

Heritage of the hunt

TAYLOR FAMILY TURNS FISHING CREEK FARMS INTO A HIGH-END HUNTING EXPERIENCE

WRITTEN BY ANDREA GABLE
PHOTOGRAPHED BY TERRY ALLEN



Rob Taylor grew up hunting in Thomaston, Georgia – a pastime he shared with his own two sons, John and Cal, and a tradition he continues at Fishing Creek Farms in Greene County.

Before moving from Atlanta to Lake Oconee full time in 2003, Taylor had already purchased a separate piece of land, 620 acres, on which he and his boys could hunt at the end of a long dirt road in Union Point.

Not long after getting settled at the lake, the face of Fishing Creek Farms began to change with the addition of land manager, Scott Davis.

“Scott and I had hunted together in South Texas and he was looking to move back East,” says Taylor.

Davis was hired in 2004 to work full time at Fishing Creek Farms and for other regional properties in need of land management services, everything from road systems and pond construction to food plots and feeding programs for habitat management.

“When we hired Scott, it changed the whole dynamics of the place, even though it was still a family operation at that point,” says Taylor.

As more and more land was added each subsequent year, the farm revealed the potential of a full-fledged hunting operation – an operation that Taylor could fine tune into exactly what he has enjoyed most throughout a lifetime of hunting experiences. He could create a boutique offering where small groups could have the property to themselves for a high-end hunting experience.

“We wanted to create a five-star feel on the property, everything from food to service to accommodations,” says Taylor. “We wanted people to feel like they’re the only ones here when they visit.”

It started with a modest “bunkhouse” built on the property in 2005 for leisurely family hunts. “It didn’t take us long to realize we didn’t do too well in one room all together, so we had to expand,” laughs Taylor.

This expansion led to the construction of a main lodge, then a two-story suite, then the cookhouse and lounge, all connected by a central lawn and outdoor fire pit.

“I wanted to create more of a campus kind of environment rather than one big, huge building,” says Taylor, who enlisted the help of DreamBuilt for construction. “It’s designed so that you can separate yourself if you didn’t want to be confined in the same four walls as everyone else. You can go to bed whenever you wanted or find a quiet place to work if you needed to.”

Tyla Kuhn, lodge manager, says this is what sets Fishing Creek Farms apart from larger commercial properties. “When you are set up on a bigger scale, often you lose that intimacy of being able to create your own private experience like you can here.”

Kuhn says it only takes four to six hunters to reserve the whole property so they can capitalize on that intimate setting. “We only take up to six hunters at a time so we don’t have groups crossing over and people can have the whole place to themselves,” she says.

Between the lodge, suite, lounge, and bunkhouse, there are six private accommodations, each with their own private bathroom. Sprawling porches connect the “campus” for gathering outdoors or around the fire pit. Each building has well-appointed common areas, centered around elegant fireplaces, a commune table, or a custom pool table and surrounded by a gallery of mounts along the walls.

An in-house chef provides three meals a day with wine and special fireside cocktails and hors d’ oeuvres around the fire pit each night.

The accommodations and amenities give Fishing Creek Farms less of a hunting lodge feel and more of a luxury retreat.

“It’s what sets us apart,” says Taylor. “We try to maintain that boutique feel so that when you’re here, you’re the only ones here. I did not want to get into a situation where you’re running people through for the numbers. I wanted it small enough to have a personal relationship with the clients when they’re here.”

Taylor estimates about 65 percent of the clientele are repeat customers.

Though deer hunting on the property remains primarily private, the family opens the farm to 2-4 commercial Whitetail hunts each season, based on the estimated deer population. Taylor says no hunts were held last year because of the drought, but a minimum of two hunts is typical. Four hunters are allowed on each commercial hunt.

However, in 2013, Taylor decided to experiment with adding a commercial quail component to the property. After working with Davis to get the habitat right, they opened 400 new acres for wingshooting in 2015.

The wingshooting area is across the dirt road, completely separating it from the deer habitat. The changes are noticeable with wooded thickets giving way to waving grasses and brush throughout the rambling pines. Taylor says he never tried to combine the two areas because quail won’t thrive in environments where the deer like to be, and vice versa. The topography of the property lent itself to the separation of the hunting areas but Taylor and land manager Scott Davis have consciously worked to maintain the distinct habitats.

Kuhn says the management practices put into place at Fishing Creek Farms has resulted in high quality birds.



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A photograph of turquoise jewelry. It includes a long necklace with large turquoise beads and a large turquoise cross pendant. There are also a pair of turquoise earrings and a turquoise bracelet. The jewelry is displayed on a light-colored background.

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“This place has been so valuable to us as a family and it makes me happy to see it lend that familial culture to the people who stay here.”

- Rob Taylor



“In the south, where wild quail hunting has been such a historic tradition, there’s a lot of passion and people have a desire to see quality birds in the air,” says Kuhn. “The death of quail hunting properties, oftentimes, are birds that don’t want to flush or are poor flyers. We’ve got really strong flying birds and we’ve figured out things that work to allow us to have exceptional birds throughout the season.”

Kuhn and her husband, Scott, also a hunting guide at the farm, manage the kennel facility on site. They have spent years breeding and training English Pointers, German Shorthairs, and English Field Cocker Spaniels. The dog work, Taylor adds, is something that impresses clients because they don’t detract from the hunt or take focus from the wingshooting experience.

"We usually run a brace of pointing dogs, which is a pair, and have a cocker either at heel or on the cart," explains Kuhn. "Once the dogs go on point, and the hunters are positioned up and ready to take their shots, then the cocker enters to flush the birds."

Guests also have access to customized Polaris Rangers that allows Fishing Creek Farms to accommodate a variety of ages and skill levels. "If someone isn't physically able to get around in a lot of that cover, it doesn't mean they lose out on the experience of hunting here. It also lets people be as aggressive or relaxed as they want to be on a hunt."

On average, Kuhn says clients harvest 25-30 birds in a half-day hunt. The birds are packaged in house and sent home with the guests or sometimes used by the chef to make wild game appetizers before dinner.

"We just try to be all-inclusive," says Taylor. "You can just come here and hunt. There are no overage costs if you go over a certain number of birds. We clean and package the birds for you. If you need a gun we can provide it. I know that when I go somewhere, I just want to pay and not have to worry about any overage costs, so that's what we've tried to do here."



Fishing Creek Farms has just begun to accommodate selective corporate outings in the off-season. Though there are no guided hunts, guests can still enjoy full access to the property, its amenities, and the three trophy bass ponds, rifle range, and five-stand layout overlooking the lake.

The remodeled five-stand will be ready to reopen this fall as more of a "modified five-stand" that combines elements of a sporting clay course into a more stationary five-stand environment.

"In the remodel, Rob has taken components of five-stand and components of sporting clays and mixed the two so there's a greater variety of shots presented," says Kuhn. "It's designed to be a teaching and training tool for real hunting scenarios, without requiring you to have to spend hours working your way through a sporting course."

Now with 1,000 total acres, Taylor says he's got the property the way he wants it and is focusing on fine tuning every aspect of the current environment.

"This place has been so valuable to us as a family," says Taylor, "and it makes me happy to see it lend that familial culture to the people who stay here."

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