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# MR. SUMMEROUR'S SUNFLOWERS

AN ACCLAIMED ATLANTA ARCHITECT CELEBRATES  
WILDFLOWERS AT THEIR PEAK WITH AN AFTERNOON FÊTE



WRITTEN BY *Kate Abney* PHOTOGRAPHED BY *Erica George Dines*



On a hot August day, Atlanta landscape designer John Howard relaxes on a hammock strung across a shaded, Southern-style wraparound porch at Keith Summerour's Towerhouse Farm. A friend, collaborator and distinguished guest at this fete, Howard also helped design the cypress allée that now borders Summerour's sunflower fields, which can be spied in the distance beyond a dry stone hedge.



**“GETTING AWAY REPRESENTS GREAT FREEDOM. WHEN YOU’RE IN THE CITY, YOU’RE CONFINED TO YOUR WORK AND YOUR PARTICULAR PARCEL OF LAND. WHEN YOU’RE AT THE FARM, YOU HAVE NO NEIGHBORS FOR MILES AROUND, AND WHEN PEOPLE ARRIVE HERE, THEY’RE AFFECTED BY THAT.”**  
*—Keith Summerour*



*left* Interior designer Beth Webb fashioned a rustic farm tabletop as a tribute to Tuscany. Handfuls of fresh figs, rustic wooden bowls, antique pewter-and-glass cups, simple white stoneware plates and primitive ceramic jugs all contribute to the pastoral feel. *right* A view from the loggia at the top of Towerhouse provides an exceptional vantage point to admire the expanse of sunflowers and surrounding land.



**W**ITH WORK IN BOTH THE RESIDENTIAL and commercial arenas reaching prolific levels of output and recognition, architect Keith Summerour, now more than ever, requires asylum to disconnect, draw and clear his mind.

Nearly every weekend these days, Summerour—whose present projects at Tennessee’s Blackberry Farm are simply an impressive scratch on a well-honed surface—escapes the frenetic pace of the city for his “primary home,” located 60 miles away in Gay, Georgia. The rural refuge, called Towerhouse Farm, is a bastion of Southern romance, where the distinguished architect found the freedom to build without code restrictions. The soaring structure—an extraordinary tower using stones culled from the land and inspired in part by Civil War shot towers and the architecture of San Gimignano, Italy—keeps watch over the surrounding farmland, a plot brimming with corn, millet, soybeans, seasonal produce and, most recently, a labyrinth of bobbing sunflowers.

“One of the most wonderful things about the sunflowers is the wildlife they attract,” Summerour says. “There are days when tens of thousands of blackbirds come in big, swooping waves and descend on the sunflowers and trees.”

“Though the sunflower field was at first for my edification and enjoyment,” he continues, “it turned out so beautifully that I wanted to share it with others; what a beautiful expression of a landscape that can spring from a few thousand seeds.”

Compelled to celebrate it, Summerour called upon friend and frequent collaborator Beth Webb to style a late-summer fête for a dozen or so colleagues and comrades. Calling the scene “an homage to Tuscany” (Countess Marchesa, heiress to the Fiat fortune, maintains a farm close by), Webb combed the house and guest

house for accoutrements, setting a ravishing tabletop with stoneware plates, rustic pottery, pewter glasses, natural linens and freshly picked figs.

Served from the cool of the covered porch, a farm-to-fork spread of Italian nibbles—Star Provisions Bresaola with arugula and fresh mozzarella; fig crostini with caramelized onions and lonzino; chilled cucumber, mint and yogurt soup with chives; olives al forno and rosemary gelato from Honeysuckle Gelato—was enjoyed by local luminaries who filtered in throughout the afternoon, among them jewelry designer Avril Vignose, showroom proprietors Randy Grizzel and Gary Mann and kitchen designer Mary Kathryn Timoney.

Guests sipped on signature cocktails, The Early—a tomato-and-orange concoction rigged up by Webb and Ian Walker in St. Barth’s during Hurricane Earl—along with several varietals of rosé, a refreshment hand-picked by Summerour via Westside’s Perrine’s Wine Shop.

Another cause for celebration: the addition of an allée of cypress trees, which was added to the grounds by acclaimed landscape architect (and party guest) John Howard, in concert with Jeremy Smearman of Planters Garden. The new feature contributes a certain conviviality to the setting, where a farm table was positioned front and center. There is something entrancing about the environment, and “people are affected by that,” notes Summerour. “They’re much more open and really enjoy that liberation, the space that nature brings.”



Summerour purchased this old-world-inspired gazebo, designed by fellow Atlanta architect D. Stanley Dixon, at auction. It now serves as an elegant punctuation point on the property. Summerour has recently introduced a fireplace on this spot, which features a rustic wood-burning oven on the back—perfect for preparing straight-from-the-hearth flatbread pizzas at frequent get-togethers.



*clockwise, from left*  
Because it was erected in Meriwether County, Towerhouse was allowed to come together without the typical code restrictions that preside over structures within city limits. Describing his second home as “rooted to the land in both color and texture,” the architect utilized Georgia clay-tinted quartz gathered right from the property, assembling a romantic structure that references both Confederate shot towers and the acclaimed architecture of San Gimignano, Italy. At the side entry to Towerhouse, the reclaimed mahogany doors and Romanesque archway take on an old-world

appearance, as does the native stacked stone facade surrounding them. “When you walk through this house,” says Webb, “it actually reminds you of Italy, because of the authentic smell of the stone.” Webb, along with Cocoa, a Vizsla/Brown Lab mix, takes a stroll around the perfectly positioned swimming pool, which is bordered by rustic sandstone coping.