



Vianne and Michael Bell own and operate Good Timber Bed and Breakfast on Deep Creek Lake, an intimate home away from home for many repeat guests of the Bells. Solid cedar logs create a two-story home with a soaring cathedral ceiling in the great room. Guests can relax in the loft, overlooking the activity below.

creative quarters

A GARRETT COUNTY B&B THAT'S
IDEAL FOR ARTFUL LODGERS



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When Vianne Bell leaves her bed-and-breakfast—usually for the month of March, when things would be slow anyway—rather than hire an innkeeper to keep things going, she just shuts the place down. It's not only to save on the salary of a professional or even a reflection of Bell's unwillingness to trust someone to do it right. She correctly assumes that things just wouldn't be the same without her.

Bell and her husband, Michael, who live in an apartment downstairs, opened the Good Timber B&B in 2002 in a custom-built cedar log house on Deep Creek Lake. There are only three guest rooms, and they are generally booked on weekends year-round and on weekdays throughout the summer. Vianne's energy defines the place; the décor reflects aspects of her own life, from the painting by her father above the fireplace to the iron-forged napkin rings made by a friend and frequent guest. Each morning, we rise to fresh-brewed coffee and banana bread, scones, or muffins hot from the Viking oven.



While the rooms are placed discreetly apart, each with its own bathroom, and there are plenty of common areas and lots to do—guests are encouraged to take a canoe out for a paddle, drive to one of the nearby parks for a hike, or dine at one of the local restaurants—you can't help feeling that you're a special guest here, a personal friend of Vianne herself. And, trust me, this is a good thing.

If you want to be left alone, that's always an option, but it's fun to see the innkeeper throughout the day and wind it down together with a glass of wine and a snack of bread and cheese before heading off to dinner.

The Good Timber certainly lives up to its name. Its solid cedar logs create a two-story home with a soaring cathedral ceiling in the great room, and an open loft on the second floor that serves as a common area for two adjacent guest rooms. It's a bright and airy place, with walls of pale white cedar, and sunny in spite of its setting in a grove of hemlock, ash, and maple trees.

The name is in honor of Vianne's mother, taken from a poem that her sister found in a magazine when their mother was dying of cancer. The "good timber" of the poem grows strong in adverse conditions, and that's the way Vianne remembers her mother, who raised three children after losing her husband at an early age.

The Bells purchased the property in 1979 with a small inheritance from Vianne's mother. And while the house is dedicated to her, it is Vianne's father, Stan Morris, who is memorialized throughout the home via his artwork. There are watercolors in the upstairs bedrooms, one of which evokes a powerful memory: As a child, Vianne sat by her father's side at the edge of a river as he painted it. Morris' large oil over the fieldstone fireplace, titled "Eve and the Apple," was part of the San Francisco Museum of Art's exhibition of up-and-coming artists in 1949.

The cubist-style painting, reminiscent of Marcel Duchamp, may be the focus of the grand room, but it is surrounded by

smaller treasures. Just about everything you gaze upon—be it a carved bowl by a local artisan, or the desk from the boardinghouse that Michael's great-grandmother operated more than a century ago in Oklahoma—tells a story. The house could easily double as an exhibition space for local artists and craftspeople, and Vianne is happy to act as their agent, giving out phone numbers and websites for those you may admire.

But the Good Timber does more than simply showcase the work. We drink and eat from hand-thrown cups and plates, hang our jackets on a sculpted tree branch, even sleep in a bed designed by an ironsmith. Jody Best created our headboard in response to the Good Timber poem, with the solid metal swirling to make stars, wind, and trees. The rest of the cherry bed was crafted by Bob Newman, a furniture maker who also built the accompanying night tables.

A Good Timber guest, Chris Modla, who works as a blacksmith for the Smithsonian, made the napkin rings, each decorated with a mouse, mushroom, or



The bed and breakfast is a working gallery of sorts, playing host to many artists and artisans, from the work of "Chainsaw Granny" near the waterfront to frequent guest Chris Modla's napkin rings. Above the fireplace is a work from Vianne's late father.

leaf, that Vianne uses at her breakfast table. Once we've had our wake-up coffee on the peaceful deck outside our room, we sit down to breakfast: a feast of Belgian waffles with fruit compote and maple syrup, fresh fruit, and thick sausages. Another option is an omelette made with organic eggs and oozing with farmhouse cheese and fresh vegetables.

We're lucky enough to enjoy the Good Timber midweek during peak foliage season, our two-night stay bridged by a spectacular warm and sunny autumn day. After breakfast, we take paddles from where they lean against the porch wall amidst a jumble of fishing rods and tackle, and snag one of the canoes from the inn's dock. The Good Timber is situated in a secluded cove on the northwest arm of the many-limbed lake, and local zoning restrictions keep houses and their related noise and activities a distance from the high-water line. The result? You're at one of the most popular vacation spots in Maryland and feel like you're alone.

The Good Timber's outdoor amenities also include a fire pit—for evening cookouts or marshmallow roasting—encircled by low stumps for sitting. The Appalachian woodcarver Shelly Upole, whom Vianne refers to as "Chainsaw Granny," made clever use of an old red oak nearby. The tree, which once stood 70 feet high and had a double trunk, is now a mother bear with three cubs, two climbing the tree and another crawling through a hole in it.

After our paddle, we are tempted to just flop on a sofa or an Adirondack chair (all the deck furniture is Amish-made) and wile away the afternoon with our books and magazines; we're also anxious, though, to do a little exploring. We decide to take a walk at the nearby state park, Swallow Falls, but return in time for Vianne's evening wine-and-cheese gathering (tonight we happen to be the only guests). Vianne pours a Pinotage made from grapes grown only in South Africa, and tells us a bit about what she does when she's not making breakfast and beds.

She and Michael, who is a professor of public policy at George Washington University, as well as a consultant, operate a nonprofit called the Coalition for Effective Local Democracy. The organization helps communities all over the world with projects like building high schools, and provides seed money for small businesses and opportunities for youth. Hence the Pinotage, which Vianne discovered on a trip to Cape Town.

The hand-carved chess set in the living room is also from South Africa. The masks on the walls were brought back from Thailand by Vianne's son Derek, who worked in Japan for a time. The carved bowl on the coffee table was made by Jeff Snyder, who finds and transforms felled wood throughout Garrett County.

I could go on and on, listing everything I see as I sit on the couch sipping a wine with an odd, almost moldy flavor. But here's a better idea: Come and see for yourself. Hang out with Vianne for a spell. And tell her hello. [\[1\]](#)



Breakfast is served courtesy of Vianne's comfortable and professionally-equipped kitchen. Guests are invited to take a canoe and enjoy a peaceful journey on the lake. Later in the day, it may be wine and cheese before dinner or roaring fire in the fire pit.