



Getaways

CAREFREE RETREATS *for* ALL SEASONS

Chris Casson Madden
author of *A Room of Her Own*

country treasure

WE ALL KNOW WHERE TO FIND

Katie Couric on weekdays. For two hours each morning we can follow her from inside the NBC studios at "30 Rock" to outside on the street, rain or shine. There she mingles with Matt Lauer and Al Roker and the hundreds of spirited New Yorkers and waving tourists who throng the famous plaza, bearing placards and sporting T-shirts that identify them as members of such-and-such high school band or drama club. So much activity—and all before most of us have had our first cup of coffee! It's little wonder that Katie needs an escape come the weekend. With relief and a sigh, she and her two children head for the green meadows and rolling hills of Dutchess County, New York.

"We decided on Dutchess County because it reminded us of Virginia," explains Katie, who grew up in Virginia and graduated with honors from that state's university, founded by Thomas Jefferson. Set up on a hill, her house overlooks a picturesque hamlet. The sweeping lawn, stone fences, and white church and steeple across the lane resemble the country settings where James Stewart and Katharine Hepburn frolicked in *The Philadelphia Story*, or where Barbara Stanwyck and Dennis Morgan flirted in *Christmas in Connecticut*.

"A lot of the houses were really isolated," says Katie. "We liked this one because it is private but without the feeling of total isolation I got from other places we looked at. There is a sense of living in a neighborhood."

The presence of Katie's late husband is evident in every room. Jay Monahan chose much of the furnishings and had considerable input in



OPPOSITE: A side table displays a grouping of family photos and is flanked by a collection of antique walking sticks.

The mirror was a gift from Katie's mother-in-law. ABOVE: An early-morning moment in the tree-shaded garden.



PRECEDING PAGES: Plush upholstered furniture in a rose-and-cream toile anchors the music room. Nineteenth-century chairs from a church in Virginia stand on either side of the marble fireplace. RIGHT: Katie's collection of antique pillboxes from her grandmother. BELOW: Life in the country includes the childhood piano Katie brought with her from Virginia.



the decorating. The interiors are relaxed—not at all fussy. Though there are lots of toys, thanks to their young daughters, Ellie and Carrie, the feel of the house is very much that of a Southern gentleman's. In the music room, walking sticks, country furniture, rare books, and historic paintings dominate. Several pieces from Jay's collection of Civil War memorabilia are on display.

The centerpiece of the music room is the old Cable upright piano. "I grew up with it," says Katie. "It's the one I learned to play on, so it's nice that the girls can learn to play on it, too." In keeping with the sentiment of the heirloom instrument, it is crowned with a collection of photographs of family, friends, and special occasions.

The furniture in the music room also has important family significance. "Jay's mother gave us the gold mirror and my parents bought the sideboard beneath it at an estate sale," Katie says. "Jay and I picked out the covered bench that stands in front of the fireplace at an antique store in Hudson, New York."

OPPOSITE: In the corridor connecting the music room to the study, an antique reversible bench rests under oil paintings collected by Katie and Jay.





ABOVE: The surrounding fields and fences reminded Katie and Jay of the rolling hills of the horse country in Virginia. A garden plot is cultivated in a pasture near the carriage house.

The original fireplace mantel was reinstalled against the hand-rubbed finish of terra-cotta walls, which created a warm backdrop for the piece. Antique English treens—drinking cups turned by young boys learning the art of woodcrafting—are arranged on the mantel. Katie picked out the Cowtan & Tout fabric used on most of the furniture while Jay chose the rug, and they both selected the oil painting from Scotland that hangs above the fireplace. Decorating the room was very much a family affair.

The Greek Revival house, built circa 1820, did not require much structural change when Katie moved in. With the help of Jonathan Lanman and Debra Wassman of Trumbull Architects, “we redid the kitchen, built baths out of closets, and turned a bath into a guest room—not major changes. We did mostly decorating,” says Katie. A friend and designer, Karen Reisler, also helped Katie and Jay in this effort.

What Katie appreciates most about her country home is that “the kids can run around in a big yard and do all the things we used to do growing



up. We eat breakfast outside, the kids play with their toys out here, they read, and do puzzles.” Eldest daughter Ellie adds, “We can climb trees and I can go outside in my pajamas!”

Katie and the girls swim, pick vegetables and flowers from the garden, and do numerous craft projects together. Katie and Ellie have recently been experimenting with mosaics, decoupage, and Popsicle stick art, and they love entertaining Carrie with “homemade” balloons from a kit Katie picked up in London. Summer is outdoor time, but she and the girls also enjoy ice-skating in winter and have become “champion bowlers,” Katie says, laughing.

In short, Katie’s retreat is focused on her children and enjoying her time with them. “This was Jay’s dream house—a place where we could all come and be happy and relaxed,” she reflects. “This house gives us lots of privacy and makes me feel like I’m worlds away from my New York life.” And that, after all, is what a getaway is all about.



ABOVE LEFT: Ellie enjoys the swing before breakfast. TOP: From the side lawn, a view of the stone terrace: a shady setting for summer lunches and family games. ABOVE: Katie and the girls in the vegetable garden. OVERLEAF: A stone rooster keeps watch over the entrance to the early-nineteenth-century home.