

HOMESTEAD REVISITED

PHOTOGRAPHY BY WILL BREWSTER

Montana natives may be the toughest people to please when it comes to making changes in the looks of local ranches. So, when native Bill Smith was visiting the Big Hole River Ranch to conduct a riding clinic the other day, his compliment had clout: "This ranch goes with the land. Lots of people throw up buildings that look like explosions. But this place belongs here."

The place Bill refers to is a redesigned homestead, the result of an evolutionary process played out by a creative team including the owners, architect Candace Tillotson-Miller, builder Harry Howard and his Yellowstone Traditions crew, interior designer Hilary Heminway and landscape

The porch of the library is a favorite spot to gather. Footpaths link the library, field house, soddy and boys' cabin, allowing family and friends a sense of both community and privacy.



"We wanted the entry of the ranch to be understated," Harry Howard says. "So, we recycled old gates that came out of the stockyards at Anceny, and we used unpeeled lodgepole jackfencing."





A view inside the main house: "I try to read people and come up with what will make them comfortable," Hilary Heminway says of her approach to interior design. "You leave your ego at the door; your biggest concern is the client."

designer Linda Iverson.

With visions of a big lodge taking the places of numerous dilapidated homestead buildings, the owners bought the century old ranch as a recreational retreat for riding, fishing and hunting. But before they started on the lodge, they needed a place to live. They chose to use and add on to one of the original homestead buildings located in a field near the river. They'd live in it for a year, then turn it over to the ranch manager. But when the owners moved into the newly designed "field house," they were so charmed by the simplicity, scale and decor that plans for the lodge fell apart.

"We felt we could get a number of smaller buildings put together on independent spaces but linked and interacting as if they were a lodge," Harry says. "The owners were trusting enough to let us get started."

What evolved was a variation on the theme of home-

stead. The first phase of the project was to take down existing buildings that were rotting or caving in. That produced tons of recyclable materials: steel, metal, lumber, timbers and logs.

"By taking down the old stuff, we figured out what the new stuff should look like and how it should get built," Harry says. The team also used the design, composition and pallet of other ranches along the Big Hole to guide them in their decision making.

For foundation and fireplace masonry, for example, they plucked stones from the surrounding hills. Then, they drove the mason to the stone wall of an old sod-roofed building a few miles away to show him the feel they wanted to recreate in the new buildings.

While Candace massaged and tweaked the designs of specific structures, she frequently consulted with the owners. "They're fun to work with, and they're serious.

We exchanged ideas. They were taken by the romanticism; recreating the homestead appealed to them in a historical sense."

As the designs for the buildings progressed, Harry made suggestions for the use of recycled materials. "He has an eye and feel for what's appropriate so it blends into the landscape," Candace says. "We used the basic materials we had on hand. It has a patina you can't buy, a time worn look. Nothing is pushed at you."

To keep the new homestead in harmony with its surroundings, they looked at it as a composition in which the siting of each building was a major concern. Everybody wanted water running through the compound. They wanted to keep vehicles on the periphery and foot paths connecting the buildings.

"With all the different buildings, the stream acts as a common thread pulling your immediate focus towards the center," Candace says. "But you still have the long views, the dry hills, the mountains."

As you move from building to building, each one has a unique visual vignette. And, collectively, the buildings are situated to preserve and frame specific views.

Landscape designer Linda Iverson, whose first job was to open up and regenerate the existing stream with native

cottonwoods and aspen, was also concerned with the placement of new vegetation. She sat on each porch and considered the view from outside as well as from inside each house to determine where to plant trees. With the addition of more cover and low-maintenance foundation planting, the buildings' exteriors became more grounded, more a part of the landscape.

Interiors were Hilary Heminway's concern. To make the inside of the buildings comfortable for the owners, she got to know their personal preferences, not only in colors and fabrics but on such matters as whether they put their feet on the coffee table or read in bed.

Having lived in Montana a long time and being involved in ranching herself, Hilary has a practical side when it comes to textures and fabrics. "I really try to tell people not to put curtains up because they're only going to get stained by the bugs and rotted by the sun. And I tell them to buy the tractor before they buy the designer couch."

Working with the owners of the ranch, Hilary chose handmade furniture by regional craftsmen to give the interiors a local vernacular. And she included some antique pieces, too. "When homesteaders came here, they brought things with them, a lilac bush or a piece of furni-

"The library is a restacked log building, so it already had a basic character, a shape, something to work from," Candace Tillotson-Miller says of the homestead's party house. Yellowstone Traditions' built-in bookshelves complement Hilary's decor.





Logs peeled with a light touch leave the walls of the guest cabin a rough-hewn color and texture in keeping with its sod roof.



The "soddy," the new sod-roofed guest cabin, echoes the appearance of similar homestead buildings built over one hundred years ago on nearby ranches along the Big Hole.

ture from the old country." So, some old furniture helps tie all the elements of this new homestead together.

Over a period of two and a half years, fourteen structures—including sheds, barns and cabins—have been built or restored at three different locations on the river bottom ranch. Of the main compound, Harry says, "We didn't deviate from where the original homestead was, we just expanded on the concept." Elsewhere, they preserved the oldest building on the ranch, a cabin made of cottonwood logs cut along the Big Hole River over one hundred years ago.

Pastures, fences, and water resources have been restored and improved, in addition to buildings. "The place was really hammered when we first saw it," Candace says. "But we all decided we could make the creation of a new homestead work."

What made it work was the process. "This is not a project that was thought out ahead of time, it evolved," Harry says. "There was great spirit that went into it. The idea was to make the job joyful, to work hard and be professional. It's really the talent of everyone involved that got it done." BSI