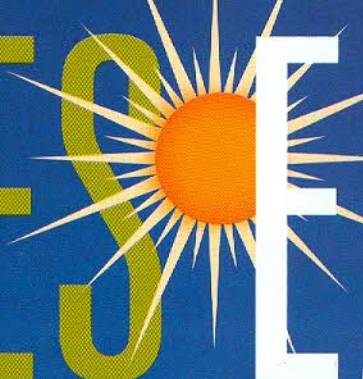


CASCADES EAST



FALL 2005

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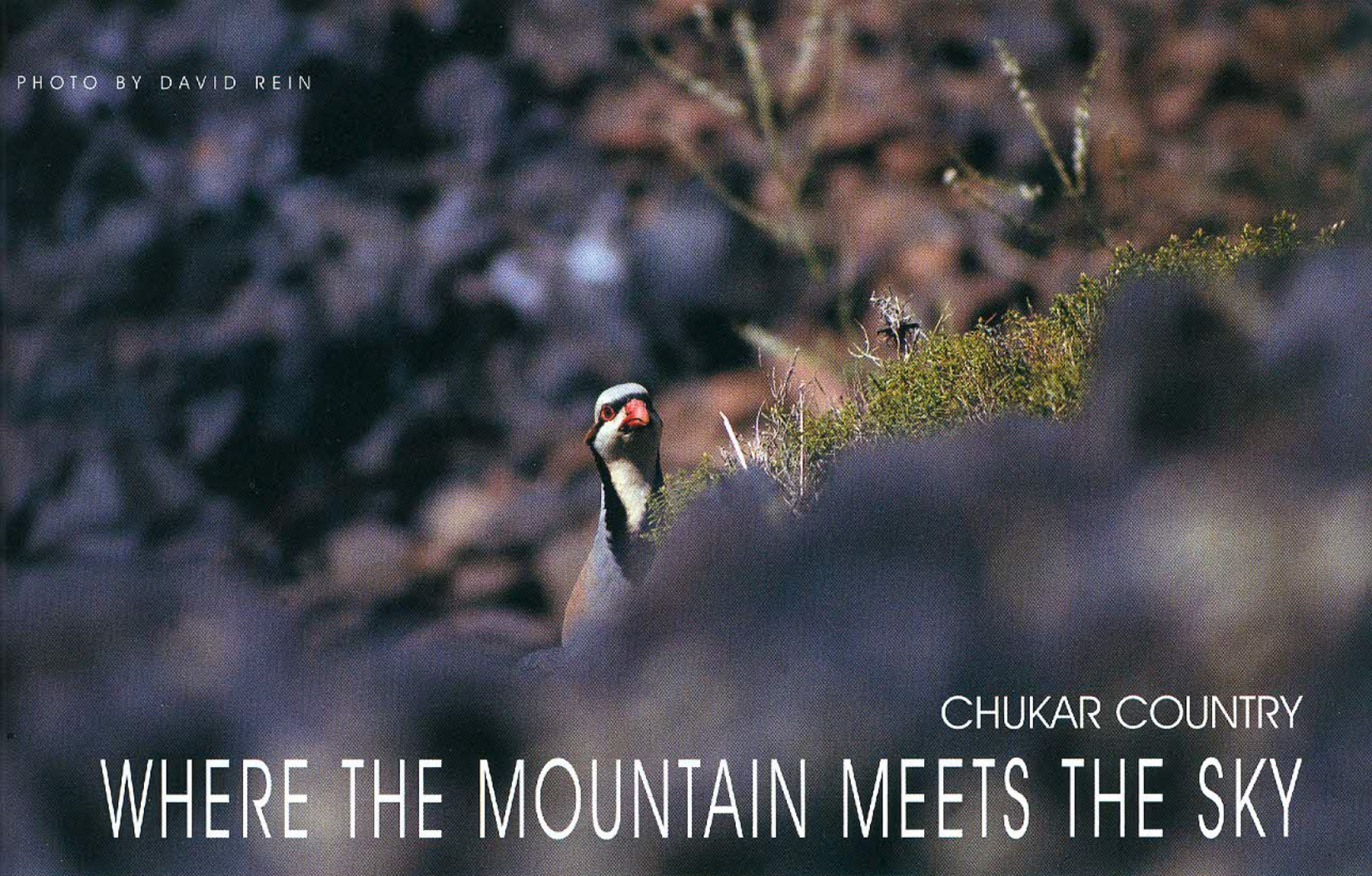
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of the dark side of the day

ADVENTURES IN HOME LIVING

SEASONINGS

Wining & Dining in the High Desert





CHUKAR COUNTRY

WHERE THE MOUNTAIN MEETS THE SKY

by GARY LEWIS

After the climb, I rested my shotgun on the slope and stopped to catch my breath. To the west, Steens Mountain stood dark against the pale sky. To the east, sagebrush and junipers stretched into the Alvord desert.

An ancient, narrow footpath leads uphill into the rimrock, and I wondered how many hunters had rested here over the centuries, looking for game in this dry country.

Neal wiped his forehead with the back of his hand and a wry smile tugged at the corner of his mouth. "You hunt chukar the first time for fun. After that, it's for revenge."

Neal's dog, Abby, and Ken's dog, Chase, both German shorthairs, had caught a wisp of scent. Chukars had led Chase and Abby on so many frustrated trails that they were steeped in revenge. There was little time to rest. We followed the dogs south under the rimrock, in a hurry to beat the setting sun.

Here, the land was dry and brown, the mountains rising steep out of the valley floor. Junipers clung to the lower slopes and cot-

tonwoods climbed some of the canyons. Green leaves, tinted with yellow, indicated water. And where you find water, you'll find chukar.

A transplant from Eurasia, chukar thrive in some of the most inhospitable land east of the Cascades. It is a land of pungent sage and blankets of yellow cheatgrass on an otherwise barren slope. It is howling wind, rocky mesas and jagged peaks.

A few canyons away, I could see an island of green in the sea of sage. That meant water. We scrambled out of the draw, over a finger ridge and into the next canyon. I guessed we would find birds soon. The tops of my legs burned with the exertion. I drank in gulps of cool, clean air and grinned at the realization that this was just a warm-up for tomorrow's hunt.

A sudden change had come over the dogs. Gone the playful prance and the endless back and forth. Chuffing, their noses locked to the ground, they sought the chukar beneath clumps of sage.

Ken and Neal were uphill when the covey broke. Ten birds, wings

