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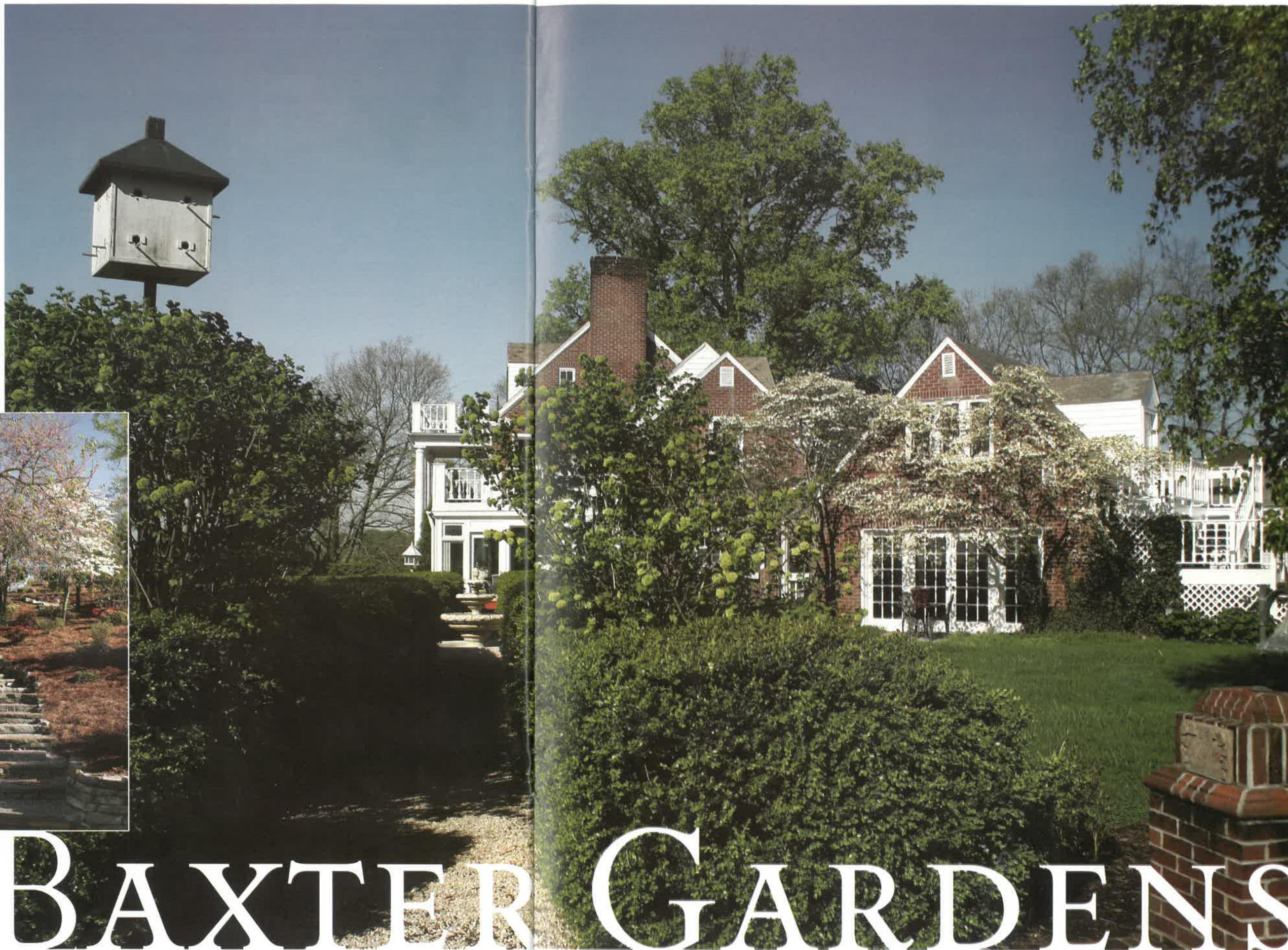
Bill &
Ginger
Baxter
TAKE US
ON A GARDEN
TOUR

ALSO INSIDE: THE HISTORY OF FOUNTAIN CITY. MODERN COLOR
TUSCANY IN OAK RIDGE. ST. MARY'S 75th ANNIVERSARY



FEATURED HOME

*Bill and Ginger Baxter
Have Cultivated
Gardens of Beauty and
Heritage at the North
Knoxville Hilltop
Paradise They Call
Home*



BY BARBARA ASTON-WASH
Photographs by Jean Philippe



The tulip poplar growing at the west corner of Ginger and Bill Baxter's Georgian Colonial home on Black Oak Ridge is said to be the highest point in Knoxville, beating out Sharps Ridge by a treetop. The house was built by F. E. Barkley in 1937 on one of a series of lots bought by officers of the C. M. McClung Company, of which Barkley was secretary. The Baxters' property includes 50 acres, 30 of which are used for the house, pool and planned gardens. The remaining acreage has been left in woodland.

From its summit, one can survey the city of Knoxville in the distance. Tall buildings are distinguishable, as well as the Sun Sphere. But far more majestic are the Smoky Mountain ranges, whose magnificent layering is quite distinct. On a clear day Mount LeConte easily may be seen, and the homes of



Fountain City are virtually hidden among the treetops, providing an almost pastoral scene below.

While in high school Bill Baxter, now one of three TVA Chairmen, worked as a yard boy on the property for Barkley's daughter, who was then owner of the house. Bill grew to love it - a love that has lasted more than three decades.

Bill and Ginger grew up in Fountain City. They met and dated while attending Central High School but after graduation went

their separate ways. A gymnast, Ginger attended Southern Illinois University. Bill attended Duke University for his undergraduate

degree and then returned to Knoxville to attend law school at UT.

In 1977, while a law student, he bought the Barkley property and lived in the house with some of his law school buddies until he and Ginger found each other again and became engaged. They were married on the lawn in front of the house 26 years ago.

White wooden fencing lines both sides of the drive as it winds past a daffodill-filled pasture, turning the hillside golden in spring's prelude to summer.



The house needed a lot of work at that time, Ginger says, and it has been a labor of love - a work in progress ever since. During their tenure, the grounds have been developed considerably. Over the past 20 years, Bill

and Ginger have traveled widely, visiting such places as Japan, England and Spain. They have also visited famous gardens in the United States such as the Biltmore Estate and the DuPont gardens in Delaware, which have inspired some of the features in their own gardens.

Small man-made ponds with bubbling fountains - two from among a dozen water features on the property - now flank the entrance, where there is an impressive arbor overhead. White wooden fencing lines both sides of the drive as it winds past the pasture that was filled with 50,000 daffodills in March, turning the hillside golden. The drive ends at the motor court at the rear of the two-story red brick and white shingle house.

There the family's four dogs laze in the springtime sunshine of the now-empty motor court that soon will be filled with an assortment of automobiles and activities as their college-age children arrive home, assured Ginger, who is looking forward to that onslaught of energetic voices. The Baxters have four children - Elizabeth, 24, is a Harvard graduate; Jennifer, 22, will graduate this May from Middle Tennessee State University; Joe, 21, and John, 19, both attend the University of Miami at Coral Gables.

Although the children have all left the Baxter "nest," Ginger is quite busy as chairwoman of Holston Gases, a role she assumed from Bill when he was appointed to the TVA Board by President George W. Bush. At present, Ginger juggles the responsibility of her role at Holston Gases with serving on the board of Habitat for Humanity and the Fountain City Art Center.

The entrance to the Baxter home from the motor court is



through a great hall that runs from the back to the front door. There, a fanlight transom above the door provides both light and design interest. The door opens onto the terrace that commands a mountain view. Brick steps lead down to a spacious and level front lawn that can accommodate weddings and large receptions. It was on that front green that George W. Bush, while campaigning for his father in 1992, shook the hands of 500 Knoxvilleans. An amazing number of handshakes, recalls Ginger, but good practice for his future campaigns. TV and film actor Fred Thompson, a former Tennessee senator, and Senate Majority Leader Bill Frist are among the politicians who have had receptions at the Baxters' home.

"Ours is a simple house that reflects what we are about," says Ginger of their 12-room, 5-bath house that is comfortable, livable, unpretentious and quite attractive. "Fussy" and "decorated" are not terms one would use to describe this house.

The walls are painted light beige and serve as the perfect background for several oil paintings, landscapes by artist Ron Williams, done while he lived in an apartment above the garage for seven years. Bookcases filled with many volumes line an entire wall in the living room, flanking a picture window. In front of the large traditional fireplace sit a pair of comfortable sofas in a subtle shade of olive, facing each other over a large square leather cocktail table. A pair of French armchairs, upholstered in textured leather, add additional seating to the conversation area defined by a handsome oriental rug. Five from a collection of nine bronzes of dancers given to Ginger by Bill are displayed in the living room. In graceful poses, the dancers are gowned in period cos-



tume. A prized grandfather clock, built by Bill's late father, Pat Baxter, proudly stands in one corner.

Off the living room is the "swing porch," so named because it has three old-fashioned swings suspended from the ceiling



by chains. It is a favorite place for the family to gather after dinner or even on a hot summer day, as a breeze always blows there, says Ginger. The porch is shaded from the afternoon sun by the lofty (high point) tulip poplar.

Hanging in the great hall is a framed photograph of a sunflower signed by both the photographer, Ambassador/Sen. Howard Baker, and his wife, Sen. Nancy Kassebaum Baker. "The sunflower was photographed on Nancy Baker's Kansas farm," says Ginger. "I voted for her when she first ran for the Senate from Kansas while I was coaching gymnastics in Wichita."

Oriental carpets in the hall and dining room add softness and muted color underfoot. The antiques in the dining room were purchased by the couple from Dominick's antique shop. There is a large Chippendale table and chairs, a Heppelwhite buffet and cor-



ner cabinets that house china from Bill's grandparents and great-aunt who lived in Texas. A springtime bouquet of bright flowers centers the table where family dinners are served. For Thanksgiving and Christmas, when as many as 50 to 60 family members and friends gather to celebrate, additional tables are added throughout the house.

Off the dining room is a glassed-in breakfast room that enjoys the same breathtaking mountain view as the terrace and looks to the gardens to its east. In the winter the sunny room does a bit of greenhouse service as well.

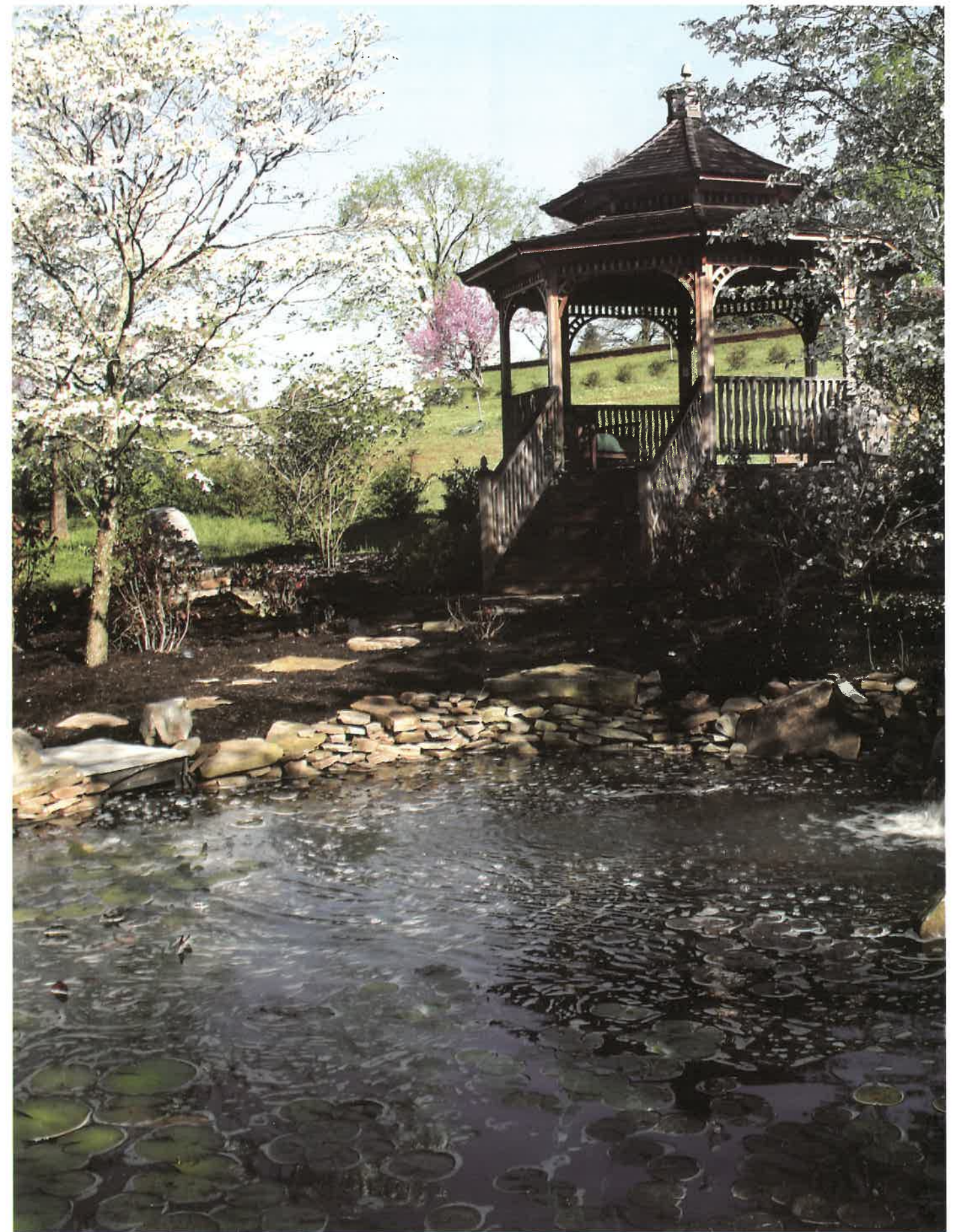
The kitchen and butler's pantry, adjacent to the dining and sunrooms, are large and airy. It is a room that Ginger loves. The white cabinetry is original to the house. With red countertops and walls papered in a white and red pattern, it is a cheerful space to prepare meals for the family.

Upstairs are six bedrooms and baths. Downstairs is the media room - a room special to Bill. It is filled with Duke University memorabilia, the alma mater that still has his allegiance.

An open breezeway connects the house with the exercise room and the pool house. Dressing rooms and a shower are on the second floor. French doors open onto a white gravel pathway that winds around the grounds past

pools, fountains and gardens. There is an herb garden and a kitchen garden near the motor court. A small magnolia tree, a 25th anniversary gift from the children, is planted nearby.

The original badminton court, popular with the Barkleys in the 1930s, was replaced with a large swimming pool where the Baxter





children and their friends spent a great deal of time during their growing-up years.

Popular with guests is the large, dense and intricate yew maze Bill designed for the lawn. It is entered through a pair of carved Chinese gates at the west side of the shaped lotus pool. The maze, fashioned of 750 yew bushes, is centered by a large fountain. Outwitting the maze is com-



plicated, and just

when friends have it figured out, Bill moves a bush or two to make it new and more fun.

The gravel path winds past a formal garden completely enclosed by a brick wall. There the tulips, nar-

cissus, candy tuft, snowballs, azaleas and dogwood all blossom in white, making it a cool place to linger while on a summer evening's twilight walk. Verde bell-shaped garden lights illuminate the pathways after dark.

Lattice arbors line the hilltop of the east driveway. White wisteria vines lace the lattice to create a beautiful and fragrant drive. Beyond is an ellipse where tents are placed when the Baxters entertain. There is also a fire ring where the children used to toast marshmallows and roast wieners, then camp out beside it.

Just below the balustrades that begin the dogwood garden, a man-made stream begins its trek down the hillside, past some 30

varieties of dogwoods that make up the garden, and on by the wild flowers and other perennials that adorn the hillside. The stream ends at the foot of the hill in front of the house and is pumped back to the top to begin its descent again. A



gazebo sits at the end of the stream, providing a welcome respite from the sun and a great place to sit at any time of day. Stone steps ascend from there to the front lawn.

Interested in preservation, the Baxters have purchased a 60-room historic hotel in Jackson Hole, Wyoming, and are renovating it. The active, sports-loving family enjoys vacation trips in the West, where they delight in mountain climbing. ☼



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