



MATT BARTON



SAVED from “RUIN”

saved from “ruin”

**Painstaking renovation of an abandoned
distillery yields upscale lodging
in the heart of horse and bourbon country**

By Terri Darr McLean

Longtime horse farm manager Ron Wallace and his wife, Elise, a family counselor, were looking to buy their own little piece of the Bluegrass when an eight-acre spot along Glenn’s Creek in Woodford County caught their eye. Even with the obvious signs of neglect, the property four miles outside Versailles seemed to hint at something special.

And just across a 1940s-era concrete bridge and into a clearing there was, indeed, something special: a bourbon distillery from the 1800s ... lying in ruin.

“It was a mess,” said Ron, “but it looked like it had potential.”

That was in 2010, and six years later a piece of Kentucky history has risen from the rubble — and, it seems, reached the potential the Wallaces had imagined. They not only restored the distillery’s massive stone walls and built a home there, but also opened a bed and breakfast on the property so they could share it with others. Quite aptly, they call it The Ruin.

A place to call home

The Wallaces had moved 18 times during their marriage, primarily as Ron advanced his career managing and designing some of the Bluegrass region’s prized Thoroughbred farms. The Kentucky transplants even moved to Ron’s native Colorado to run a guest ranch but returned soon after.

Eventually, the couple decided to put down permanent roots in their adopted home. “Our goal was to find a property or small farm to make ours, to own, and to never move again,” Ron said. They centered their search on Woodford County outside of Lexington.

“Most of my client farms have been in Woodford County, and we felt very much at home here,” he said.

The rundown property off McCracken Pike piqued the Wallaces’ interest from the start. They saw potential in the old distillery, as well as the value of land in the heart of Central Kentucky Thoroughbred country. Ashford Stud, now home to Triple Crown winner American Pharoah, sits right across the road.





MATT BARTON PHOTOS

Clockwise from top: When the Wallaces acquired the property, only the massive limestone walls were still standing. One of their first projects was to repoint and reinforce the walls, which are a signature feature of the bed & breakfast. They constructed a breezeway that connects the main structure to the guest house and planted a perennial garden. A 1940s bridge over Glenn's Creek leads to The Ruin.

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Still, Ron and Elise knew a massive transformation was necessary — along with a lot of patience.

“Although we each felt it had enormous potential, it took a little soul-searching to convince ourselves that we could make a home here,” Ron said.

“In fact, I was starting to have my doubts while I was traveling overseas with a client and almost canceled the deal,” he added. “Elise received an architectural rendering of a possibility for the restoration, and she became totally excited and convinced me that we could make it happen.”

The project centered on the remains of what had once been the Glenn Springs Distillery. Because the structure had been neglected for years, only the massive stone walls were still standing.

“The interior caved in even more by the time we closed on the property,” Ron said.

The first order of business, however, was to build a guest house for the Wallaces to live in while the restoration was in progress and later for family and guests to use. It was completed seven months later; the restoration project took three more “hard, work-filled years.”

“I’m sure some people think we’re crazy, and I can appreciate that,” Ron said. “It was a risky proposition,



A 1970 photo of the abandoned distillery evidenced the potential of the property's future use.

and the first few years were a struggle. But fortunately it has worked out and surpassed our expectations.”

Uncovering the ‘good’ underneath the ‘rotten’

Key to the restoration project was the Wallaces’ desire to pay homage to the past, not only by repointing and reinforcing the stone walls (a year-and-a-half-long project) but also by repurposing materials from the distillery and other reclamation projects, including a dismantled log cabin from the late 1700s that once stood on another Woodford County farm.

The Wallaces are quick to credit Phil Gerrow of Midway Preservation in Midway and Tom Wilmes of Wilmes Architects in Lexington for having the vision to bring it to fruition.

“We didn’t really purchase the property with a set or grand vision,” Ron said. “The whole development ... evolved through a lot of hard work, and luckily, we had a great architect who understood what we were after and a gifted and skilled contractor.”

Inside the stone walls, which were deemed strong enough to bear the roof load, Gerrow and his crew framed a new structure and “then put a 1780s log house inside of it.”

“I hate to give away a lot of my secrets ... but what we did is we took that log cabin, and we sliced it into five slices,” Gerrow said.

The outer “slices,” he explained, became the hand-hewn logs that make up the striking interior walls. The inside slices became the floors. Even the ends of the logs were incorporated throughout.

“I try to keep as much of the authenticity as I can,” said Gerrow. “I uncover the good wood that’s underneath the rotten stuff.”

Additional materials used in the interior of the main structure were some of the distillery’s original beams and racks that held whiskey bar-



Ron and Elise Wallace initially had misgivings about renovating The Ruin.

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The two guestrooms pay homage to famous Thoroughbreds, including Royal Delta. Ron Wallace was the general manager of the former Chanteclair Farm, where Royal Delta was foaled and raised.



MATT BARTON PHOTOS

rels, discarded fence boards from area farms, siding from old tobacco barns, beams from a railroad warehouse, and flooring from a tobacco warehouse in Louisville. Even the front door is made from the scaffolding Gerrow used during construction.

Once the project had been completed, the Wallaces had a two-bedroom main house with a kitchen and dining space, a huge living room, a loft used as a den, a sunroom, and the “biggest bathroom in Woodford County” — all artfully surrounded by the distillery’s restored limestone walls.

“It’s not just carpentry or woodworking. It’s not just reclaimed lumber. It’s artistic expression with unique materials,” Gerrow said of the craftsmanship.

They connected the main structure to the guest house

by a breezeway flanked by a perennial garden designed to add both color and texture. John Michler of Michler’s Florist, Greenhouse and Garden Design in Lexington brought his expertise to that part of the project.

An idea snowballs

Once most of the work was complete and the Wallaces were able to move into the main house, they began to think about uses for the guest house — a two-bedroom structure with a living space, kitchenette, and veranda that likewise feature reclaimed materials, mostly “all the crappy wood from the distillery,” Ron said.

At first, they figured their children — daughter Alaina and son Tristan — and their families could stay there when they visited. And they thought it would be great for clients of Equine Farm Management, Ron’s company.

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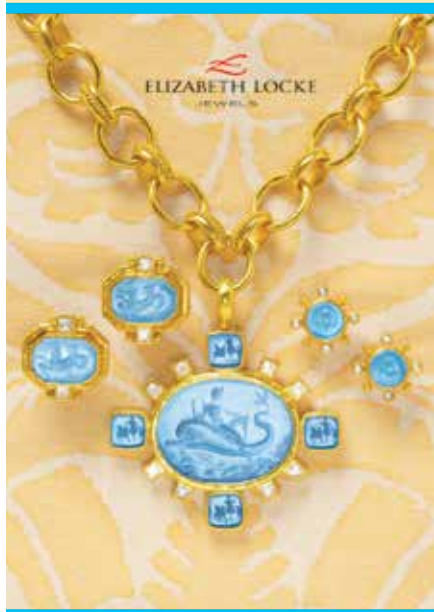
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The Wallaces repurposed materials from the distillery and other reclamation projects, including a dismantled log cabin from the late 1700s that once stood on another Woodford County farm.

Although Elise acknowledges she'd always wanted to run a bed-and-breakfast inn, the idea to use the guest house for that purpose didn't come until a bit later. When it did, it snowballed.

"I think after we built it, we started getting the idea that we wanted to share it," she said. "We have what we feel is a gem of Kentucky history ... we don't want to just keep it for ourselves."

Turning the property into a B&B was also a long process, at least from a business angle. Before they could welcome their first guests, the couple had to notify neighbors, get the proper permits, win approval from government entities, and go through a health department inspection. They also sought certification from the Bed and Breakfast Association of Kentucky, which meant adhering to additional regulations.

Then, before The Ruin officially opened its doors, Ron and Elise took a year to practice. "We invited lots of couples — people we knew, a lot of friends. They just came and spent the night. We wanted their critique," Elise said.

Now into their second year, the Wallaces are "as busy as we want to be," Elise said. They are booked regularly during Keeneland's race meets and sales, and many of their guests are fresh off the popular Kentucky Bourbon Trail distilleries tour. One of the

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distilleries, Woodford Reserve, is only minutes away.

Playing off their surroundings, as well as their years-long involvement in the horse industry, the Wallaces decorated both the main house and guest house with memorabilia from one of their favorite Thoroughbreds, Royal Delta, a two-time champion mare and Breeders' Cup Distaff winner. Ron was the general manager of the former Chanteclair Farm, where Royal Delta was foaled and raised. One of the inn's bedrooms is named for her; the other for another favorite, champion sire Danehill.

Guests can enjoy a full or continental breakfast in the main house or have their morning meal in the guest house. Elise does all the cooking, featuring a “special sausage, egg, and cheese casserole” she calls The Ruin Casserole. Other specialties include broiled tomatoes, yogurt parfaits, eggs benedict, a vegetarian frittata, and quiche. In the evening guests are treated to warm cookies and cupcakes. Bourbon balls are frequently offered.

During their stay, guests can walk along a creekside trail or an abandoned railroad bed trail and in a wildflower meadow. If roasting marshmallows over a fire pit is appealing, there's that, too.

“We really just want a relaxed and peaceful feel here,” Elise said.

Guests seem to agree, at least the ones who've posted reviews on Trip Advisor, the popular hotel booking website.

“My wife and I were looking for a place to spend a relaxing weekend in horse country, and we ended up coming across The Ruin on this site,” read one review. “The reviews seemed way too good to be true, but we went ahead and booked it for this past weekend. We just returned, and I can confirm that the reviews are not only true but that they somehow understate the enchantment of this place.”

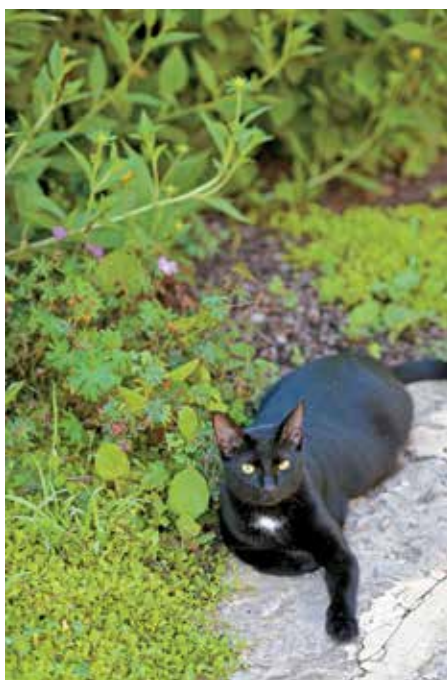
“The most interesting place we've

ONCE-PROMINENT DISTILLERY

The Glenn Springs Distillery, which lay in ruins when Ron and Elise Wallace purchased their eight-acre property in Woodford County, once had the mashing capacity of about 180 bushels a day. It produced both sweet-mash and sour-mash whiskey under the names Belle of Anderson and Arlington. It had one bonded warehouse with an 8,000-barrel capacity before it was closed and dismantled sometime prior to 1903.

Glenn Springs is thought to be the first distillery in America to employ Dr. James C. Crow. Crow, who studied both medicine and chemistry, immigrated to Kentucky from Scotland in 1823, where he used his knowledge to turn a haphazard procedure into a scientific process. His method was adopted by other distilleries, and it remains commonplace in bourbon distillation today.

(Referenced from *Bourbon in Kentucky: A History of Distilleries in Kentucky* by Chet Zoller and *Bourbon: A History of the American Spirit* by Dane Huckelbridge)



The resident cats welcome visitors to The Ruin.



stayed in a long time! What a delightful and relaxing experience,” read another.

The Ruin has also become the relaxing, peaceful home the Wallaces had always envisioned, and they joke that their children will have to physically remove them

from the property one day.

“That’s what I told my kids. I’m never moving. You can move my body,” Ron laughed.

“This is everything we love about Kentucky,” Elise said. **KM**



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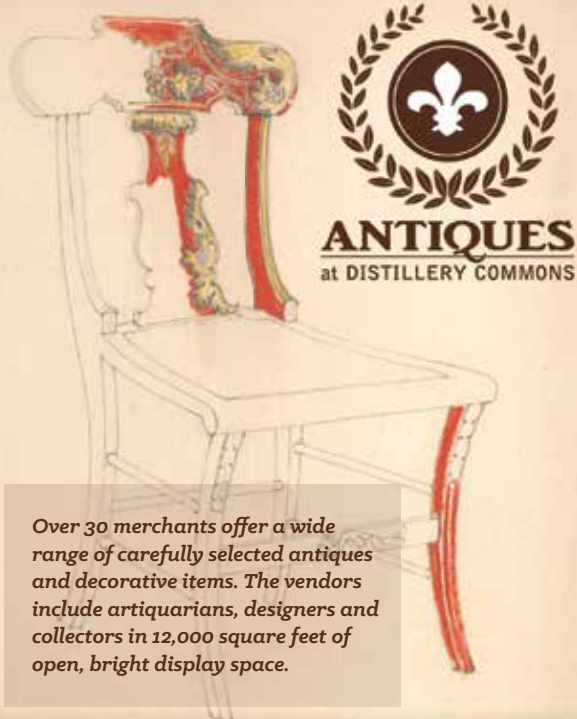
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