

JANUARY-FEBRUARY 2004 \$5.50

VERANDA



Grand Teton
Mountain Range
presents a majestic
backdrop at Fir Creek
Ranch near Jackson,
Wyoming.



LOGGED ON

FIR CREEK RANCH

INTERIOR DESIGN BY DIANA BEATTIE
ARCHITECTURE BY LARRY PEARSON
PHOTOGRAPHY BY MARK DARLEY/ESTO
TEXT BY TOM WOODHAM





“**M**an is important in the East,” observes interior designer Diana Beattie, referencing the dense cities on America’s East Coast. “In the West it’s all about nature.” Especially the wide open landscape of Montana and Wyoming, with Yellowstone and Grand Teton National Parks at its heart.

In close proximity to these wondrous natural preserves stands Fir Creek Ranch, a collaboration among the homeowners, Beattie, architect Larry Pearson and general contractor Harry Howard of Yellowstone Traditions. “The house overlooks the Buffalo River, which joins the Snake as it flows west,” says Howard. “To put something in an environment that is perfect already, you have to be as quiet and indigenous as possible.”

Beattie agrees. The New York-based designer has an impressive client list and can drape silk brocade with the best, but she is also a Montana ranch owner and has been a judge at the Western Design Conference in Cody, Wyoming. “I like natural materials and traditional references,” she affirms.

Both are abundant at Fir Creek Ranch. The Teton Mountains loom majestically and powerfully beyond the homestead, which hunkers down below grazing fields, behind jackleg fencing. “They’re gentle against the cows and horses,” Beattie says of the horizontal lodgepole lengths suspended between X-shaped uprights. “It is also sturdy and doesn’t require digging any holes.”

Front door features a restrrike bronze plaque of an Indian buffalo hunt by Charles Cary Rumsey, originally forged for the Manhattan Bridge in New York City. Hewn timbers and round lodge poles define the foyer. Custom ceiling lanterns from Period Lighting Fixtures. Virginia slave quarters door painted by “Tobe,” c. 1820-1840, becomes art. *Lewis and Clark, Dusk on the Upper Missouri*, by Montana artist Todd Connor, hangs over a table hand crafted by Montana artisan David Laitinen from old bamboo fly rods and reels with small worm-wood pine poles.











PRECEDING PAGES, LEFT: Towering fireplace of Harlowton moss rock was crafted by Rod Cranford and Son. Crate and Barrel seating; sofa fabric from Cowtan & Tout. Handcrafted furnishings include sconces by Cloud Bird and David Laitinen's twig-patterned coffee table. Elkhorn Designs fallow deer chandelier. Antique floor lamps with blackened copper shades. *Blackfeet Camp at Crescent Moon* by Michael Coleman above mantel. Tufenkian carpet. PRECEDING PAGES, RIGHT: Dining room table crafted by Todd Gardenier of Yellowstone Traditions. Hines paisley on Flat Rock Furniture chairs. Chandelier, designed by Diana Beattie and forged by Elkhorn Designs, features brands of neighboring ranches. Tim Shinabarger's bronze sculpture *Sundown*. Kilim carpet.

Lodgepole pines, Douglas firs and aspens stretch up nearby slopes. "The color of wood used for a house should replicate the bark color of tree trunks, so the house settles in, forming a muted palette," says Beattie. "The near single tonality of the building—almost 7,400 square feet—was achieved by using 100-year-old hewn logs, Harlowton moss rock for foundation and chimneys, and now sun-grayed cedar shingles for roofing."

Beattie did extensive research for the project. She found inspiration in Harvey H. Kaiser's *Great Camps of the Adirondacks*, a definitive work about the upstate New York style. But she needed more: She wanted to experi-

ence the architecture and craftsmanship of the camps firsthand. With typical pluck, she borrowed a boat and paddled for four hours to see the great old camps, including Marjorie Meriwether Post's Topridge and the Rockefeller estate, The Point. The theme for Fir Creek Ranch was set.

Pearson, based in Bozeman, Montana, "restacked" old logs to achieve the desired rafter ceiling heights. The bedroom plaster wall was colored and glazed by Jennifer Bessen to bounce light. Log-wall windows are deeply recessed to lighten interiors during the day. "It's all about the view outside," Beattie explains. "It comes to you surrounded by a dark theater of logs." The hewn-log living room gets an added punch with two red chenille sofas, and tea-stained kilim rugs offer a soft transition to the circular-sawn fir flooring throughout.

One of the rewards of any endeavor is teaching, and Beattie imparts knowledge through suggestion. Many of the young carpenters who worked on the house had not done the kind of elaborate branch work embellishment reminiscent of the Adirondack style. "I'd say, 'Make this a little more whimsical, stretch those arches, use bark-on cedar.' I introduced foreman Gary Zundel and his carpenters to traditional, creative woodworking, and they liked it. They even became competitive and tried to outdo each other."

Beattie is intuitive about what her clients will like. She selected ninety-two works of art—oils, old Harper's prints, sculpture, etchings, bronzes—and the homeowners bought all but three. She also likes to correlate art and artifacts. "The clients wanted historical subjects, such as a Civil War rifle they had purchased at an antiques show. I found a painting, *Lewis and Clark, Dusk on the Upper Missouri*, by a young Montana artist, Todd Connor. One of the men in the painting has a rifle slung over his shoulder. The scene also shows the oxbow of the Missouri River that references the oxbow of the Buffalo River just outside the house. The rifle hangs above the painting in the entrance hall."



Early settlers often brought family heirlooms with them, so the use of European or American antiques is appropriate in the West. The twenty-eight antiques shops in Woodbury, Connecticut, turn out to be Beattie's secret cache. "There is Old Hickory all over the place. I bought chairs, tables and a double swing." She also found a restrike of a bronze plaque by Charles Cary Rumsey of an Indian buffalo hunt, originally forged for the Manhattan Bridge in New York City. It now adorns the front door.

What she couldn't find she asked artisans to fabricate. David Laitinen hand crafted a table in the entry by combining old bamboo fishing rods and reels

with small wormwood pine poles. A hidden shelf offers space for the owner's fly rods. In the dining room, a pot rack chandelier features the brands of neighboring ranches, aged conchos and sheep-hide shades. "The Women's Cattle Association has these brands printed on their napkins. I just circled the ones they wanted, took the napkin to Elkhorn Designs in Jackson and had the chandelier made."

Diana Beattie has put her own special brand of refined sensibility on Fir Creek Ranch. It is a working ranch with longhorn roping cattle and quarter horses, but it is also conserved, a haven for wildlife. And for its owners and their friends. □

OPPOSITE: Sliding barn door affords privacy for master bedroom suite. East Indian trellised doors create unique bed. Chandelier from Elkhorn Designs. Reading lamps by O'Lampia Studio. Khyber Collection rug from Pakistan. ABOVE: Back porch offers sweeping views of the Tetons framed by bark-on cedar posts and zig-zag, lodgepole railings. Old Hickory chairs, tables and double swing settee from the 1930s. Pillows sewn from old Beacon blankets. Period Lighting sconce lanterns. FOLLOWING PAGES: Sheep fescue planted around the house references the grassy riverbed through which the ox-bow of Buffalo River meanders, and newly planted aspens harmonize with the natural beauty of lodgepole pine and Douglas fir trees on the slopes.

