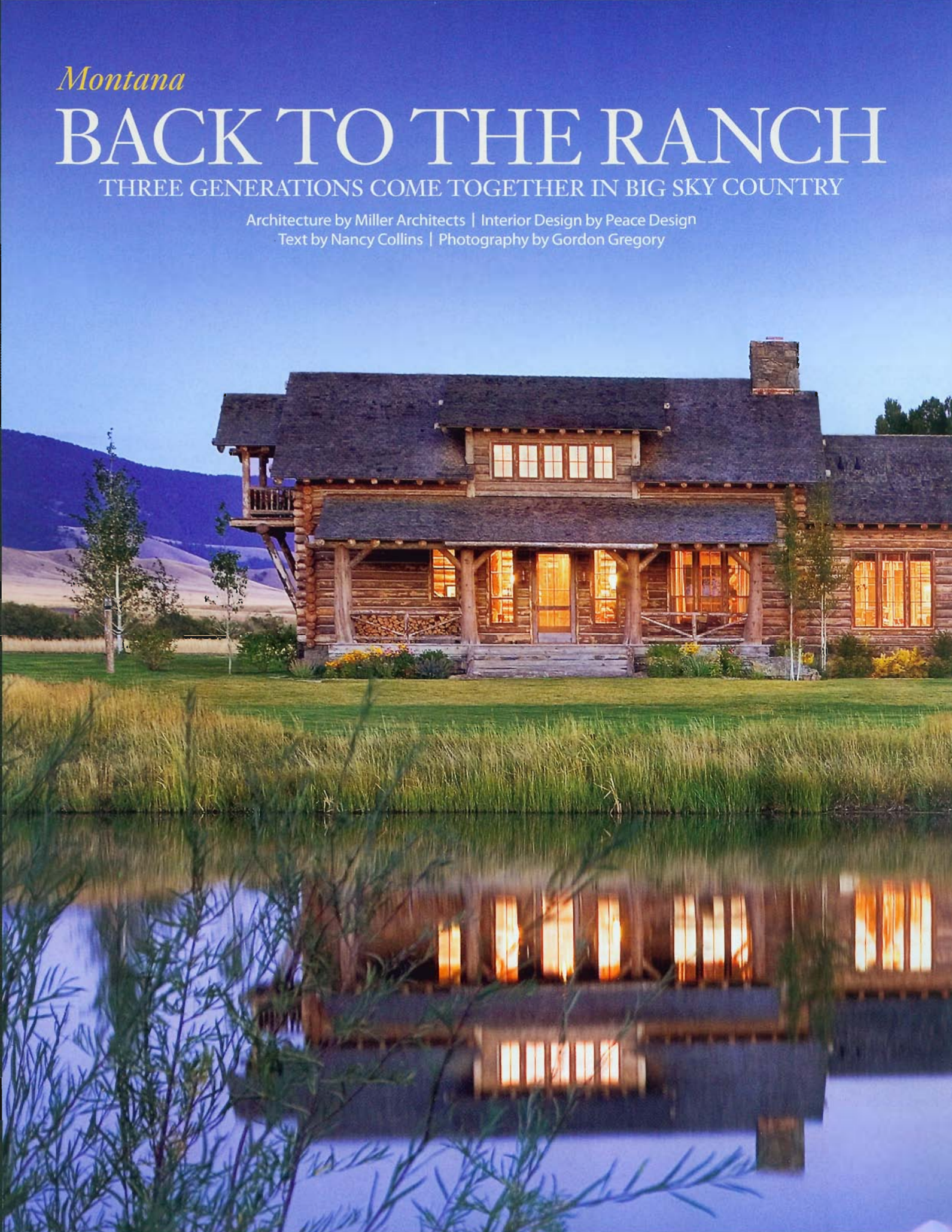
Montana

BACK TO THE RANCH

THREE GENERATIONS COME TOGETHER IN BIG SKY COUNTRY

Architecture by Miller Architects | Interior Design by Peace Design
Text by Nancy Collins | Photography by Gordon Gregory



At the foot of the Rocky Mountains, designer William Peace and architect Candace Tillotson-Miller collaborated on a lodge residence and other structures for a large extended family.

Every kid dreams of being a cowboy," muses the owner of this spectacular, 12-building ranch compound nestled on a glorious hunk of mountainous Montana terrain. But, unlike most, this southern-born industrialist made his come true when he and his wife created a riding, hiking and fishing western wonderland for their three children and 13 grandchildren, ages nine to 21. "Whether we're rafting down the river or zip-lining into the pond," says his wife, "the ranch is a place to be together and enjoy each other as a family. We're so happy that we're here in Montana."

Indeed. After initially looking in Wyoming, Big Sky came up the winner when interior designer William Peace, of Atlanta's Peace Design, introduced the couple to a ranch that he and Montana architect Candace Tillotson-Miller had been working on since 1994. Hired by the previous owners to renovate extant structures as well as build new ones—a fishing cabin and guest, bunk and ranch manager houses—the pair quickly discovered that

LEFT: Clerestory windows illuminate the double-height main room, a favorite gathering space for the owners, their children and grandchildren. Sofas and club chairs are from Ralph Lauren, as is the brown leather upholstery. Upstairs is the library loft. ABOVE: Karen Bonnic's *Coming Home* hangs in a corner. Upholstered chair at far left is by Hancock & Moore.

"Though our clients were after a relaxed, comfortable feeling, they definitely didn't want a clichéd ranch environment."

they were a match made in design heaven. "We both believed in reclaimed Montana architecture," says Peace, "the use of indigenous materials to create a historical sense of place that Montana had lost. And Candy, because she owns a cattle ranch, brought ranch knowledge as well as architectural skills to our collaboration."

Impressed by what they saw, the new owners decided to complete the compound with four buildings of their own: two boys' cabins, a laundry/fishing gear facility and, most significantly, a central lodge. "Though there was already a nice home on the land," says the owner, "we discovered that a family our size couldn't fit into one house. We needed a big gathering place. So we sat down with Bill and Candy, and in 16 months they put it together. Amazing what can be done in the middle of winter." Adds his wife: "We didn't want anything flashy. Candy, who has such a feel for what people need, really read us."

The result is a 6,300-square-foot structure complete with 28-foot ceilings, a spacious living room, industrial-size kitchen, bar, dining room, sitting area, a bedroom and bath, large pantry, screen porch and loft library with a balcony.

"My architecture is always site-specific," says Tillotson-Miller, "especially here, where there are such extraordinary views and a pond stocked with fish, which, after being enlarged, was the perfect location for a large house with a huge, grassy field of a backyard for soccer or football."

While the lodge, like the ranch's adjacent buildings, appears to be constructed of logs, it is, notes Tillotson-Miller, "a stick construction, a regular frame house on which logs—in this case, dead standing lodgepole—have been split in two and slapped onto the interior and exterior." (After lodgepole pine bark peels, the underlying wood takes on a gray cast, giving it an aged patina). "It's the most effective building package you can put together, especially in a seismic zone like this," explains Tillotson-Miller. "Not only does it ensure superior insulation but you can have larger openings for windows and doors."

As for the interiors, Peace was equally philosophical about the home-versus-land role of living western. "The reason most

LEFT: Tillotson-Miller used salvaged fir, maple and stone in the kitchen and installed sliding panels to fully separate it from the dining room. Range, VikingRange.com. ABOVE: Peace designed a mahogany-paneled bar for the saloon.

OPPOSITE: A trestle table made from old oak planks sits beneath an antique iron chandelier in the dining room. The owners requested a house that could comfortably accommodate up to 20 people at a time. The Portuguese-style side table is circa 1880. Floors throughout are reclaimed fir.

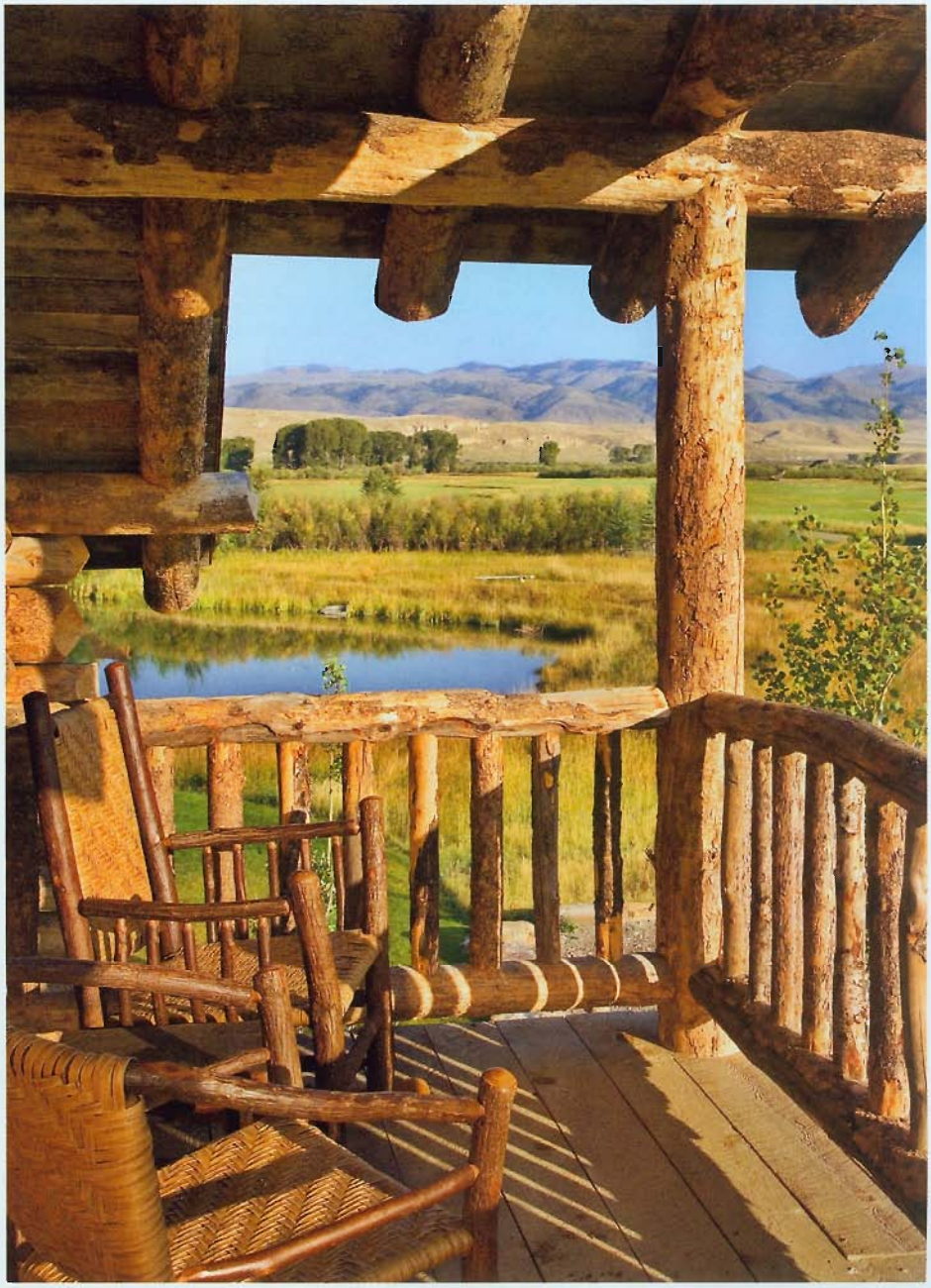
ABOVE: Walls sheathed in lodgepole pine add to the western air of a bedroom. "Since the exterior feeling must carry through to the interior, I minimized things like color inside," says Peace.

OPPOSITE ABOVE: A balcony off the loft library enjoys the view north past the pond. Montana-based Linda Iverson designed the landscaping. "Besides somewhere that I could ride, I wanted access to national parks," the husband says.

people are in places like Montana is the beauty of the outdoors," he says. "My mission is to add, not detract from that. And though our clients were after a relaxed, comfortable feeling, they definitely didn't want a clichéd ranch environment."

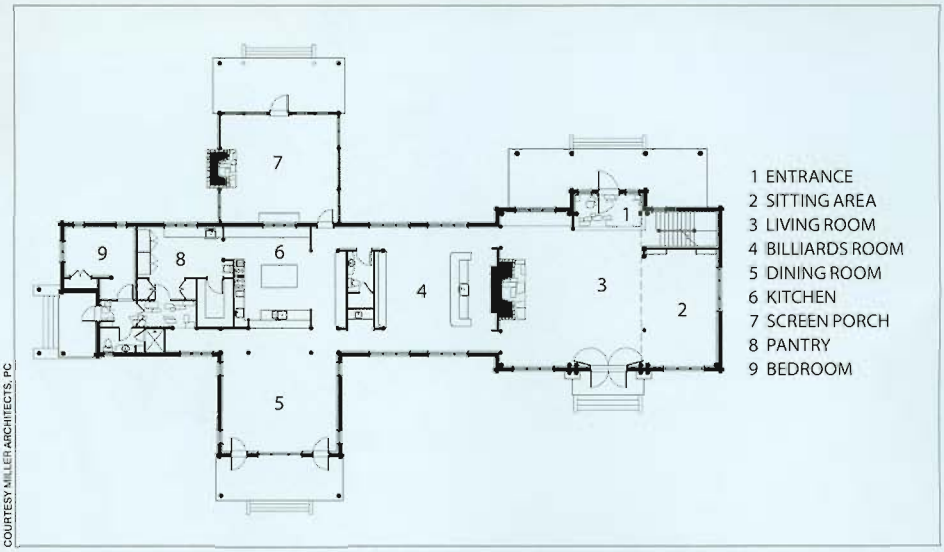
Rustic, therefore, was out, especially since "there's no great furniture to be found in Montana, where everything either disappeared or was brought from somewhere else." Moreover, the designer had to be mindful of the reality of his clients' lifestyle—"kids bouncing around, people eating on sofas and putting their boots up on tables."

Consequently, he opted for "lots of leather and suede, which, no matter what happens, can't be hurt." Counteracting the lush sofas is the charming pop of a red-painted table and a powder room boasting walls of red pressed-tin panels. There are antiques and warm, sensual woods like Balinese teak, a brushed-mahogany bar and a large, low-slung vintage Asian weaver's table used for cocktails. Subsequently, these welcoming



rooms, though appropriately lodgelike, exude an understated elegance mercifully bereft of prairie kitsch—the ubiquitous, custom-crafted, trout-fishing consoles found in so many western getaways.

In the end, this beautiful ranch—whose owners, Tillotson-Miller observes, "dote on their family"—guarantees that they will be seeing a lot of them. "Our problem isn't getting our kids out to Montana," says the husband with a laugh, "it's getting them back." □



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