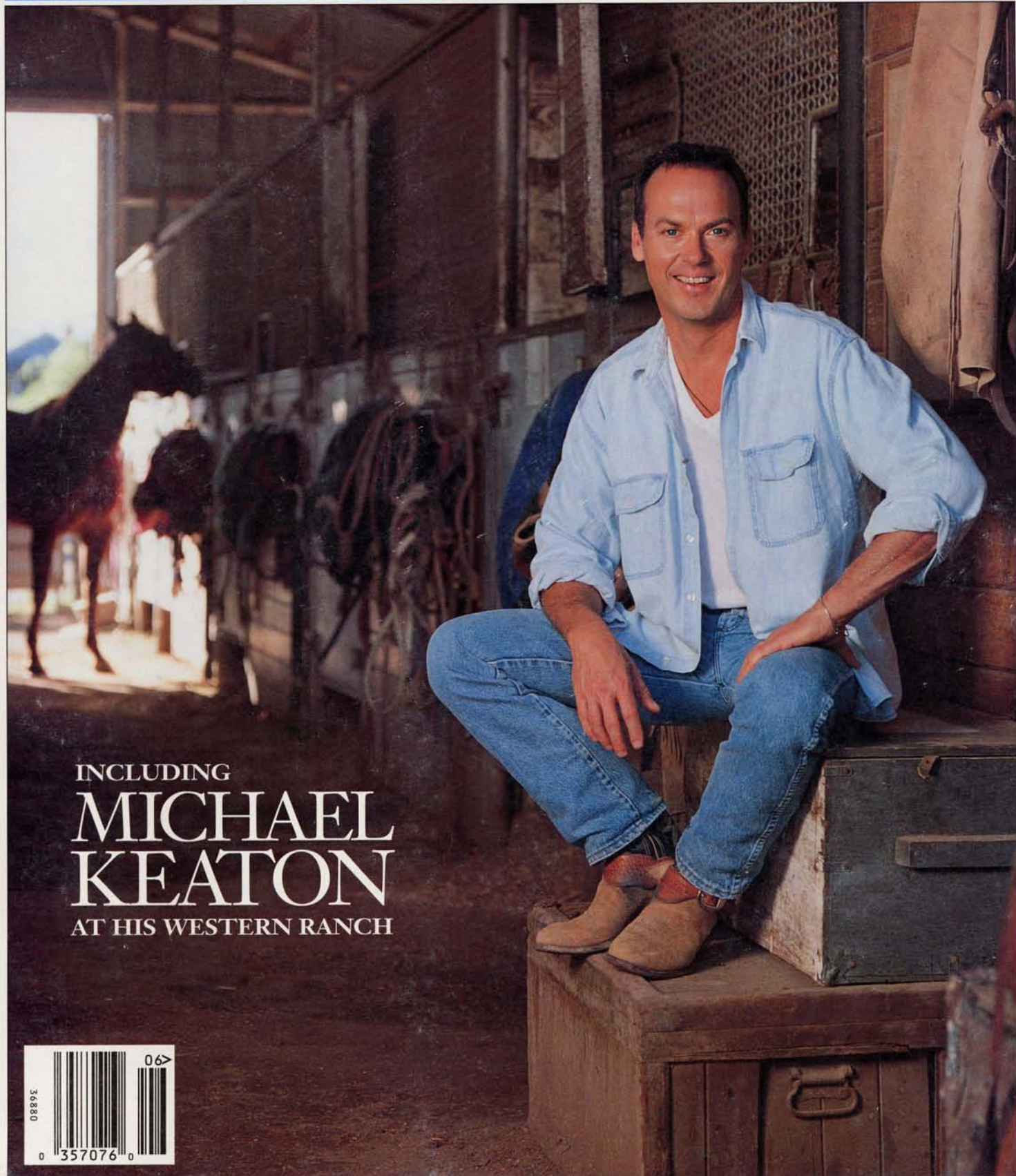


ARCHITECTURAL DIGEST

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ALL-AMERICAN COUNTRY HOUSES!



INCLUDING
**MICHAEL
KEATON**
AT HIS WESTERN RANCH





A MONTANA LANDSCAPE

CORRAL CREEK RANCH REFINES
THE WESTERN VERNACULAR



*Architecture by Larry Pearson, AIA, Harry Howard,
Dennis Derham and David Leavengood, AIA
Interior Design by Hilary Heminway*

Text by Elizabeth Clair Flood/Photography by Roger Wade

The first time Pam Rentschler saw Montana's Madison Valley, wide open and surrounded by rolling sagebrush hills and aspen- and pine-covered mountains, she nearly blushed. "You know when you see the person who gives you butterflies and you can't explain why—the goose bumps and the fluttering of the stomach? That's what happened to me when I saw the Madison Valley."

This encounter occurred several years ago when she and her husband-to-be, Fred Rentschler, were scouring the

Rockies for the perfect ranch to be their primary residence. In the previous ten years he had looked at eighty ranches without any luck.

"I was searching for a beautiful place in the northern Rockies, but the most important criterion was that it have the smells and sounds of the West," says Fred Rentschler, who has vivid childhood memories of the Rocky Mountains. When they drove onto Corral Creek Ranch, a three-thousand-acre working cattle operation with a main house and a few outbuildings, they were im-

"It had to relate to its spectacular surroundings," says Pam Rentschler of the log house she shares with her husband, Fred, at their Corral Creek Ranch in Montana. LEFT: The main lodge was designed by Larry Pearson, who worked with Harry Howard and Dennis Derham.

ABOVE: The wraparound porch at the entrance takes full advantage of the commanding views of the Madison Valley and the mountainous wilderness beyond. The structure is a combination of western red cedar, pine logs, hand-scribed tree roots and flagstone paving.

pressed but uncertain. They were curious enough, however, to return for a second look.

“What really captured us right away was the silence and the game and the secluded nature of the ranch—the way it tucks into its own little valley,” he says.

When they went back for another visit and found the Corral Creek Ranch sign gone, their hearts sank. Happily, the property hadn't been sold, as they had feared. The sign was just being repainted, so they purchased the place on the spot. Subsequently, on a rainy spring day, a Virginia City preacher married them on the living room hearth. After they took their vows, they stepped outside and saw two golden eagles fly through a rainbow. “We thought it was all pretty spectacular and a marvelous way to start a lifelong union,” Fred Rentschler says.

To enhance the property without intruding on the land, the Rentschlers sought the guidance of local talent. They worked closely with Harry Howard and Dennis Derham's Yellowstone Traditions, a Bozeman building company, and with two architects, David Leavengood of Seattle and Larry Pearson of Bigfork, Montana.

Instead of immediately bulldozing the existing 1940s house and erecting a new lodge, the Rentschlers decided to start improving the place slowly so that they could acquaint themselves with the land. They invited Howard on a horseback ride to the outer reaches of their acreage and asked him if he could put

“We wanted everything to be in keeping with the history of the area,” says interior designer Hilary Hem-inway. “The living room is elegant enough for the art yet practical enough for muddy boots.” Sofas from National Upholstering Company. Ralph Lauren fabric on armchair to the left of the fireplace. Stark carpet.





BY CONTINUING TO USE NATIVE WOOD AND STONE, THEY “WERE ACTUALLY BUILDING HISTORY INTO THE LODGE.”

BELOW: The living room’s western artifacts include a Native American breastplate, right, that was interwoven with antique French beads. Mimi London armoire and ottoman. Quadrille small pillow and ottoman fabric. Rug, Elizabeth Eakins. Summer Hill chenille on National Upholstering Company oversize chairs.

OPPOSITE: “In the dining room, as throughout the house, I kept in mind what you’re looking at outdoors,” explains Heminway. “Nothing inside should overshadow that.” The table was built with an organically shaped base to echo the log uprights. Mimi London suede-and-leather chairs.



up a line camp, a cabin where they could stay overnight. With recycled wood from a stockyard on the Flying D Ranch nearby, he soon built the log cabin. To make it look authentic, he and his crew used tools such as adzes and broadaxes.

Next, along with Leavengood, Howard designed a small fishing cabin. Reminiscent of sod homestead shanties, it was laid out as a one-room structure with a stone fireplace, no indoor plumbing and a sod roof; in the sum-

mer the grasses grow over it.

Finally, the Rentschlers turned their attention to the main house. One of the most critical decisions was its placement. Howard, Pearson and Fred Rentschler chose to keep the original footprint of the house and part of the two stone fireplaces. The previous builders had selected that particular location for good reason: There was water there, and the area was protected from the elements.

Pearson’s lodge design, encompassing some 8,600

square feet, oriented the house to the vistas and exposures. “The intention was not to isolate the building but to pull you into the environment,” he explains.

Howard and Derham, experienced in restoring old park buildings and historic ranches, strove to emulate a native style. “We wanted the place to look like it had been there a hundred years,” notes Howard. The key to their success was using indigenous materials such as hand-hewn wood salvaged from primi-

tive structures and deadfall lodgepole pine and stone from the property and surrounding areas. By employing Montana craftspeople to forge iron, lay stone, saddle-notch timbers and make furniture, they brought warmth, texture and the appearance of age to the lodge.

Pearson says that by continuing to use native wood and stone, they “were actually building history into the lodge.” Yellowstone Traditions incorporated much of the existing ranch house into





the interior. A number of components refer to vintage western buildings. Red-cedar trunks frame the front entrance, as they line the lobby at Glacier National Park's Lake McDonald Lodge. The indoor rustic wood balcony resembles the banister fashioned by Robert C. Reamer for Yellowstone's Old Faithful Inn. And a vaulted ceiling was crafted in a traditional purlin, ridge and rafter assembly, a configuration rarely seen because it is so labor intensive.

To come up with a luxurious yet practical interior, Pam Rentschler collaborated with designer Hilary Heminway, who divides her time between her house in Con-

necticut and her cabin on the West Boulder River just outside McLeod, Montana.

"The first and foremost thing on their minds was comfort," Heminway says. The couple asked for "an inviting house where people could relax and feel at home." Fred Rentschler wanted a masculine lodge with nothing frilly. His wife, who had always dreamed of living in a log house and had a binder of clippings of cabins from magazines dating back some twenty years, was full of ideas.

Heminway opted for durable fabrics and furniture; the house had to be functional. "I don't think silk and spurs go together," she observes.

Leather sofas offer hardy seats for lounging dogs and for cowboys and others wearing blue jeans with rivets. She avoided using antiques. "Why bring in a French marquetry table? The dryness will just pop the veneer out of it." Instead, when she and Pam Rentschler needed a bed, kitchen chairs or a table or a cabinet, for example, they commissioned either Cody, Wyoming, furniture makers or Yellowstone Traditions to build them.

The couple's love and appreciation of western art and culture permeates Corral Creek Ranch. A respect for detail is evident throughout as well, in the wrought iron

"The master bedroom had so much window that we had to strike a balance between the light and the vistas and the desire for privacy and darkness for sleeping," says Heminway. "We also redid the fireplace." Brunswick & Fils diamond-pattern fabric. Stark solid-color carpet.



switch plates, the hand-beaded leather draperies and the exacting masonry.

The Rentschlers' collection, which includes works by western artists such as Albert Bierstadt, Olaf Wieghorst, Eanger Irving Couse, Bill Nebeker and Scott Christensen, was an important factor in the layout. "In many cases we designed around a specific piece," Heminway points out. Yet nowhere in the rooms does the art take center stage. "There's the Bierstadt, but it doesn't scream at you to look at it," she says. "If you happen to pass down the hall, you'll see it there. It's that kind of thing that makes you feel comfortable in this house." □

ABOVE: Saddled horses stand before the stable, which was made out of recycled pine logs and native fieldstone. "It was crafted with basic tools: a chain saw, an ax, a sledgehammer and string lines," says Howard. **LEFT:** A small sod-roofed fishing cabin overlooks the creek.