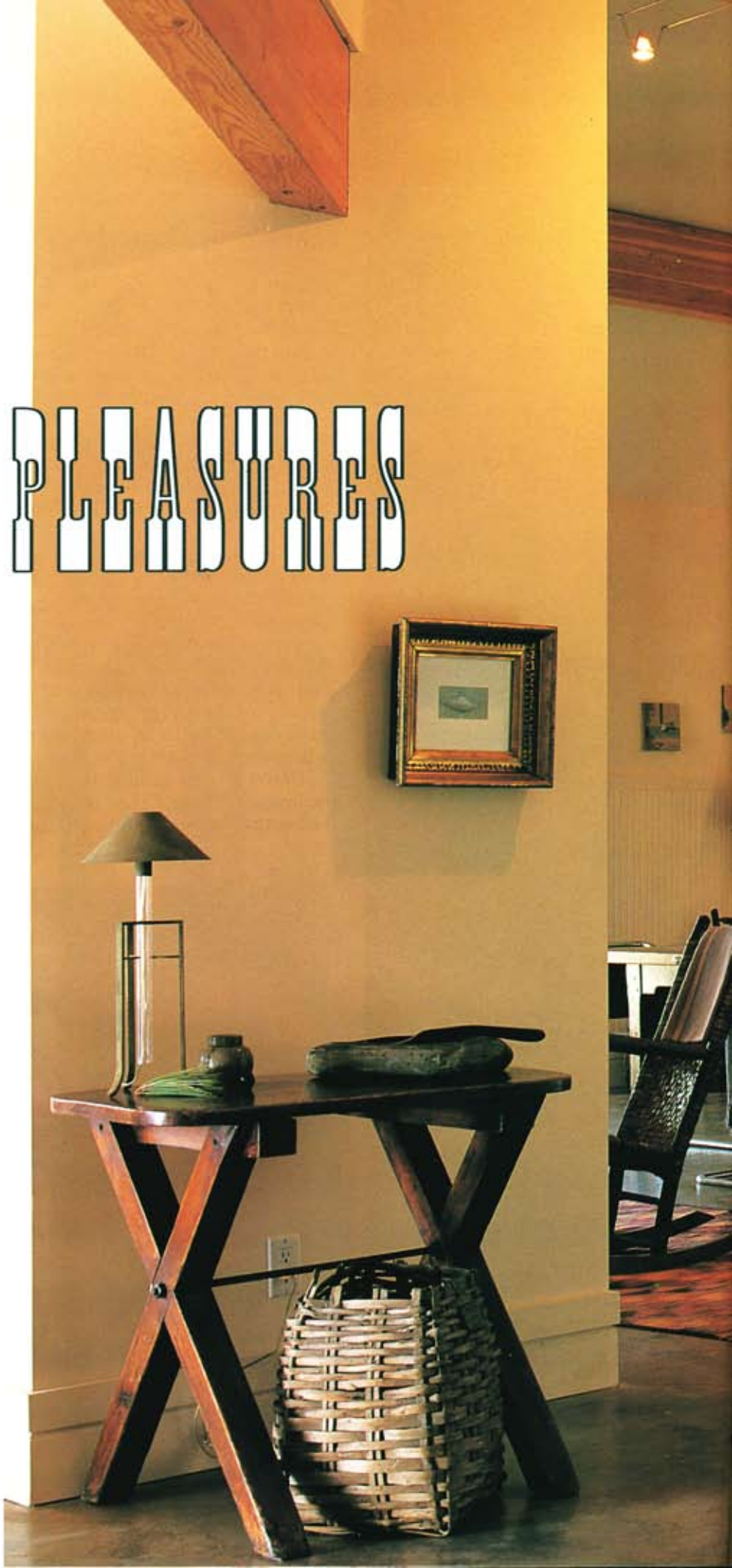
BY LORI TOBIAS  
PHOTOGRAPHY BY J. CURTIS

*LIFE AT THE TOP OF A 9,300-FOOT MESA* calls for a certain amount of mettle. One must expect a sense of isolation; compromise is a given—no quick jaunts to the supermarket—and, when it comes to work, there is always a task at hand.

That's the way interior designer Michael Dunsdon and partner David Borkenhagen, a semi-retired contractor, like it—peaceful, quiet, basic.

Says Michael, a partner in Aspen's ID Interiors and a lifelong Coloradan, "Sure, it's isolated, but you're not that far [from civilization]. At the bottom of the hill is Placerville, where the postmaster has a jar of candy and you go in and chat a little bit. You go to the general store, pick up the daily paper...they always have a joke for you; they always have time for you."

It is the Colorado lifestyle that Michael remembers from her childhood near Aspen, where she helped her grandmother in the garden, caring for the vegetables and flowers she sold to the Hotel Jerome. Back then, Michael recalls, Aspen's population totaled 500 and the streets were of dirt. This, too, is the lifestyle Michael and David hoped to partly recapture at the top of Specie Mesa.







Pine doors at the house's main entrance open to the informal dining room. A circular iron chandelier, crafted by Montrose artisan Jerry Love, is topped with ivory-hued candles that cast a soft glow over the space in the evening and illuminate a contemporary landscape by Santa Fe artist Robert Sprague. See *Resources*, p. 117.







SET AMIDST PONDEROSA PINE AND aspen on 100 acres, the sprawling 3,500-square-foot ranch house commands views of the San Juan Mountains to the south, the La Salles (in Utah) to the west and, to the north, the pinnacle of Specie Mesa that overlooks the Colorado Plateau.

The couple worked with Aspen architectural designer David Panico to design a house that would not be obvious from the road and that would blend with the surrounding environment. A one-story plan fit the first requirement, ship-lapped cedar the second. The metal roof was a practical consideration, chosen for easy snow removal and fire protection.

"We didn't want it to stick out like a sore thumb," explains Michael. "We wanted it to nestle in...to look like it had been here a long time."

There was never any question as to how they would furnish the house. Twenty-three years of collecting primitive antiques, Native American pottery, baskets, kachinas and, as Michael says, "whatever else strikes our fancy," gave the couple enough to fill not only the main house, but the 800-square-foot guest and 1,200-square-foot caretaker's houses as well.

Polished concrete floors throughout require little maintenance, while neutral colors allow the environment to dictate the ever-changing color scheme. During the summer months, the living room's cream-colored walls take on the green tones of the aspens; in autumn, they reflect the golden hues.

Two white, canvas-covered sofas and chairs upholstered in a herringbone tweed fabric lend a contemporary feel to a room otherwise furnished in primitives, baskets and a replica of a nautical-inspired telescope that is aimed at Mt. Wilson.

A German armoire holds the stereo system and wine rack, while tables and benches of varying heights and sizes display Michael's considerable collection of baskets collected on the couple's numerous trips to Santa Fe, NM, and Flagstaff and Sedona, AZ, in David's Piper Turbo Arrow aircraft.

"Baskets—that's my fetish," says Michael. "I am a container person. Most of them are antiques, there are some Zuni and some Navajo. I've never seen a pot or basket I could pass up."



*Opposite: Above the living room's sandstone slab fireplace, a bewitching wooden weathervane crafted by David points east. "I was probably the inspiration for that," jokes Michael. This page, top: In the dining room, antique hickory rocking chairs purchased by Michael at Avalanche Ranch Antiques in Carbondale are open invitations to cozy up to a roaring fire. Bottom: Jackets for bundling up gather on trout-, oak leaf- and lizard-shaped coat hooks in the mud room, where golden retriever Lucky enthusiastically greets David. A wood-framed mirror reflects a collection of fly rods once used by Michael's father.*







*Opposite: Hanging copper pots and pans and dried flowers and herbs add splashes of color to the predominantly white kitchen. In the pantry, serving trays and dishes take their place in an antique English plate rack. This page: Three-year-old Lucky learns patience and obedience as he waits to be rewarded with a treat from Michael.*



A COLORADO SANDSTONE FIREPLACE separates the living from the dining area and serves as the focal point in both rooms. Old crocks, iron tools and snowshoes create an Old West still life at the sandstone front in the living room. In the dining room, hickory rocking chairs rest on Turkish kilim rugs purchased from traders who visit Michael's Aspen shop.

Knoll leather and chrome chairs provide seating at an 18th-century French dining table purchased 18 years ago in Aspen. Says Michael, "I always wanted to do antique chairs, but I thought they might take away from the wonderful feeling of the table, so I settled on modern ones so they wouldn't fight. I like that clean look straight across." Pearly onion skins in a primitive bowl reflect the glimmer of candles set in a wrought iron candelabra above the table.

A gallery that links the central living area with the kitchen, master suite and guest house displays an assortment of kachinas and a set of three folding benches, the tops marked in one-inch increments. Michael discovered two of the benches in an antique shop near Carbondale, and she found the third seven years later at a different antique store. Although Michael has been unable to verify the benches' original use, she believes they may have belonged to a traveling salesman or game-maker.

Old shutters, easily inches too small for the windows, reveal Michael's eye for the unexpected. Laughs Michael, "My partner Kristin (Jensen) always said I couldn't measure...they just sort of sit there on the sill and break up the space."

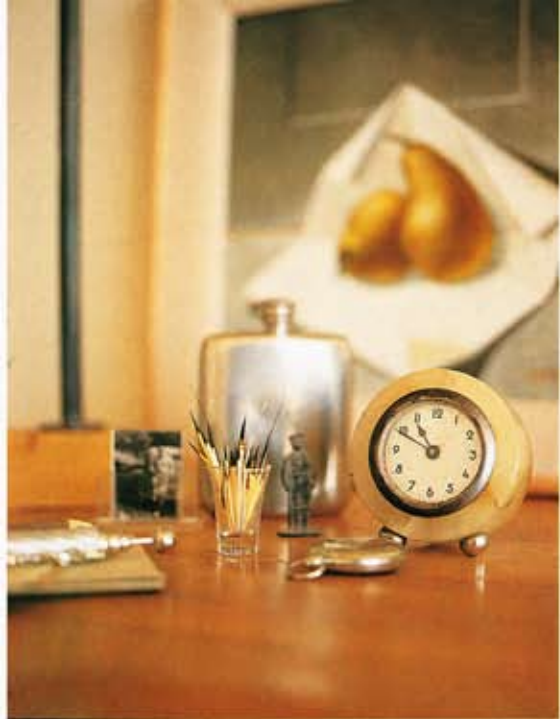
When designing the kitchen, David

sought to create an island within the main living area so that the cook would not feel trapped in a corner. Although neither Michael nor David spends a great deal of time in the kitchen, "It had to be fairly large, because nobody is going to just run into town for dinner," says Michael.

A central island holds a stainless steel range and warming drawers. The cabinets of white bead board and countertops of butcher block add warmth. Copper pots and pans hang above the sink, while in the pantry, an antique English plate rack holds serving trays and dishes.

When not outside chopping wood, cross-country skiing or walking Lucky, the couple's golden retriever, the two relax in the den, where floor-to-ceiling shelves hold David's decoy collection, toy airplanes, pottery and other aged miscellany.





A ONCE WHITE SILK LOVE SEAT HAS been recovered in a color Michaela describes as golden retriever "to match Lucky so he can lie on the love seat." Navajo weavings in red and brown serve as area rugs and pillow covers.

Since the guest house provides space for visitors, Michaela and David included only one bedroom—the master suite—in the main house. Furnished in Scandinavian pine, the master suite is separated from the rest of the house by old pocket doors that David converted to work like sliding barn doors. A collection of aged window frames, discovered by David on the side of a barn in nearby Norwood, hangs on the wall above the bed; a turn-of-the-century chest holds extra blankets and linens at the foot.

In the master bath, the tub, set in handmade white tiles, looks out over a stand of ponderosa pine and distant Mt. Wilson; an old pine sideboard serves as the bathroom vanity.

The guest and caretaker buildings continue the rustic theme. Barn doors separate cozy living areas from the bedrooms, wood stoves take the chill from the mountain air and baskets, pottery and primitives add an Old West touch of comfort.

Though hundreds of miles and more than four decades away, the Aspen where Michaela spent her childhood is not so different from life at the top of Specie Mesa.

"It is tremendously like where I grew up," she says. "You just walk out your front door and go...cross-country ski, walk, snowshoe. And the people in the small towns of south-west Colorado—Norwood, Montrose, Delta—are so nice and friendly. They'll go out of their way to do things for you...that's what I remember Colorado being like." ♦

*This page, from top to bottom: A bedside desk in the master suite showcases a thimbleful of porcupine quills collected by Michaela, a lead toy soldier from David's childhood and an engraved silver flask from Michaela's father. Topped by a trio of mirrored cabinets, an antique pine sideboard works as a vanity in the master bath. Sunlight filters through oversized windows into the master bath's tub, which affords a view of Mt. Wilson. Opposite: Michaela and David's penchant for collecting is highlighted in the airy master bedroom. Ivory-colored walls are the backdrop for a collection of antique window panes, while a group of colorful old lightning rods sits behind a cushy chaise longue.*





