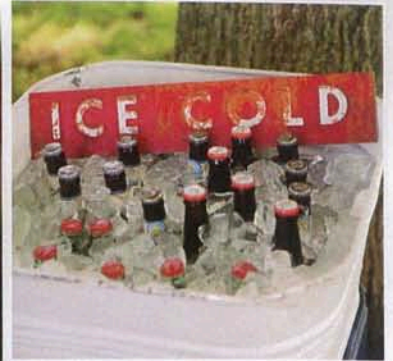




Independence Day

By Christy Marshall Photography by Steve Adams
Styling by Julia M. Usher

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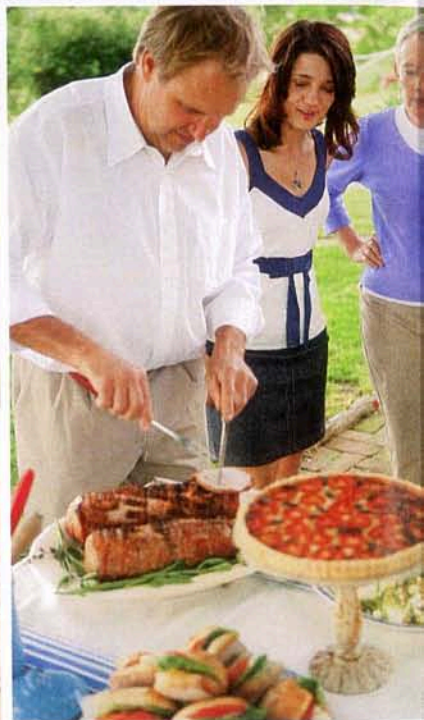




DAVID MEYER



ELLA SEIDEL, LILY PILZ



Some houses are tailor-made for parties. Take Versailles, for example. Or the White House. What slightly sloping lawn would be better for the annual Easter egg roll? In southern Illinois, *the* place for an Independence Day celebration is, unquestionably, the Meyer Farm.

"This place is built for Fourth of July, because we are on a hill," the host, Mark Meyer, observes. The farmhouse sits at the peak of a long slope, surrounded by fields of grain. The picnic table is constructed out of boards left over from a barn built in the 1860s. The land was first purchased four generations ago, in 1849, by Mr. Meyer's great-grandparents, George and Anna, who were farmers. They bought it in two pieces: one 160-acre stretch and another 80 acres that are now under Carlyle Lake (built in 1962). Since then, the land has been tended by the Meyer clan—Mr. Meyer's grandfather, Walter, and then his son (Mr. Meyer's father), David. During the Depression, the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) built the farm's three ponds and terraced the land.

Fifteen years ago, long after his father had moved a few miles away, Mr. Meyer and his wife, Nicole Sheridan, had to decide whether they would refurbish the house or "let it go." Sentimentality ruled. But the condition of their homestead

was dubious at best. "We came in one time, and there was a dead raccoon on the top of the stairway," Mr. Meyer recalls. Today, the house is pristine. While the floors are original, the walls have been repainted a soft yellow, the windows are new, and the frames precisely replicate the original design. Mr. Meyer and Ms. Sheridan also added a second bath upstairs and transformed an antiquated kitchen into a gourmand's dream.

Mr. Meyer and Ms. Sheridan now reside on the farm for five months a year and in Sydney, Australia, for the remaining seven. She runs Australia's National Tourism Alliance; he is a commodities trader. The farmland is leased to a neighbor who harvests the corn, soybeans, and winter wheat crops.

When the family is back in Illinois, they host parties. "A lot of parties," Mr. Meyer says, adding that he invites neighbors and friends from both Australia and St. Louis. "All of our friends are 'foodies' and wine-lovers. Usually the combination has to go together.

"We try to grill," Mr. Meyer says. "We have a garden, and our neighbors have a lot of sweet corn. We also have peach trees." But to fill in any ingredient blanks, he also shops the outdoor markets in both Illinois and St. Louis, having just recently discovered the Tower Grove Farmers' Market.