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# Chapel Hill

September/October 2008 \$4.00

A G A Z I N E

## Stepping Up

The Thorps prepare for their new role as UNC's first family. A Q&A with Patti Thorp on page 110

THE CHANCELLOR'S FAMILY  
Patti with Emma, 9, and John, 13, at their new residence.

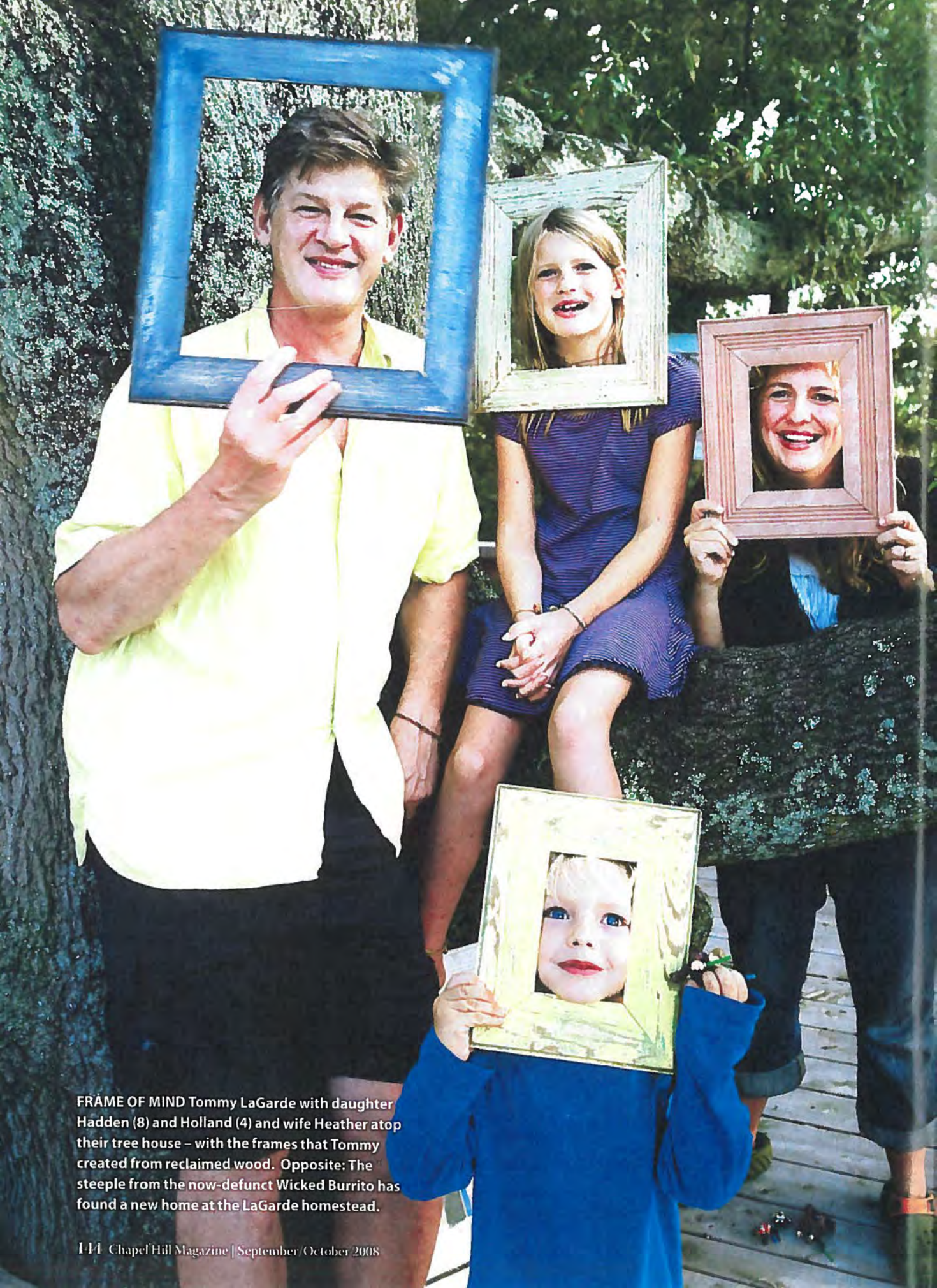
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**FRAME OF MIND** Tommy LaGarde with daughter Hadden (8) and Holland (4) and wife Heather atop their tree house – with the frames that Tommy created from reclaimed wood. Opposite: The steeple from the now-defunct Wicked Burrito has found a new home at the LaGarde homestead.



# Life in. Perspective

BY RANDY B. YOUNG | Photography by Briana Brough

**A** tall tree of a Tar Heel, who once cut a swath on the hardwoods of UNC's Carmichael Auditorium en route to second-team All-American honors, a basketball gold medal in the 1976 Olympics and a six-year NBA career, Tommy LaGarde is again working magic with wood – this time carving a name for himself as a local artisan.

After basketball and a stint on Wall Street, the 6-foot-10-inch Detroit native and his wife, Heather, and two children relocated in 2004 to the rolling pasturelands west of the couple's alma mater. Moving into a one-time dairy farm near Snow Camp, they founded BarnStar Vintage Wood and Archi-

tectural Salvage ([www.barnstarvintage.com](http://www.barnstarvintage.com)). LaGarde, now 53, rescues materials from farm and estate structures that have been slated for demolition, often transforming the hand-hewn beams, vintage tiles, porcelain or elegant glass into artistic treasure that defies definition.

"Some people call this kind of stuff 'shabby chic,'" LaGarde says, "but it's more about using old things in new ways."

From custom-made frames and mirrors using vintage woods and antique tin ceiling tiles to furniture made from a variety of architectural materials, each work-in-progress in the LaGardes' expansive dairy barn stu-

*continued on page 149*



The LaGardes' studio and workspace is located in the expansive dairy barn (shown above) on their property near Snow Camp.



dio or on display in their home tells a story.

"I always hated 'shabby chic' as a term, because I don't think there's anything shabby about it," Heather LaGarde says. "What I like about it is that it's real, and we try to know the history about most of the wood. It's sort of 'epic architecture.'"

LaGarde is at ease with the circuitous course that has led him back to the area and his current pursuits. "Six years ago I couldn't have told you the difference between pine and oak," he says with a reluctant smile. What got him started was the necessity of repair.

"When we bought the place five years ago, [a barn behind the house] was a granary that used to stretch ... way back, but a hurricane back around 1995 took the roof off, and a third of the building was rotting away."

LaGarde restored it using salvaged materials, discovered a love for such reinvention and never looked back.

"He finds ways to make himself meaningful," says Chloe Greene of Franklin Street's Toots & Magoo, where LaGarde recently crafted some rustic frames for a selection of Victorian paintings.

"He's involved with the Saxapahaw summer series, he's raising a family, and he's involved in the arts," Greene adds. "Tom LaGarde is just somebody who plants himself and then roots grow."

Cut a cross-section through this gentle giant, and you'd likely discover a fine and beautiful marbled grain that reinvents itself at every turn. **CHM**

**"I always hated 'shabby chic' as a term, because I don't think there's anything shabby about it. It's sort of 'epic architecture.'"**

**– Heather LaGarde**

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