

# BIG SKY JOURNAL HOME

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# Summer Camp

Miller Architects creates a compound that brings one family together for the ultimate Montana idyll

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If you could recreate the idyll of your childhood summer camp — what would it look like? Think of the cool splash of water on a hot day, running barefoot through grass, eating grilled cheese in bathing suits, roasting marshmallows around a campfire, a deep night sky pinholed with stars, finally falling asleep at the end of the longest day of your life, flashlight in hand, smile on your lips and not a thought in your head, but for the relief

**Previous page:** Every room in the cabin leads to the outdoors, as with this corner sleeping porch that connects the stream to the master bedroom. **Left:** Proving that small spaces don't need to be limiting, Miller Architects designed a cook's kitchen, with Wolf appliances, granite countertops and plenty of storage. **Above:** Builder Yellowstone Traditions handcrafted and installed built-in shelves and storage with custom detailing, such as diamond pattern twigwork. **Right:** Combining custom-made contemporary furnishings with antiques and original artwork, Haven Design, crafted interiors that feel as timeless as the rustic architecture.





**Above:** In the master bedroom, lush linens and a roaring fire epitomize the beauty of cabin life. **Right:** Yellowstone Traditions finished the master bath with rustic branch detailing on the vanity and bathtub surround. **Opposite:** Two "cabins" are joined as a duplex by shared outdoor spaces to create a family camp. • Compact bunks maximize space while adding a playful aspect to the interior design.



of a soft pillow.

Translate that to architecture and you might have to be a little more *specific*, but, in the end if you could design a place that felt even half as sweet as those memories, you'd jump at the chance. That's just how one family approached their ranch property in Paradise Valley, Montana. They wanted to build a gathering place for family that was carefree and inviting.

After a decade of searching, the family found a ranch property at the base of the Absarokas. Working with Candace Tillotson-Miller, principal of

Livingston, Montana's Miller Architects, they considered the options for building a guest cabin on the 3,000 acres. Although it was tempting to build high, to take advantage of incredible valley views, Miller encouraged the owners to cultivate the focus of the family compound on the natural water features that abound in the shady bottomland.

With the practicality of multiple families in mind, Miller crafted a private cabin, ensconced by willows and tall cottonwoods next to the flow of creek, a deep pond and an outlet stream. Using stone and round logs with their rich, textured imperfections, the home is subdued and blends easily with the surrounding landscape.

"Working with these clients meant understanding that this [property] is going to be in the family for a lifetime," stated Miller. "This cabin serves to bring them together."

Walking up to the guesthouse, you are greeted by the sound of water and then by the beckoning flagstone path that leads to a covered front porch. The weathered rocking chairs and wide steps encourage guests to linger here. Constructed as a duplex, the front porch acts as a welcoming crossroads to two identical doors that mirror each other in every way. The homeowners wanted to provide private quarters for their children and grandchildren — with separate kitchens, bedrooms and living areas, yet ample opportunity to gather outside in shared spaces. The affect is both respite and revolving door, as siblings and cousins interchangeably flow between one part of the cabin to the next throughout their extended visits.

True to the intimate size of a traditional cabin, Miller designed each room with the idea of maximizing space. Niche storage was seamlessly cultivated into the wall of the open living and dining area with intricately detailed twigwork in a diamond pattern that is repeated on the exterior gable of the



cabin and then back inside within other handcrafted furnishings. The family cooks and shares meals together regularly, so the kitchen is equipped with Wolf appliances and chef-worthy granite countertops, yet the refrigerator is clad with hand-notched woodwork to blend with the cabinets, built-in shelves and peeled logs of the cabin and therefore to create continuity in a relatively small area.

Using aged timbers, Miller Architects and the builder, Yellowstone Traditions of Bozeman, crafted a timeless structure that echoes the simplistic style of log buildings that pepper the region. Working with interior designers Debra Shull and Phoebe McEldowney of Haven Design, Miller achieved a delicate balance of comfort and scale. The cabins are cozy, not cramped, to accomplish this Haven designed the furniture and had nearly all of it custom-made to fit the space.

"This client wanted us to create something that was comfortable and warm," said Shull. "They wanted it to feel timeless and collected."

Haven's signature approach is to create a feeling, to let the architecture speak for itself and to make home interiors flow naturally rather than seem contrived. With a mix of antiques, new furnishings and original artwork that doesn't overpower the texture of the materials in the structure, the

rooms of the cabin feel casual and gracious.

"We are trying to create a tapestry within an interior, where all the pieces speak to each other, but they don't match exactly," she explained.

Continuing the casual camp style outside, where a deep porch and patio transition to a soothing outdoor setting, Shull utilized some of the same hickory furniture and fabrics as she did inside. Every room in the house leads to the outdoors — screened sleeping porches off the master suites are steps from the creek and bunkrooms open out back to a wild playground where days of boating, fishing and riding await. Out there, the trout-stocked pond calls on a hot summer's day, the water clear and clean. The sound of water is soft and constant. As sun filters through the trees, it's easy to see how the amble of time spent here could fill a hundred nights of campfire stories and a lifetime of memories. ■

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