

Meet Jason Reeves, the Hotelier Bringing Soho Farmhouse Vibes to the Southeast



Photo by Wesley & Emma

Like many others during the pandemic, Jason Reeves is drained and exhausted ("languishing," per the New York Times). But if he's being honest, he's been feeling that way for a while — 15 years, to be exact — just enough time to finally do something about it. Some might even argue that the New York real estate developer-turned-hotelier and owner of the newly-opened [Highlander Mountain House](#) was always destined for a quiet, laid-back life in the mountains. Born in Lexington, Virginia and raised in Richmond, to a mother with a penchant for decorative arts and a father who was a commercial contractor, Reeves spent an idyllic childhood in restored log cabins and farmhouses, and summers in the English countryside. He grew up around local painter Cy Twombly and photographer Sally Mann and credits them with developing his cultural taste.



Photo by Maggie Braucher

Reeves's keen eye for Appalachian art is on full display at his bucolic escape in Highlands, North Carolina ("the Hamptons of Atlanta," he says). In fact, the entire design of the nearly 150-year-old farmhouse pays homage to the region, with pieces by Cherokee tribal artists hanging alongside works by Mann and Josef Albers, esteemed alumni of the nearby Black Mountain College. Whimsical floral-printed wallpaper, antique furniture, and quirky artifacts like Victorian-era taxidermy bring a homey feel that's equal parts elegant and cool. As for lodging, Highlander Mountain House offers two options: the English country-inspired main house and more rustic bunkhouse, reminiscent of a cabin, but with Malin+Goetz amenities. "The vibe is eclectic English country transposed into Appalachia," Reeves says.

It's a far cry from Reeves's days in commercial real estate, where he'd log countless hours rebuilding properties and overseeing strategic acquisitions, including the high-end condos at 15 Central Park West, with unparalleled views of Central Park and upper Manhattan. A graduate of Sewanee, Reeves initially moved to Charleston, where he restored 18th-century houses, before earning his masters in Historic Preservation at Boston University and working for the Society of the Preservation of New England Antiquities. "I wanted to do something that preserved old ways of building," he says. "The buildings that I was working on had been there 300 years, and they were going to be there for another 300 — I loved that continuity and craftsmanship."

From there, Reeves studied real estate finance and development at Harvard, with the goal of finding clients interested in breathing new life into historic structures. He received a second master's in design studies, with a concentration in real estate development, and headed to New York, where he stayed through the 2008 global financial crisis before ultimately leaving to form a boutique hotel company. "I was burned out and had meandered off my path of doing work I thought

mattered," he says. And so he changed course, specifically repurposing vintage motor lodges in Dallas and Santa Fe, Texas into hotels, and infusing a fresh, modern energy akin to Oxfordshire's Soho Farmhouse or Foxfire Mountain House in the Catskills. Then, this past fall (amid the ongoing COVID-19 crisis, no less), he opened Highlander Mountain House as his first solo venture.



Photo by Maggie Braucher



Despite a tumultuous year, demand has been up, as more people flee crowded cities seeking respite in nature. Recently, Reeves hosted musicians for the Bear Shadow Festival, a three-day celebration of hipster Americana music. As the world begins to emerge from lockdown, Reeves hopes that more guests, from artists to chefs and academics, will take advantage of the Highlander's communal common areas, which foster an inclusive work and social environment. His ideal day consists of waking up with a cup of coffee, lounging in front of the fire while reading the paper, working, then enjoying a cocktail and dinner with new acquaintances (hiking trails, streams, rivers, waterfalls, and a forest are all mere steps away). "I want to be your living room and your lounge and creative workspace in the mountains," Reeves says. "It's the New Yorker in me that knows diversity comes from different walks of life intersecting with each other."