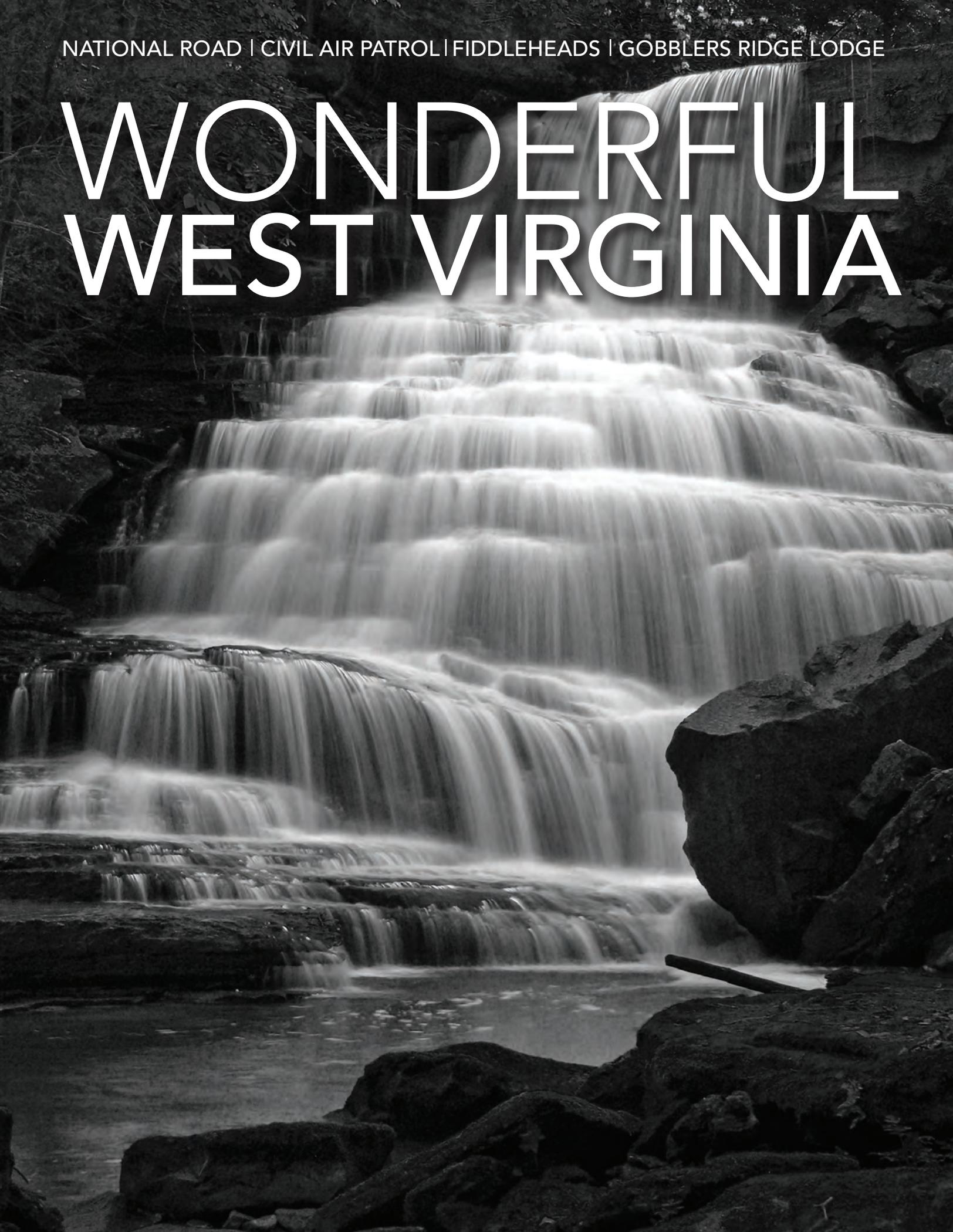


NATIONAL ROAD | CIVIL AIR PATROL | FIDDLEHEADS | GOBBLERS RIDGE LODGE

WONDERFUL WEST VIRGINIA



GOBBLERS RIDGE LODGE B&B

Labor of Love

By Colleen Anderson

The directions to Duane and Rachel Brown's Gilmer County bed-and-breakfast inn are not complicated, but Duane advised me to print them out in advance. "Your cell phone won't work, and your GPS may get confused," he cautioned.

Although it's only about 15 miles from I-79, Gobblers Ridge Lodge is beautifully secluded. The custom-built log house, tucked into a mountainside and surrounded by verdant forest, is far from city congestion—but close to neighbors like white-tailed deer, fox, wild turkey, coyote, and many species of songbirds. And, with more than 2,500 square feet of porches and decks, amply provided with comfortable seating, there could hardly be a more pleasant place to commune with nature.

The Browns offer to visitors a single private suite, ideal for a couple or a small family. The suite includes a bedroom and full bath, a fully equipped kitchen, and a cozy living room with a working woodstove. Just outside the bedroom door waits a private hot tub.

The innkeepers obviously appreciate the integrity of handcrafted furnishings. They have decorated their lodge with handmade rugs, quilts, and pottery. Original wildlife art graces the walls, and a colorful collection of antique bottles brightens the guest kitchen.

"Some of these things are family heirlooms, in a way, because they belonged to Duane's parents, who have passed on," Rachel says. "There's a little red wagon that was Duane's. I look at the shelf with the picnic basket and colorful spools of thread and it reminds me of Evelyn and Willard." Warm

wood paneling in the bedroom and an impressive, hand-built stone wall in the living room add to the suite's rustic charm.

In the morning, guests are invited upstairs to have breakfast at the family dining table in a room warmed by a hand-built stone fireplace and pine-paneled walls. Rachel is the cook, and she prepares all of the meals following the Pennsylvania Dutch tradition in which she was raised. "They make big, full breakfasts," she says. "I just try to make it the way I was taught. Breakfast is the most important meal of your day."

Served on specially commissioned dishes made by a local potter, a Gobblers Ridge breakfast always includes eggs or other hearty fare: it might be biscuits and gravy, pancakes, or French toast made with homemade bread. Then there are sweet choices—Rachel's homemade apple crisp, peach cobbler, and banana bread are popular. Finally, there is what Duane calls "everybody's favorite item"—farm-raised, fresh-smoked bacon, ham, or sausage from Snyder's Meats in Pitman, Pennsylvania. The Browns regularly travel "back home" to buy meats that have been hickory-smoked in Snyder's old-style smokehouse, and their guests consider them a memorable part of the Gobblers Ridge experience.

In addition to sumptuous breakfasts, guests at Gobblers Ridge Lodge can enjoy other seasonal treats from the innkeepers' garden: homegrown asparagus, berries, potatoes, tomatoes, and peppers. Duane has a particular interest in genetic dwarf fruit trees and grows several varieties of heirloom apples, as well as peaches and nectarines.

A new addition to the garden in 2012 was organic tea; guests may choose peppermint, orange mint, or chocolate mint tea. And Rachel and Duane have an even more



▲ The custom-crafted Gobblers Ridge Lodge features 2,500 square feet of porches and decks where guests can relax and enjoy nature. © Duane Brown

(Bottom right) Adjacent to the dining room is a cozy sitting area warmed by a hand-built stone fireplace. © Clayton Spangler

▼ A stone walkway leads guests into the garden. © Duane Brown



ambitious goal for the near future: they plan to serve their guests fresh-roasted coffee from their own coffee plantation in Colombia (see page 30).

Building a Dream House

Successful innkeepers are a special breed—they must be adventurous, organized, social, and energetic. Duane and Rachel Brown are all of these. As you may have guessed by now, they are also fascinating people with wide-ranging interests.

The two were middle-school sweethearts and married in 1984, when both were still teenagers. Their life together has included moving their household, including four children, a number of times, as Duane's work in law enforcement for the U.S. Department of Justice included stints in Pennsylvania, West Virginia, New Jersey, and Washington, D.C. In 2002, when he had an opportunity to transfer to West Virginia for the third time, they decided to put down roots and build their dream home.

After consulting with a log home company in North Carolina, they ordered a complete package. "Rachel designed most of the floor plan," Duane explains, "and the company architect produced blueprints for us." The Browns rented a mobile home eight miles from their property and hired a crew of experienced local builders to begin the project. After seven months, when the house was "under roof," the family took over. Rachel's parents, Mark and Betty Shreffler, came from Pennsylvania to help when they could. The Browns' four children—then aged 17, 15, 14, and 12—helped build the house too.

"They helped carry lumber, collect mountain stones for the fireplace, sweep floors, pick up trash, and cook meals on the grill, since it seemed like we were always hungry!" Duane says. "The boys nailed thousands of feet of Ponderosa pine on the walls and ceilings and worked on scaffolding 20 feet high."

It took three long years, but the Brown family persevered, opening their B&B in February of 2006. Kristin, Joshua, Natasha, and Justin even helped their parents choose the décor for each area of the home. "The lessons they learned from this family endeavor were many," Duane says. "We are proud of all of the children and proud that all of them have a college education, something Rachel and I were not able to do."

Just as Rachel learned to cook in her childhood home, Duane learned woodworking skills from watching and working with his father. "As a child, I always followed my dad around his very humble workshop," he recalls. "He never had any fancy tools or quality equipment, but he always made the most beautiful benches, chests, and other crafts with the most basic tools."

One day a friend asked if Duane had ever tried making turkey calls. He hadn't, but he decided to experiment.

"After some trial and error, I had a basic design that sounded pretty good!" he says. Duane's turkey calls are now sold at Tamarack and several other venues, and organiza-

tions including the National Wild Turkey Federation and the American Chestnut Foundation have commissioned him to create turkey calls.

Another sound frequently heard at Gobblers Ridge Lodge is live bluegrass music, often during gatherings at which the innkeepers demonstrate such traditional crafts as making apple butter, pressing apple cider, churning homemade ice cream, or smoking chicken and other meats. Some of the gatherings, according to the Browns, are celebrations in appreciation of their local church pastor and family friend, Bryan Groves. "We've also enjoyed hosting a breakfast for 18 members of the local Red Hat Society," Duane says.

Before they started building their home, Rachel was not enthusiastic about the idea of running a B&B. "My first thought was, I don't want strangers in my home!" she admits. Yet since then, she and Duane have shared their dream home and their love for a handcrafted lifestyle with guests from all over the world, including visitors from England, Spain, South Africa, Canada, Australia, and Colombia.

"It wasn't what I expected," Rachel says. "Everyone that has come has been wonderful. They seem so thankful that we open up our home to them. And we have many repeat visitors, so I guess we must be doing something right."

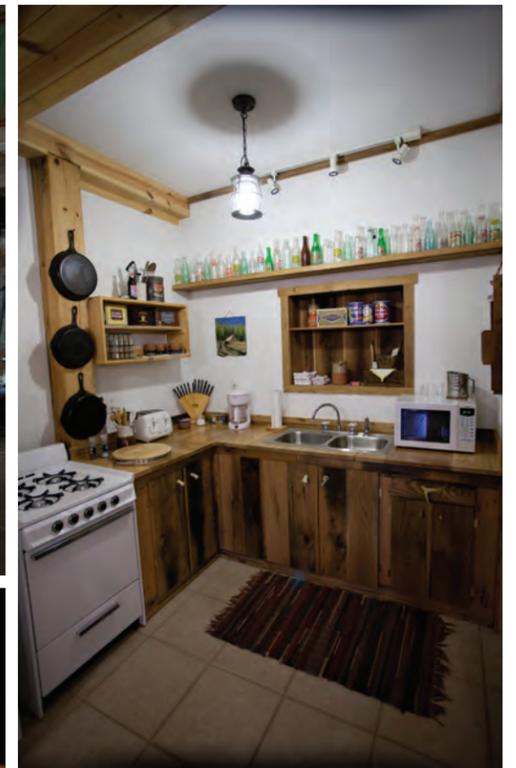
Gobblers Ridge Lodge makes a good home base for exploring many nearby attractions, including Stonewall Resort and Lake, Sutton Lake and Dam, the West Virginia Wildlife Center, Bulltown Historical Center, and Cedar Creek State Park. Also close at hand are golf at the Glenville Golf Course and tours and tastings at Lambert's Vintage Wines. For more information, visit the lodge website or call the number below. ♡

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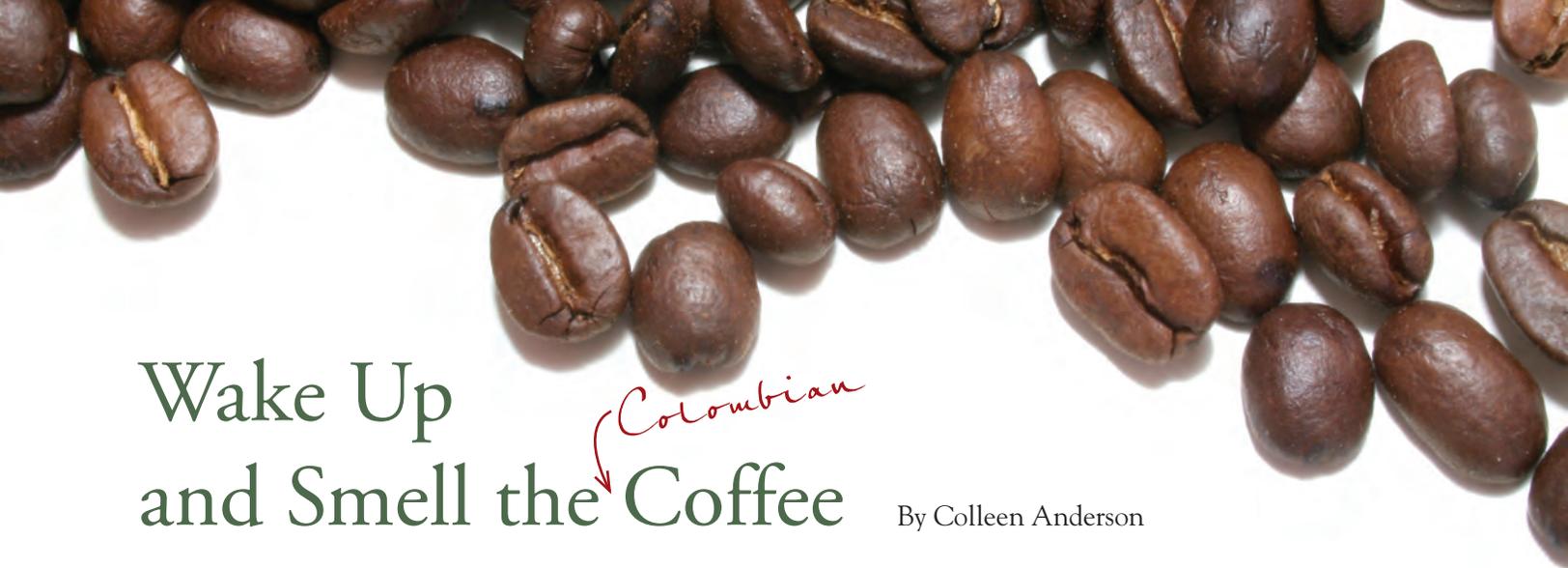


◀ Duane Brown's handmade turkey calls are sold at Tamarack, among other places.
 © Clayton Spangler

(Other photos this page) Handmade furnishings, hand-built stonework, and family heirlooms add to the cozy ambiance of Gobblers Ridge.
 © Clayton Spangler



▶ Duane and Rachel Brown pose at their finca, or small coffee farm, in Colombia, South America. Photo courtesy of Duane Brown



Wake Up and Smell the Coffee

Colombian

By Colleen Anderson

A few weeks after my visit to Gobblers Ridge Lodge, I received a package in the mail. Inside, along with an explanatory letter, were several plastic snack bags filled with the fruits of another of the Browns' endeavors, coffee farming. I brewed a pot of coffee and settled with a steaming, delicious cup to read Duane's account of how and why a West Virginia couple became owners of a Colombian coffee farm.

In 1993, Duane's uncle, Erwin Bourne, was a missionary working in southern Colombia's infamous 'Red Zone.' Duane wrote, "If you are not familiar with the Red Zone, it was an area between the Andes Mountains and the Amazon where guerilla forces and rebels were fighting the Colombian government and displacing indigenous people from their land and farms. It was and still is a very volatile and dangerous area."

Duane also spent some time doing missionary and humanitarian work in the area, where he met and befriended Pastor Edermin Cortes, a Colombian whose family farm had been stolen when Edermin was a child. Over the course of some years, Duane and Edermin Cortes became close friends.

"Now, fast forward to 2011," Duane continued. "I was on a missionary/humanitarian trip to the Amazon jungle in Colombia, Peru, and Brazil. During this trip, I had the opportunity to meet up with my good friend and invited him to visit our church in West Virginia. He stayed at our B&B in the fall of 2011.

During that visit, Pastor Cortes told the Browns that he was ready to retire from the ministry after 30-plus years. He wanted to return to farming coffee.

"I asked him what a small farm, or 'finca,' would cost, and whether he knew of any in a safe area of Colombia," Duane told me. "He said he knew of several. My wife and I talked it over and decided that we would purchase the farm and have Pastor Edermin and his family manage it for us. I know it sounds crazy, but yes, we decided to purchase a coffee farm, sight unseen, in the Andes Mountains of Colombia!"

In February of 2012, Duane, Rachel, and their son Justin traveled to Colombia to complete the purchase of their new property, each carrying a third of the money for the cash transaction. Duane wrote, "After being fingerprinted, photographed, and interrogated, I signed the papers and gave up our hard-earned cash to a total stranger who spoke a language I didn't totally grasp. Talk about a leap of faith! Almost everyone we told about our adventure thought we had lost our minds or were experiencing a mid-life crisis."

Happily, the Colombian government approved the sale and, in March, issued a deed in Duane's name. A legal technicality prevented their changing the name of the farm, but its traditional name, Finca La Despensa, suited them well. "The name literally means 'a farm that dispenses food to the people,'" Duane explained.

"Pastor Edermin now has a house and a coffee farm to retire to. He is the farm manager and takes care of the day-to-day operations for us. Rachel and I enjoy having a small house to travel to, and travel to the finca several times a year. Our family has been very blessed and is happy to share our blessings by helping Pastor Edermin and his family to have a safe and productive lifestyle in his retirement years."

The Brown and Cortes families have grown close. Rachel and Edermin's wife, Maria, share a common interest in cooking. "She doesn't have a kitchen like we have," Rachel told me in a phone conversation. "Her stove is the old-time stove that you have to make a fire under. She can fry up chicken and everything on that. She makes the best food. Pure Colombian food." She went on to describe learning to dig up yucca roots with Maria, who then made them into a delicious soup that reminded Rachel of potato soup.

Finca La Despensa currently has about 4,500 coffee trees, and Duane and Rachel plan to plant 3,000 more in the near future. The new owners experienced their first coffee harvest in May of 2012, learning from local, skilled workers how to pick, de-pulp, dry, and roast the coffee beans. They are hoping to import coffee for sale in the United States and, of course, to serve their own Colombian coffee at Gobblers Ridge Lodge.