

# US AIRWAYS magazine

## Inside

October 2007



74  
ALTER  
EGO

CHUCK LEAVELL

**70 9 HOLES WITH...** Ian Baker-Finch

**74 ALTER EGO** Chuck Leavell

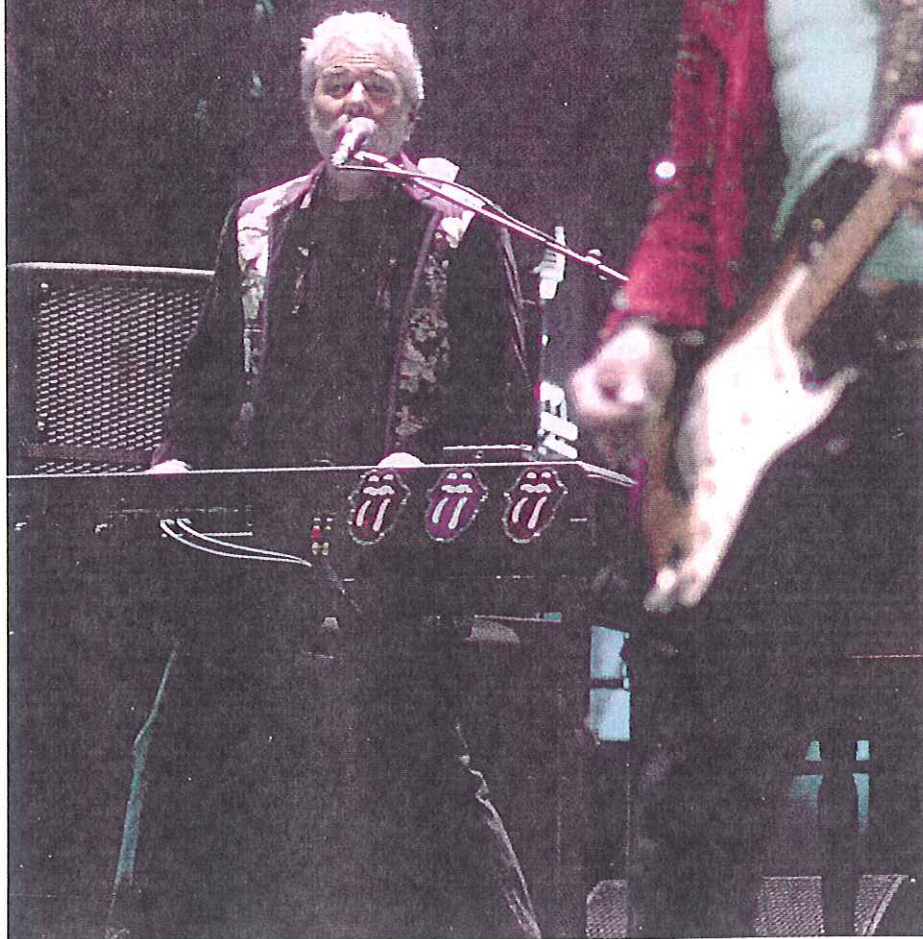
**76 VERBATIM** Marcia Gay Harden

**82 A GOOD READ** How to Argue

**172 PUZZLES** Crosswords, Sudoku, and More

## IN TUNE WITH NATURE

As an award-winning tree farmer and fervent conservationist, keyboard player Chuck Leavell brings a whole new meaning to "roots rock."



As a young teenager, Alabama native Chuck Leavell saw a Ray Charles concert and immediately set his sights on a musical career — and what a career it's been. He's perhaps best known for his piano work in the 1970s with The Allman Brothers Band and his own group, Sea Level. Since 1982 he's served as keyboardist for the Rolling Stones, both on the road and in the

studio, and he's recorded or performed with nearly 100 artists, including Chuck Berry, George Harrison, Eric Clapton, Charles Mingus, and Lee Ann Womack.

But when Leavell's wife, Rose Lane, inherited her grandmother's Georgia farmland in 1981, he embraced another job: tree farming. "The responsibility of family heritage, the stewardship of the land, fell on

our shoulders," says Leavell. "[It] was a diversified farm, with row crops, cattle, and timber, and I knew my musical career meant I couldn't handle much day-to-day activity." After examining all his options, Leavell decided that forestry made the most sense for him and his wife.

So he threw himself into research: He met with other landowners, attended seminars, and enrolled in correspondence courses. "I'd do my homework in hotel rooms or in the back of the Fabulous Thunderbirds' tour bus," Leavell says. Then he implemented his newfound knowledge on the farm, dubbed Charlane Plantation. To say his efforts paid off is an understatement: He's twice won the Georgia Tree Farmer of the Year award, and he and Rose Lane were named National Outstanding Tree Farmers of the Year in 1999.

Along the way, Leavell became a passionate advocate of forestry and conservancy causes. He now sits on the Board of Trustees of the American Forest Foundation, the Board of Directors for the U.S. Endowment for Forestry and Communities, and the Georgia Land Conservation Council. Leavell has coauthored two books about forestry, including one for kids called *The Tree Farmer*. "We need to give our children some understanding about the importance of nature and trees," he says, "because it won't be long before those children are walking into voting booths."

But as seriously as he takes his advocacy work, Leavell also has personal reasons to embrace his tree-farming life. "It makes for a perfect balance," he says. "I love traveling and playing music on big stages, and it's a great honor to work with the Rolling Stones. But after a while of doing that, I begin to miss my woods. I long to be in a green space — and I get to do that. When the tour's over, I get to come home and get on my tractor, get my hands dirty, and have some fun."

— Julia Alsbaugh Poole