

PONTIFICATING PRIMLAND

It was the vision of Primland's founder, Frenchman Didier Primat, to create a place of immense beauty that offered his guests a return to simple human pleasures in an environment of refined authenticity and sensuality. The Monsieur developed Primland in an eco-conscious and thoughtful manner, as the ultimate retreat for world-class golf, hunting, refined dining and outdoor activities. In my visit over the Christmas Holiday, I found this prodigious, puissant 12,000-acre estate, 69 miles south of Roanoke, Virginia to be just that. If its stunning in the winter, imagine this (Forbes, Conde Nast, Travel+Leisure listed) resort in the fiery fall.

A Sportsman's Dream

Here in the Blue Ridge Mountains, bear and deer forage, bobcats stalk, and bald eagles circle the valleys with discerning eye. An Orvis Endorsed Wingshooting

Lodge since 1990, pheasant hunting is a specialty at Primland. Bobwhite quail and chukar provide additional shooting opportunities for hunters. Wingshooting is conducted in extensively managed habitat and early release methods ensure an abundance of hard flushing, flighty birds.

Despite the professional greetings and propitious treatment, one would expect at a first-class preserve, the guides at Primland are just down-home boys from neighboring hollows, namely Mount Airy, North Carolina. They loosen up as the road winds out and it wasn't long before Mike Martin, now 70 years young, instructs us on the lay of the land. A retired tobacco farmer, this Tarheel's love for bird hunting is as pronounced as his drawl.

I brought along my young German Shorthaired Pointer to ogle the kenneled dogs working those milo-sorghum patches, and Stohon got an eyeful, earful and mouthful. Some

singles, a few doubles, and several coveys busting out in 4-15 strong, it was as much action as a Yankee could ask for. My wife's first experience on pheasants, Danielle stood amazed watching trained dogs doing what they were bred for centuries to do.

At each field parcel stop we'd listen for rooster cackles. Lacking experience, Stohon soon learned those heightened sensations were legitimate responses as he began to backing girlfriends Kitty and Sassy on points, tail stiff. As the ladies retrieved downed birds, I was looking for movement on the ground. Pheasants do more running than flushing if they'd have it their way.

Great upland terrain should offer a variety of cover. Outlining the CRP strips were an abundance of foxtail, switchgrass and woody lespedeza. Engulfing that were millions of hardwoods sprinkled with white and Virginia pine. Each hollow seemed to have its own creek trickling through, and I crawled through several patches of elderberry while traversing those areas. Chasing runners up Bunker Hill and cutting through the mountain laurel-lined fence rows had me on the verge of exhaustion. Watching two dozen birds flush is only acceptable when you're out of breath, picking greenbrier out of your pantlegs. This is hunting.

On the tongue of the kennel trailer birds piled up. Each rummaging sniff and soft mouthing brought Stohon one step closer to fulfilling his destiny, even if a long way off. Hillside hiking

now over, the day's end witnessed picturesque photo ops to be cherished a lifetime. Worth the service fee, the next day I received more than a dozen frozen birds breasted out and vacuumed sealed for my 10-hour travel back to Indiana.

Side notes:

Running September 1 through April 30, guided hunts are booked 7 days a week and can be facilitated with your own gun and dogs or theirs. Side-by-side and over/under shotguns are the tradition in this sport, but autoloaders are allowed if only two cartridges are loaded at a time. Ammunition is limited to #5 fine shot or smaller and can be purchased on site. Budget a half day at \$415 and tip your chaperon well.

In addition to European Style Released Pheasant Shoots, Primland offers Driven Pheasant Shoots for larger hunting groups. Tall, flighted birds are flushed towards the gun line as loaders and dog handlers dressed in proper shooting attire assist you at each drive. Considerably higher in price, these unique experiences are prime for the upland aficionado.

Primland's fall deer and spring wild turkey seasons are true, fair chase hunting at its best, with no guarantee of success. You'll hike taxing terrain to get to these Blue Ridge gobblers so stay in shape. Virginia hunting is a guided activity offered only during state-regulated seasons. Licenses are sold on site and complete processing of meat is available.



Set in the Blue Ridge Mountains, this southern Virginia beauty is one for the bucket list.



ASO author Scott Cummings takes a quick knee from exercise with gundog Sassy.

Lodging and Dining

Whether it's a Luxe treehouse, rustic log cabin home, or the swanky eco-chic main lodge, Primland Resort offers a varied stay for all tastes. Equally impressive in their rightful, contextual settings. Our first night we relaxed in one of the Lodge's Blue Ridge Suites; king bed, 400-thread count Frette sheets and lush down duvets provided a deep-sleep event. My wife described my snoring as "dramatic," but I blame the hotel.

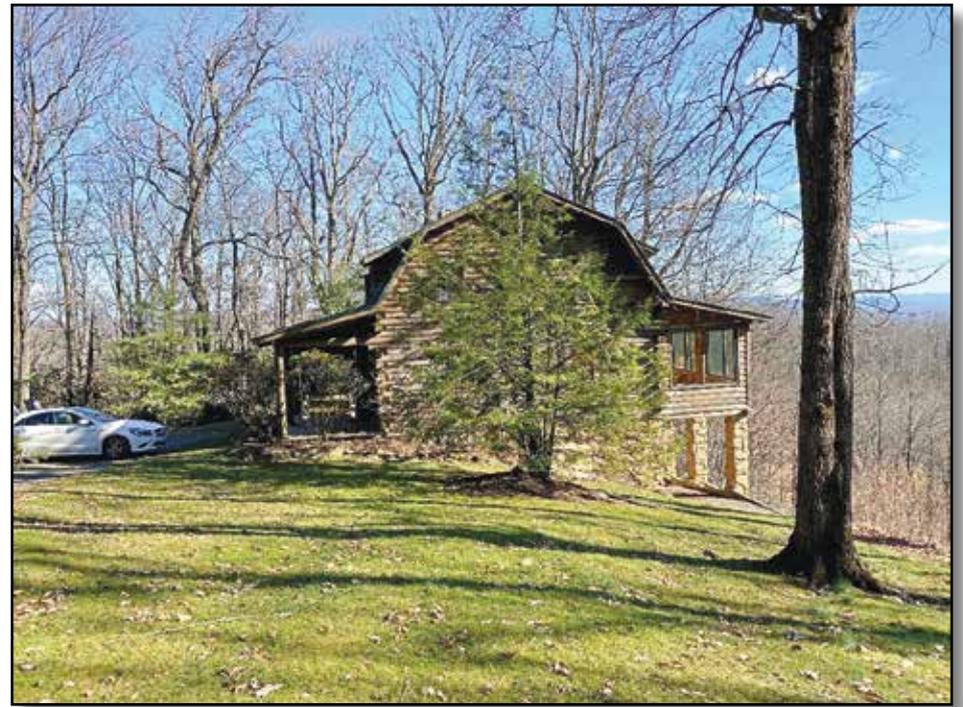
All their bathrooms feature imported European glass mosaic tile and the clean lines of Dornbracht fittings. Amenities include robes and slippers, BVLGARI bath products, a refrigerator, wet bar and coffeemaker, as well as flat screen televisions in both the master bedroom and living areas, complimentary wireless internet access and a fully automated Lutron shade and mood lighting dimmer system.

No matter what season you dine at Elements Restaurant, Executive Chef Ernest Bledsoe incorporates local, organic, and sustainable foods into exciting cuisine. Apple salad, Foie Gras, Duck Confit, or fresh North



A good sign, young pup Stohon was baptized by gunfire with no hesitations.

Carolina Grouper, the harmonious flavors and beautiful presentation won't disappoint. The adjacent two-story wine room is impressive, and the morning brunch buffet samples



The rustic Whitetail Cabin overlooked breathtaking views for miles ahead.

every breakfast item you'll crave for fueling your day's adventures. Expect to pay resort prices.

Camaraderie and cheer abound in 19th Pub. This lively bar comes well stocked with draught beers, single malts and favorite cocktails. Hearty

pub fare is served for lunch and dinner, and in casual attire, we enjoyed the fried chicken dinner. With not a lot of evening entertainment options - and why would it be needed - guests congregate between here and the two large fireplaces in the Great Hall to



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- The fundamental rules of safe firearms handling and operation
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What to bring:
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Note: Class Size is limited to 20 Students. Please register early. Class will require a minimum of 10 students



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Pontificating Primland... cont'd.

meet and greet. Talk to guest services about obtaining their smores pack to enjoy on the back patio's firepit.

The second night we booked in the warm-lit Whitetail Lodge. Whitetail features a log exterior, fireplace, cathedral ceiling, exposed beams and pine paneling throughout the living, dining and kitchen areas. Four bedrooms, appointed with comfortable king, queen and twin beds can comfortably accommodate larger families or groups. After a long day in the field, bathing in the copper tub upstairs was a welcomed indulgence. With my wife and GSP pup on either side, I pleased a bourbon-imbibed, pulchritudinous sunset and cozy morning sunrise over a strong cup of coffee. It tormented me to leave.

Extras

Reminiscent of Scotland, the Highland Course at Primland showcases Primland's breathtaking mountainous views overlooking the Meadows of Dan below. The 18-hole Audubon-certified all bentgrass

greens course was carved from the natural landscape of the mountains by renowned golf course architect, Donald Steel. On top its many accolades, GOLF Magazine ranked it as one of the "Top 100 Courses You Can Play." This rare and meticulously groomed playground looks to be worth the \$135-235 seasonal outlay.

A one-mile long, 14 station clays shooting course and another 5-stand shack will challenge sportsman of all levels of ability. Other hosted activities include fitness center, yoga, biking, hiking, RTV trail riding, horseback riding, archery and fly fishing. The Spa at Primland offers a tranquil sanctuary for total rejuvenation.

The celebration of nature at Primland takes on an even greater dimension from the Observatory Dome. Primland's remote altitude provides unusual clarity of the night sky, presenting guests the opportunity to study stars, planets, and celestial objects with an absence of ambient light. Their Celestron CGE Pro 1400 telescope provides extraordinary glimpses of the heavens and beyond our solar system.



Danielle's first experience with pheasants and training a pup was an amazing one.

For more information about Primland visit www.primland.com or call 866-960-7746. 2000 Busted Rock Road, Meadows of Dan, VA 24120

Scott Cummings is an avid sportsman, educator, and nationally published freelance outdoors writer and photographer. National Wild Turkey Federation and Wildlife Forever named him their 2013, 2014 Conservation Educator of the Year for his work in and out of the classroom.

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