

THE PREMIER MAGAZINE OF THE WEST

COWBOYS & INDIANS

NOVEMBER 2001



Clint Black & Lisa Hartman

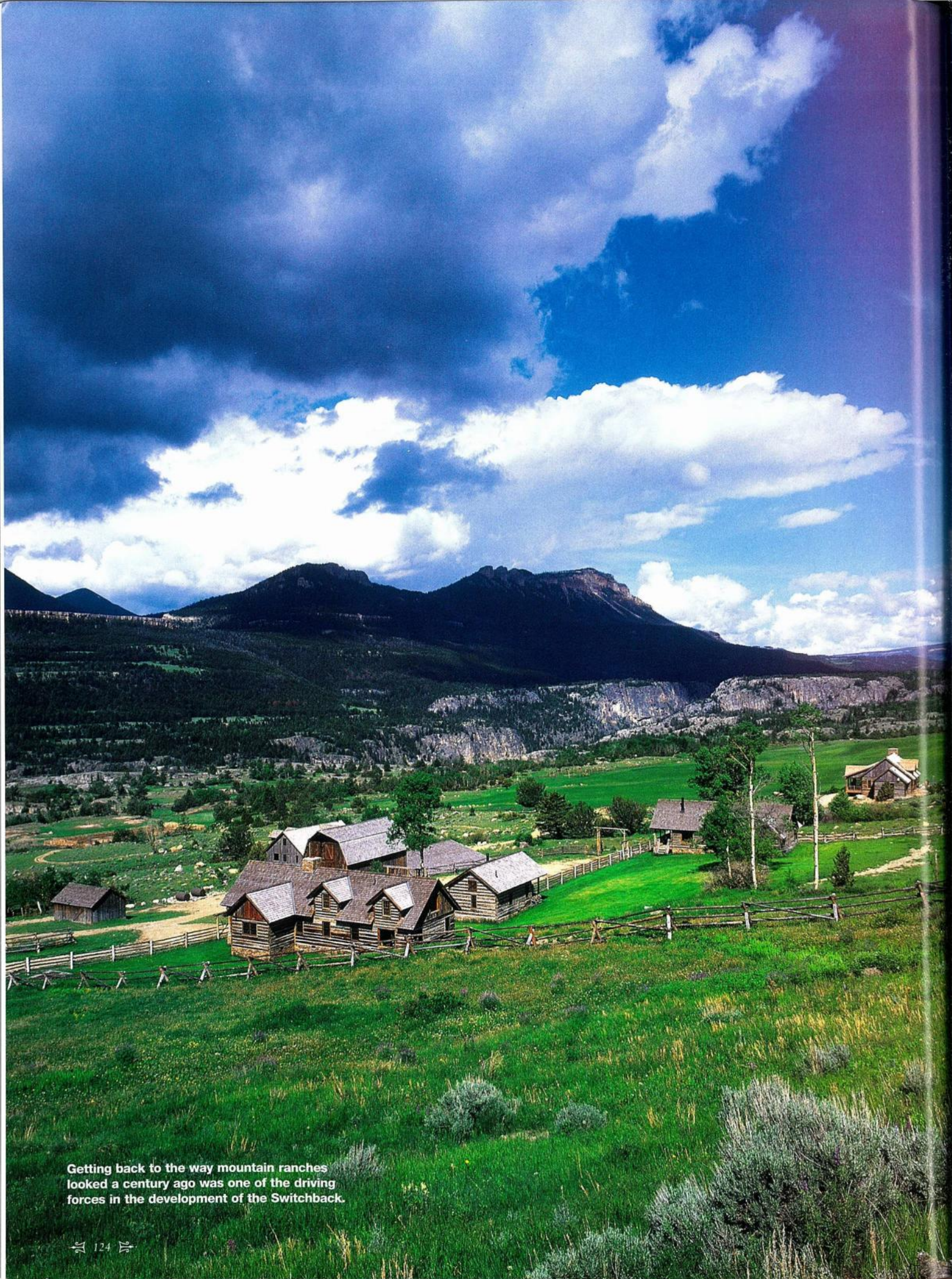
A NEW CAREER
FOR NASHVILLE'S
FAVORITE COUPLE

- 50 Coolest Things About Skiing
- His & Hers Gift Ideas
- Navajo Weaving Guide
- Throw the Perfect Western Party

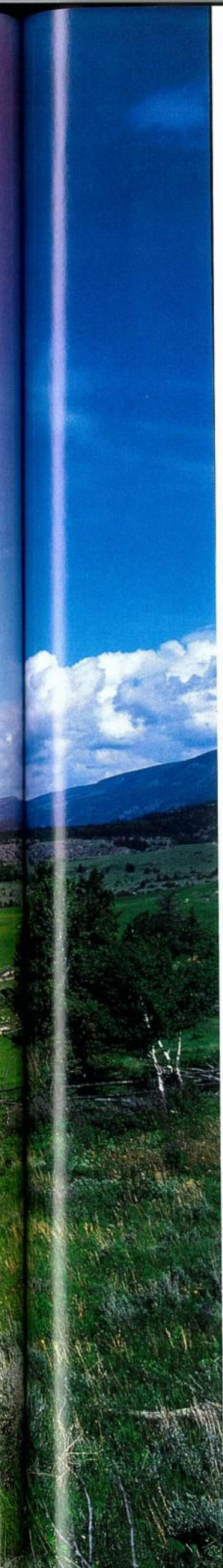
www.cowboysindians.com

\$5.00US \$6.50CAN





Getting back to the way mountain ranches looked a century ago was one of the driving forces in the development of the Switchback.



COWBOYS

INDIANS

Resettling the West

OLD WEST STYLE AND NEW WEST SENSIBILITIES
COME TOGETHER AT THE SWITCHBACK RANCH



h	o	m	e
I N T E R I O R			
By	Melissa Jones		

If you had to bet on one spot on the map that has, at one time or another, hosted such well-knowns as Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid's Hole in the Wall Gang, Buffalo Bill Cody, the real-life Jeremiah Johnson, Will Rogers, Roy Rogers and Dale Evans, and saddle maker Ed Bohlin, you might put all your money on someplace safe, a highly populated watering hole like The Brown Palace Hotel in Denver or maybe Dodge City. But you'd be wrong.

Western characters and the lore they've left behind have always run thick as thieves through the high-altitude terrain that now makes up the 70,000-acre Switchback Ranch cattle operation in Wyoming and Montana. It was in this same alpine country that Chief Joseph fled from the U.S. Army in the late 1800s, around the time when the first families were beginning to set up their government-issued homesteads.

photography by Will Brewster



A riverstone fireplace and Western collectibles warm the great room in one of Switchback's houses.

Mind you, the characters who spent their lives—or at least their glory days—in this wilderness country didn't set out with the intention of being associated with any group of people, famous or not. Some were on the run or looking for another bank to rob. Some were in need of inspiration or solace. Others just wanted to sit and listen to nothing but the sound of things watching them, enjoy the view, and whittle their initials into the porch post of an old grizzly-scratched cabin that functions as a remote cow camp during the summer months on the upper grazing units above 10,000 feet. Whatever inspired their journeys to the West's wildest country, one thing is for sure: These folks wanted to get away from it all.

COWBOYS

Yellowstone National Park is due west of the Switchback, and the Absaroka and Beartooth Mountains make themselves known with some 60 snow-covered peaks.

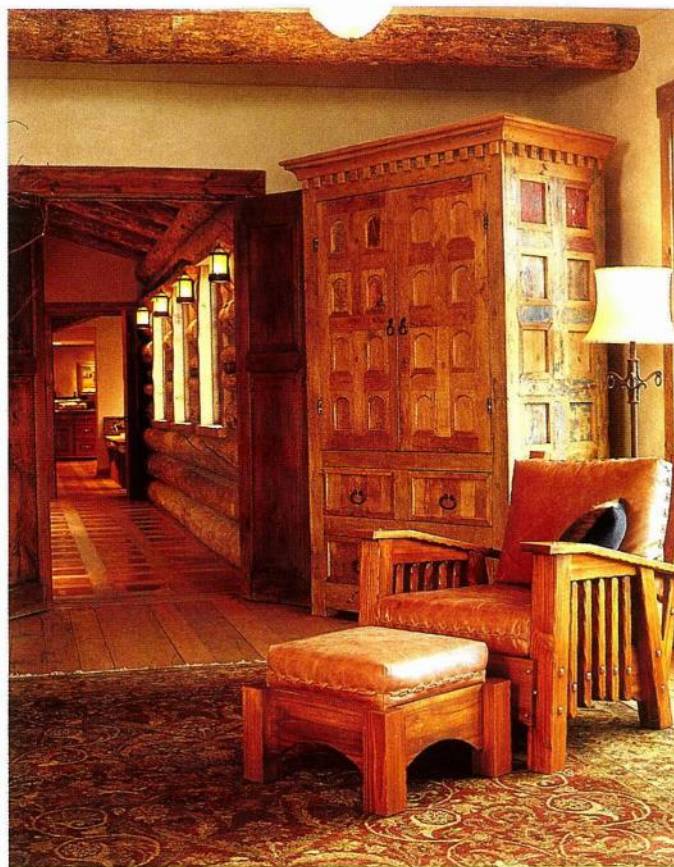
INDIANS

The beauty of Switchback Ranch is in its remoteness. Today the ranch is divided by the Beartooth Mountains into two parts: the Lower Switchback in Montana, and the Upper Switchback in Wyoming's Sunlight Basin. Upper Switchback proper is virtually unreachable by conventional methods of transportation. Planes, helicopters, and horses can easily make the trek; however, climbing the 1,800-vertical-foot mountain trail into the ranch by ATV is an experience that truly drives home the significance of the ranch's name.

By definition, a switchback is a road with many hairpin curves that is so narrowly constructed—usually about six feet in width—that rounding a corner is impossible without bringing a vehicle to a complete stop, backing up, and realigning it with the direction in which the road is winding. The road leading up to the ranch involves maneuvering 23 switchbacks that are etched out of a narrow ledge with a 90-degree wall to one side and a sheer 1,800-foot drop on the other.

Any human being who enters these parts is immediately relieved of the burden of being at the top of the food chain, and will find that he slots in at an easy third. Yellowstone National Park is due west of the Switchback, and the Absaroka and Beartooth Mountains make themselves known with some 60 snow-covered peaks scratching up against the year-round, snow-heavy sky. Wildlife such as wolves, mountain goats, bighorn sheep, moose, elk, mountain lions, black bears, grizzly bears, and mule deer make their homes in the tangle of wood, water, and mountains that opens onto the Sunlight Basin. This—as the locals are known to say—is what's better known as grizzly heaven.

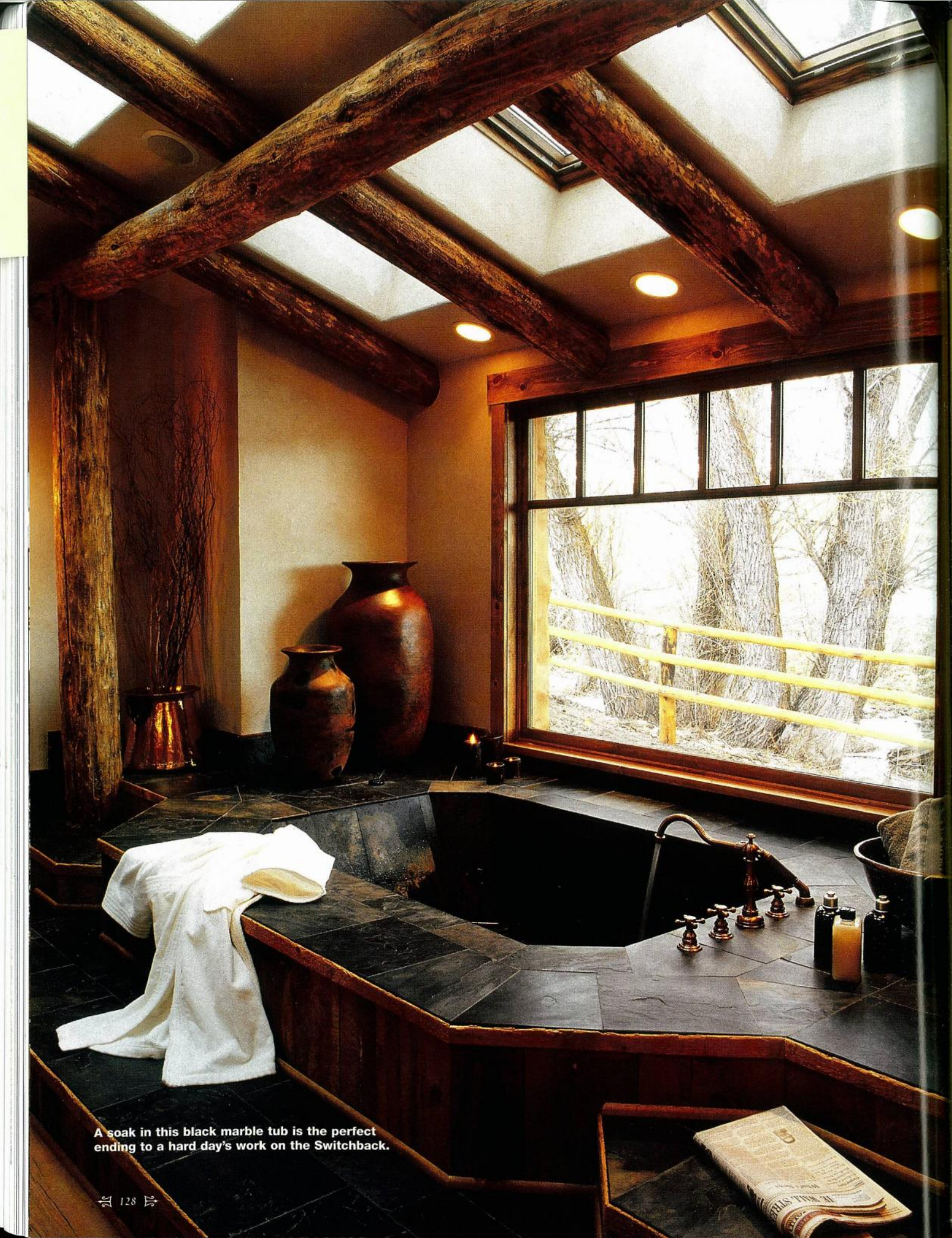
Unlike their surroundings, the ranch's houses and buildings spare nothing in their intent to provide every human comfort



Rustic furniture inspired by Thomas Molesworth adds comfort and style to the mountain ranch feeling of this room and the guest house interiors.



A collection of classic Western images by the renowned photographer Edward Curtis encircles the banquet-style table in the dining room.



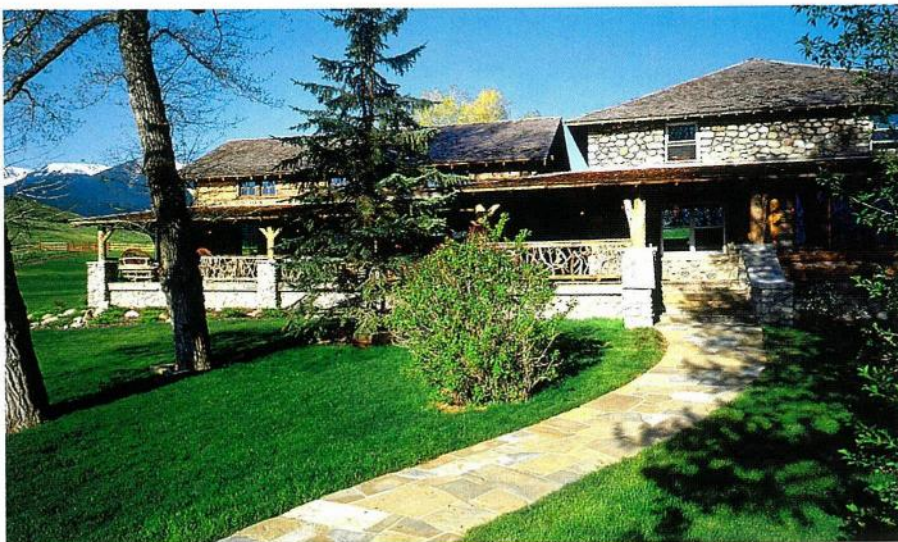
A soak in this black marble tub is the perfect ending to a hard day's work on the Switchback.



The annual branding, which covers 4-5 days each summer, is a major social event on the ranch with many local cowboys and neighbors pitching in.



Many of the houses on Switchback were historic structures from the area that were disassembled, flown in, and then rebuilt or redesigned by noted architect Jon Foote.



The siting of this Switchback porch provides a stunning view of the limitless prairie and snow-capped mountains that surround the ranch.

imaginable, while paying homage to the three-million-acre wilderness system that encircles the property. The main and guest houses of the Upper Switchback are constructed of hand-hewn historic log cabins transplanted in pieces by helicopter from original homesteads in Wyoming and Montana.

Each was reconstructed and designed with the precise intention of recreating the warm appeal of turn-of-the-century mountain-ranch architecture. Echoing the wilderness in every detail, riverstone fireplaces, rustic woodwork, and collections of Western art and furniture are scattered throughout the many rooms. Among these collections are photographs by Edward Curtis, oils and sculptures by leading contemporary artists, and reproductions of furniture by Cody native Thomas Molesworth.

Outside the comfort of the houses bustles what can only be described as the place where all good cowboys, horsemen, and ranchers get to go when they die. The Switchback Ranch seems to be made up of the stuff of Western dreams with its spacious indoor and outdoor riding arenas that regularly facilitate horse and cattle clinics. The arenas are equipped with calf chutes, team roping boxes, and return alleys, and there is a substantial herd of Corriente cattle on hand for team roping and penning.

This dream also extends to reality. The Switchback has made a name for itself as one of the most remote full-scale, working cattle operations still extant in the United States, running over 1,000 high-quality commercial Angus mother cows and yearlings as well as Corriente cattle.

The Switchback Ranch is what many would consider a modern Western marvel, a place where the original dream of settling the Old West is not only resurrected but reshaped and redefined. The owner, a third generation Montanan, has gone to great lengths to preserve the past and its traditional ways which are enhanced by modern conveniences and advancements that the New West has to offer.