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# ALTITUDE

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Focusing on people, places, and events in and around Fannin County

## LIVING RUSTIC and Loving IT



by Cindy Trimble Kelly

The popularity of “Rustic Decor” has grown rapidly over the past ten years. People are crying out for nostalgia. They want to experience *the way it used to be*. Perhaps they remember going to Grandma’s rustic home in the country and seeing her handmade quilts and ceramics. Or maybe their favorite memory is the taste of her home-cooked foods.

Before we moved to Blue Ridge three years ago, for 20 years my husband and I commuted via airplane, lived in hotels, ate way too much fast food and were continually surrounded by urban structures of steel, glass, and plastic. We spent most of our daily hours in buildings with no operational windows and no fresh air to breathe. We found ourselves craving the out of doors, the rustic or country environment, the sounds of birds and bullfrogs and the smell of the woods after a rain, which we both remembered from our childhoods in rural Georgia.

“Rustic” can include just about any material from natural or raw materials, such as rock, logs, limbs, flowers, twigs, twine, animal hides, grass, leaves, or water. Usually these natural elements are worked by hand using traditional tools and methods. Rustic elements are true to their existence and fabrication method. This characteristic may be considered crude by some who are use to machined, synthetic, slick products. This pure, unaltered state is the main characteristic of rustic decor. The beauty and decoration is in the inherent natural material itself, such as wood burls,

crooked branches, hand hewed beams, weathered barn wood, fossils in stone, or old nail holes blackened by aging metal.

The origins of rustic design go back to the first shelter man created. He needed a roof over his head, walls to protect him from the elements and fire for warmth and cooking. He used any found materials to create his shelter: logs, limbs, sticks, rocks, vines, grass, etc. You can determine the regional origin of a rustic design by the materials it is made from. As civilization has advanced, man has grown further and further away from this method of construction. We now use concrete, steel, plastic, glass and a whole assortment of synthetic materials. We even go so far as to create “natural” elements out of synthetic materials—fake rocks, or ceramic tiles that look like wood plank flooring. Society is craving a “purist” method of living, including non-synthetic organic foods, houses that smell of wood, and images that remind us of the past and that tell the history of how we got where we are today.

Building trends in rural areas lean towards available materials and labor. Choices become limited and less complicated. Decorative items are usually handmade and are evocative of those seen at Grandma’s. Rustic living and decor is not for everyone. Some people find it crude and dated. Maybe it is. But the simple, pure pleasure of touching, seeing, and smelling nature’s finest elements is refreshing.

Our most recent project designed with Moss Creek Designs and Appalachian Antique Hardwoods was a great experience in elegant and sophisticated rustic design. Our team resurrected a 150 year old barn, disassembled it and re-constructed a new structure on Main Street in downtown Blue Ridge. We used all parts of the barn on both the interior and exterior, from the hand hewed posts and beams to the rusted roofing tin, 12” wide weathered hemlock boards, faded red siding and boards with peeling white paint. Old barns were made of any type and size of wood that was growing around the area where the barn was made.

The project ended up with hemlock, wormy chestnut, yellow and white pine, heart pine, oak, hickory, poplar, maple

and cherry. It is truly a tribute to the old barn and a testament that rustic decor and living is as sophisticated and elegant as any other type of design.

*Cindy Trimble Kelly, ASID is a professional interior designer practicing in Blue Ridge, GA. If you have design questions, please send an e-mail to [cindy@trimblekellystudios.com](mailto:cindy@trimblekellystudios.com).*



Photo: Keith Jones

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706.632.8446  
[WWW.CALEBLACHMANN.COM](http://WWW.CALEBLACHMANN.COM)