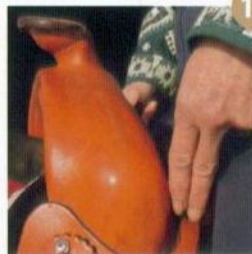
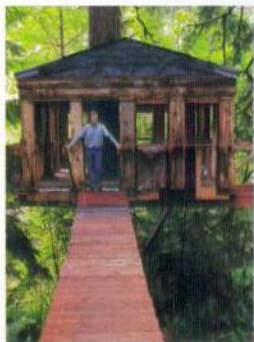


# HOMESTEAD

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## About our cover



**T**here's just something about cowboys that sparks imaginations around the world—and spurs cowboy-action shooting to monumental growth. As shooters or observers, the Single Action Shooting Society's annual End of Trail championship near Albuquerque, N.M. is fun for the whole family. In our cover story, *Up a tree*, sport meets spectacle as world-class shooters dress up in Western wear and compete against some of the coolest hands and fastest horses west—or east—of the Rio Grande. Photo by Steve Werblow.

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By Lorne McClinton

# A herd of their own

*Highland cattle complete couple's country home*

**J**ulie could tell from the sound the cattle were making that something was very wrong. Bare feet flying, she ran up the mountainside to see what was the matter. A pit bull and another stray dog were attacking one of their week-old Highland calves. By the time Julie and her husband, Jeremy, arrived at the scene, the mother cow had jumped over the 5-foot-high electric cattle fence and was goring the pit bull with her long horns. The dogs limped off when the couple came to the calf's rescue.

The dog attack was the low point in Julie Zeitlinger's and Jeremy Fontana's first year of owning cattle. The young couple had dreamed

of moving to the countryside with their two young daughters, Romy and Violetta. Three years ago, Au Diable Vert, a small alpine inn and outdoors center with 200 acres of adjoining woods and meadows near Glen Sutton, Quebec, came up for sale. They decided to move to the mountains and become innkeepers. They sold their house in Montreal, and their cottage in nearby Sutton, and bought it.

**Middle of nowhere.** "Au Diable Vert is a French phrase that roughly translates to the middle of nowhere," Jeremy says. "It certainly is appropriate. It's only 90 minutes from downtown Montreal, but when you get



**Above:** Julie Zeitlinger, Jeremy Fontana, daughter Violetta, and their dog, Chester, relax on their inn's deck.

here you really feel like you drove 500 kilometers directly into the middle of nowhere.”

The region is heavily wooded now, but 50 years ago their property was one of the many alpine farms that once peppered the south slope of Mount Sutton. The main section of their house/inn, the original farmhouse, dates from 1900. Their property, like most of the farms in the region, was abandoned when farmers switched from horses to tractors. If you hike into the woods you can still see the stone fences that once divided the fields.

The couple financed the property through a shared risk mortgage with a farmland lender and the Business Development Bank of Canada. The terms of the farmland lender stipulated that the couple had to operate an agricultural enterprise on a portion of their land. After debating the possibility of buying wild boars or bison they chose the simplest option; purchasing 12 cows.

**Happy accident.** “We stumbled across the Highlands by sort of a happy accident,” Julie says. “They can stay outdoors all the time and they like the hilly terrain. They’re ideal for the winter mountain pasture that we have.” ▶

**Top:** It's only 90 minutes from downtown Montreal but it feels like the middle of nowhere. **Above:** Highland cattle are hardy animals with a 98% unassisted live birth rate.



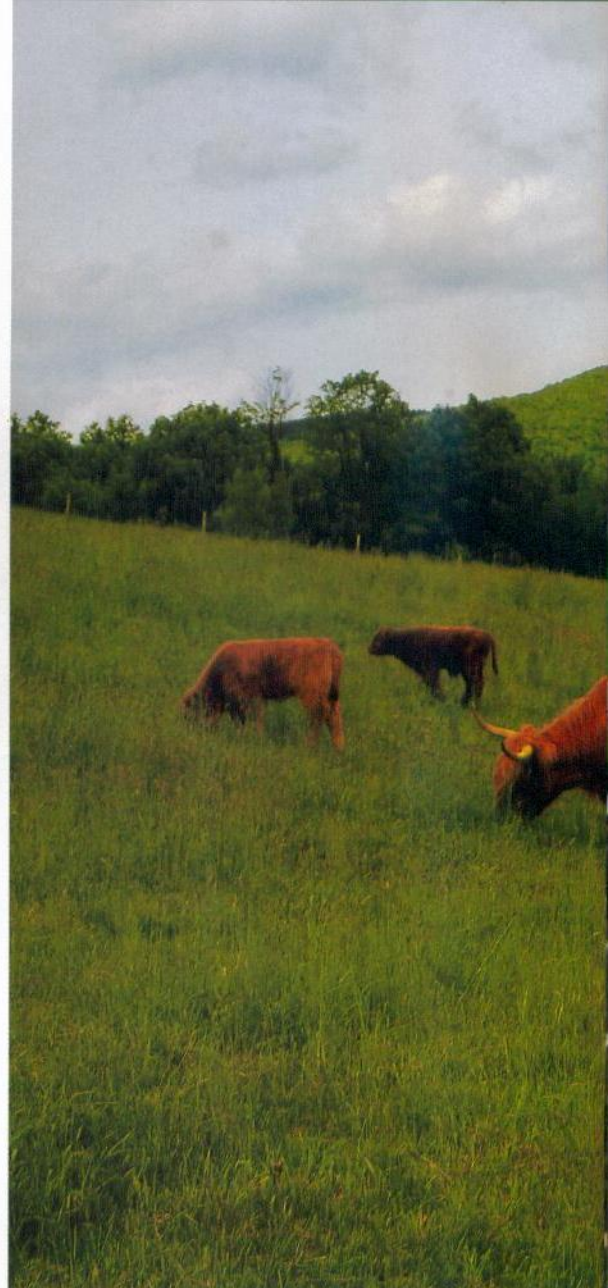
**Top:** Moving to the country gave the couple more time to spend with their two children. **Above:** Guests ask which pasture the cattle are in so they can book a cabin or campsite close to them.

“They’re very hard to kill,” Jeremy adds. “They’re very hardy; they take care of themselves. They have a 98% unassisted live birth rate which sounded very, very good. The shoulder-length gloves didn’t appeal to us.”

It was love at first sight when the couple first saw the animals. Their exotic look and their impressive horns appealed to them.

**Yaks or musk ox.** “They’re just astounding creatures,” Jeremy says. “They look cool and they’re so different. They fascinate literally all of the thousands of guests who stay at the inn, cabins, or the campsites every year. Most people have never seen one before, so we’re often asked if they’re yaks or musk ox.”

Jeremy works in advertising in Montreal and Julie had trained as a biologist in Europe. Neither had any experience raising cattle.



Don Badger, the local breeder who had sold them the cattle, was quite interested in their project and provided a lot of advice and help.

“You have to feed them and look after them,” Julie says. “If things go wrong, you’ve got to take care of them. It was a bit scary at first. They are big, they kick, and they do have long horns, but after awhile you do grow more accustomed to them.”

**N**ow, instead of two children, “I have 37,” Julie says. “I literally know all of their moos. If one cries in the middle of the night, I hear it and wake up. It’s just like having a newborn in the next room. Just one moo and I’m at the window.”

It was Julie’s close attachment to her animals that let her know something was wrong when the dogs attacked. The calf was badly



**Above:** Au Diable Vert had once been an alpine farm. The last registered cattle herd on the property was in 1954. **Right:** Julie and Jeremy knew nothing about raising cattle, but say learning has been a lot of fun.

injured. Jeremy and Julie wouldn't hear of putting the animal down, so they had the vet patch it up. Every day, for weeks afterwards, the couple wrestled the calf down and treated it with antibiotics. The calf survived.

"It's the most amazing thing when you are in there helping these little calves," Jeremy says. "The mothers stand right beside you, watching you, not blinking; breathing through their nostrils. The look is a combination of 'I really should kill you, and thank you for taking care of my baby.' You're dealing with most basic things: life, death, food, and water; things you never think about in the city." ■

