

A photograph of a rustic log cabin interior. The walls are made of horizontal log sections with white chinking. A large wooden door with a decorative handle is open, leading to another room. A patterned rug is on the floor. To the right, there is a wooden table with two chairs and two lamps. A mounted rifle is on the wall.

BIG SKY JOURNAL HOME

Western Living and Architectural Design



HOMESTEAD HISTORY

A coveted location and longstanding history adds to the character of this Western home near Grand Teton National Park

PHOTOGRAPHY BY GORDON GREGORY

In the shadow of the Grand Teton Mountain range the Buffalo River sweeps out into willowed flats. This open river valley just a couple miles south of Grand Teton National Park is home to countless moose, sandhill crane, wolves, bears and is part of the elk migration corridor en route to their winter range. Because of its lush, but austere beauty its history is almost audible: Native American hunters thousands of years ago and into recent times; trappers and fur traders; homesteaders, cattle ranchers. The land here is abundant with wildlife, and worthy of preservation.

On an unassuming bluff at an oxbow of the river there is a house, quiet and reverent in the presence of this awesome landscape. Though spacious, it is simple in structure and materials; it does not try to compete with the drama of the Tetons. Instead,

Above: The Grand Tetons hover behind the lodge at dusk. Left: In the foyer round lodgepole beams space the rows of hanging lanterns above, complementing the muted hand-hewn log walls.

Right: The Harlowton moss rock fireplace towers 20-odd feet into the raftered ceiling, while the extraordinary views of the Tetons pour through a trio of French doors and windows.



its logs are washed with a century of exposure to the basic elements—sun, wind, rain, snow—lending it a stalwart quality that is testament to man’s history in this harsh country.

“Our goal was to make this large structure hunker down and disappear into the landscape, not shock the eye,” explained interior designer and project manager Diana Beattie.

Noted for her conscientious aesthetic and respect for Western history as well as for traditional craftsmanship, Beattie was integral in forming a plan for the 7,600-square-foot lodge that was built on this unusual piece of land in Teton County. She introduced Montana architect Larry Pearson of LPAIA and

builder Harry Howard of Yellowstone Traditions in Bozeman, Mont., to the owners in 1997. Together, this team drew on the historic qualities of homestead cabins and incorporated rustic materials with subtle originality.

Using 100-year-old hewn logs, Harlowton moss rock and cedar shingles for the roof, the house embraced the natural elements that truly make this a unique property. Harry Howard handpicked the logs that were reclaimed from various buildings throughout Montana and Wyoming. The central two-story portion of the house was restacked as the “original” homestead of the lodge, with adjoining wings crafted to look as though



they were added on over generations.

"The lodge was built to look old and it looks like it belongs there," said Roger Rink, who has managed the 570-acre ranch for over 20 years. "(The owner) intends to keep the ranch historically the way it has been, to preserve what little bit of the West we have here," Rink said. Historically the place has been a cattle ranch and it continues to operate as one, raising both working ranch horses and Corriente roping cattle for rodeo stock.

From the shade of the covered porch the entrance to the house foreshadows the intricate craftsmanship of the project. Inspired by traditional old-world carpentry, Beattie filled the home with uncommon details. Inset into the handcrafted front door is a bronze plaque depicting an Indian buffalo hunt by Charles Ramsay that was originally forged for the Manhattan Bridge in New York City. Through the door a welcoming foyer, warmly lit by hanging lanterns, reinforces the unassuming materials with a subdued hand-hewn wall of chinked logs.

Around the corner, the family room softly opens up to views of the Buffalo Valley and the Tetons just 25 miles away. Despite the temptation to showcase only the mountain range, the house draws attention inward through the use of warm



Clockwise from left: A pot rack chandelier designed by Diana Beattie to showcase cattle brands from neighboring ranches accents the warm-hued family and dining rooms.

Montana artisan David Laitinen wound old fishing reels and broken bamboo fly rods to make this handcrafted fishing table in the foyer.

Handmade bent willow chairs nest under the covered porch created by bark-on fir columns overlooking the Teton Range.

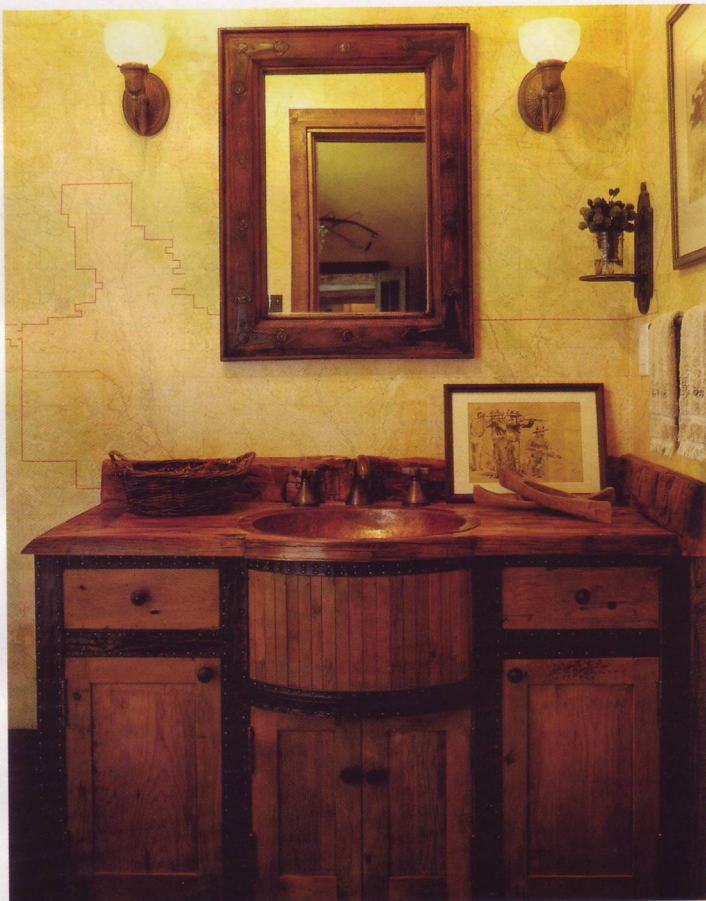




Above: The vibrant plaster walls in the guest bedroom add warmth to antique furnishings.

Left: Hand-washed topographical maps line the powder room walls.

Right: Nestled onto the hillside the lodge overlooks an oxbow of the Buffalo River.



textures, fabrics and artwork. The more obvious focal point is ever-present, but removed, fostered by the row of tall eight-paned windows. Each pane frames, yet somehow distances the famous vista into vignettes of itself. The effect is comforting and offers a sense of insulated shelter.

There was a time when this ranch was at the center of national controversy. Originally part of the John D. Rockefeller Jr. landholdings between 1926 and 1943, Rockefeller—one of America's richest men at the time—held 35,000 acres surrounding the Grand Teton National Park through his Snake River Land Company. His intent was to help expand the national park by donating the land to the U.S. government. But after repeated deadlocks in Congress due to private land rights and commercial ventures, the government refused to accept Rockefeller's gift. He pushed President Franklin D. Roosevelt to take action by threatening to put all his land up for sale to the public.

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In response, Roosevelt established the Jackson Hole National Monument. Despite numerous legal battles, the monument was finally incorporated into Grand Teton National Park in 1950.

This small ranch on the edge of that original land mass remained in private ownership. According to Rink, in 1955 the ranch was sold to Carly Johnson. It changed hands a couple more times before the current owner purchased it in 1991. The new house was finished in 1999 and an existing guesthouse was redesigned by another Montana architect, Candace Tillotson-Miller. But what's most important is that the land's legacy continues to shape the people who live here.

"This property was part of the original conservation project in America," said Pearson. "That has been passed down to the next generation and (the current owner) continues that

same sense of stewardship toward the land."

In that vein, LPAIA and Yellowstone Traditions embraced their sense of purpose with this building and carefully created a structure that did not call attention to itself or try to compete with the landscape. Set into a hillside, the house does not interfere with the viewshed and its footprint is meant to be light on the land.

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Staying consistent with the artistry of hewn logs on the outside, interior furnishings echo the artisanal traditions of



master craftsmen. From the foyer's fishing table by David Laitinen embellished with old fly fishing reels and bamboo fly rods to the custom-built desk and library by rustic artist Diane Cole, Beattie commissioned the region's most talented furniture makers.

Beattie was determined to infiltrate the home with personal detail to the degree that she sewed pillows out of antique fabric and hand-stitched bed skirts herself. But her dedication to the project is best displayed in the home's two powder rooms, where Beattie papered the walls with topographic maps and color washed them for a vintage look; she carefully positioned the maps to display landmarks such as Old Faithful and Jackson Hole for added interest. The result, she said, is worth it, since guests tend to spend more time in these rooms trying to locate historical sites or the exact location of the ranch.

Vibrant colors drawn from nature resonate with Beattie's dedication to honest western design. In the family room and kitchen an ochre yellow draws on the Balsam Root wildflowers that bloom on the ranch in the summer. While the texture

of river rock plaster remains neutral against the weathered browns of the wood elsewhere in the house, in an upstairs bedroom the vibrant wine-stain orange plaster mimics the color of Wyoming cliffs.

"In my profession many of us are asked to build 'castle ranches' today for our clients," admitted Beattie. "I am firmly committed to the idea that we are trespassing against nature and in trade we should at least make them disappear into the surrounding landscape... that is probably why I use so much brown and only washed colors of greens, khaki and salmons and prefer natural fabrics and, most of all, only used aged wood."

In the end, the house does suit its surroundings. It endures the same elements as the land, the same winters, the same hot summers and in the bigger picture it is a luxury that seems insignificant compared to the vast horizon that engulfs it.

"Up in this country you don't change a whole lot, you don't change this country," said Rink. ■

— Seabring Davis

WALTER 'GATOR' RIVERS

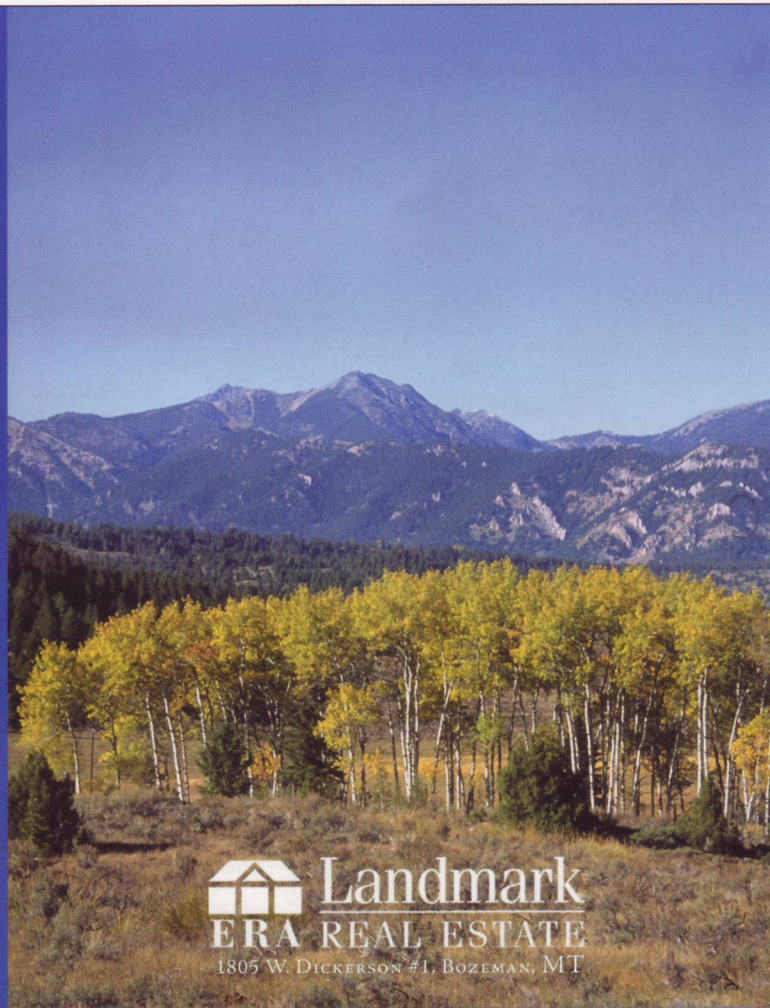
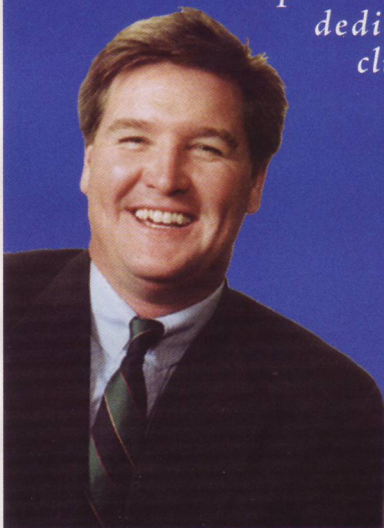
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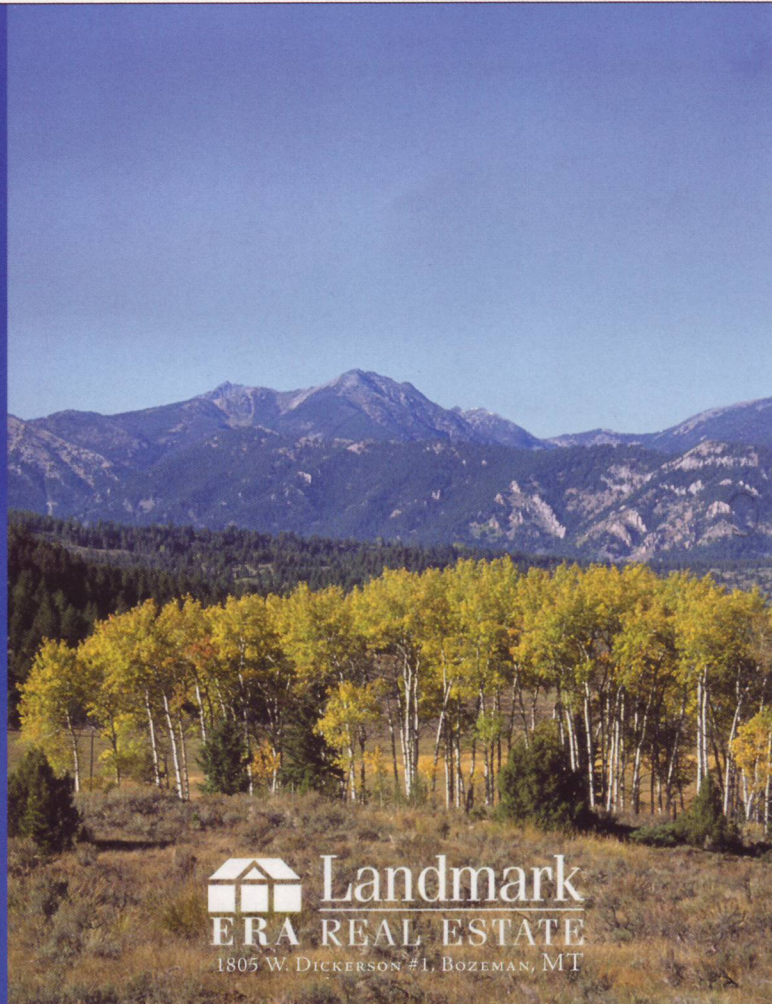
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