

EASY HEALTHY RECIPES

# Sunset

## Wellness

### in the West

Ultimate Dude  
Ranch Reset

The Healing  
Power of Snow

Sustainable  
Seafood Feast



LOW-WATER  
GARDEN INSPO

NEW MEXICO  
MAXIMALISM

ALCOHOL-FREE  
WESTERN SPIRITS



## The Dude Ranch, Reimagined

A new generation of ranchers are offering guests a transformative taste of the West at Reid Creek Lodge.

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*Photographs by* THOMAS J. STORY



# S

**Sagebrush crushes under my horse's hooves**, wafting a sharp sweetness into the Wyoming air. Towering exfoliated granite, dotted with ponderosa pine, makes way for an expansive azure sky as we ride through Elysian Fields of wild lupine and Indian paintbrush. Meadowlarks sing, and aspens quake in the afternoon breeze. It's an impossibly beautiful landscape fit for a Clint Eastwood film. A sudden clap of thunder smacks, like clockwork, signaling the arrival of evening in the Laramie Mountains. It's time to head back to the barn for supper. The storm chases us as we canter along the frontier, and it's hard not to feel like a poster of an old rodeo.

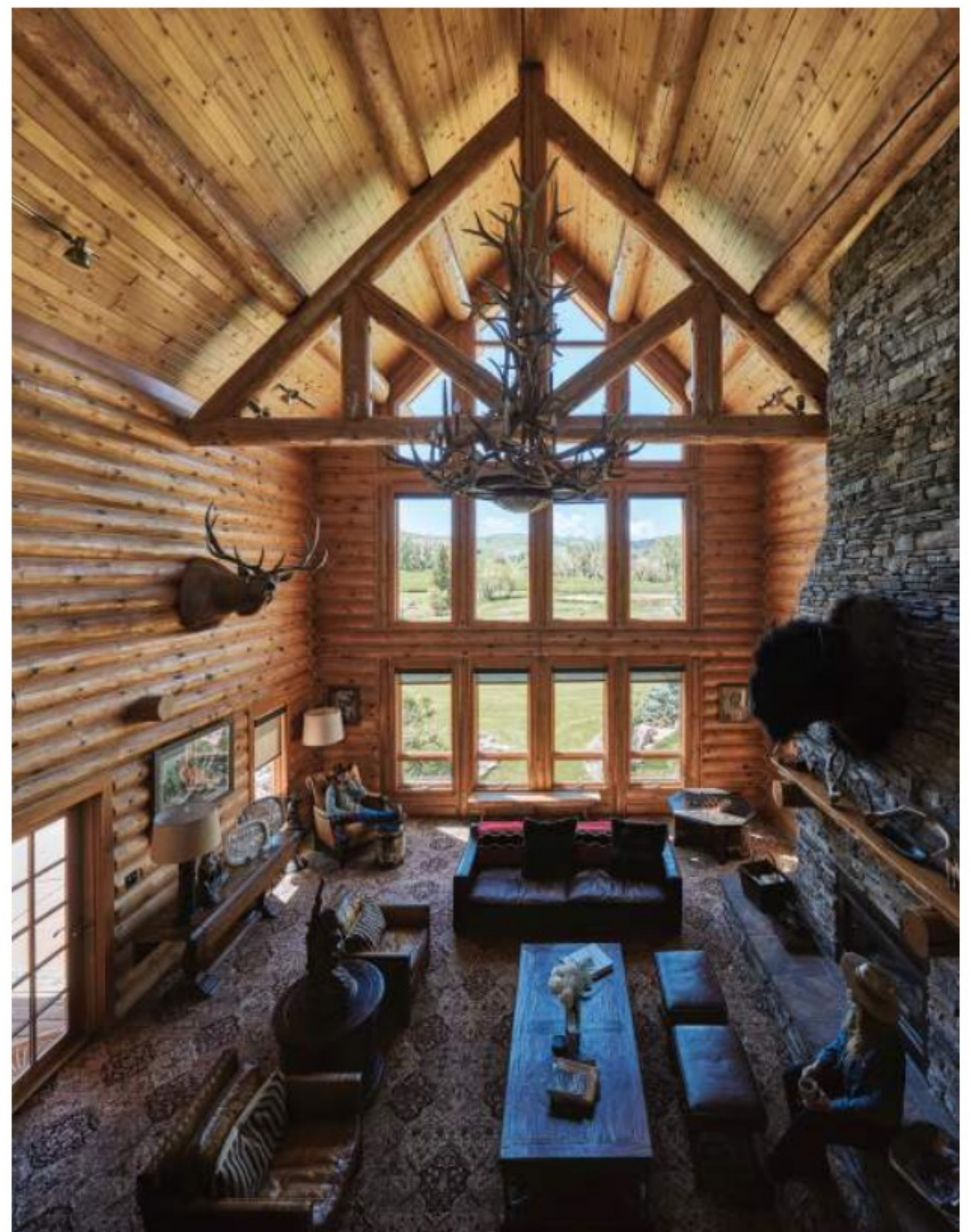
As we make our way to home base at Reid Creek Lodge, on Wagonhound ranch, I'm grinning ear to ear from the childlike thrill of learning something new. The day prior we'd spent the day in the property's world-class equestrian arena, learning skills from loping to roping. Today is the first time I've cantered since I was a little girl at Western horse camp, and the feeling of freedom and connection with my horse, Hollywood, transports me to the carefree presence of childhood. The ranch's American Quarter Horses are impressively responsive; the well-loved steeds get us back to home base with just enough time to dismount before supper.

This is where the reminiscence of the Old West ends, and a new experience of modern luxury begins. Instead of a cowboy's meal of baked beans, we're greeted with glasses of funky orange wine from the Caucasus Mountains in Georgia and homemade spanakopita to tide us over before our dinner of grilled steaks, which come from Wagonhound's natural Red Angus ranching operation. To finish, a selection of handmade pastries and sorbets.

Housed on the 300,000 acres of Wagonhound Land & Livestock, Reid Creek Lodge distinguishes itself from a traditional dude ranch in that it's a guest operation on a commercial cattle ranch. Which is part of the reason the horses are so well-trained; they're the same herd working the land with the cowboys, rather than simply being taken out for guided trail rides with guests.

In our fast-paced world, there are very few places where time has stood still, but the land where Wagonhound ranches their 5,000 head of cattle feels like a piece of the American West preserved. Here, the terms "rebrand" and "AI" take on a whole new meaning. (The first refers to the season when cattle are marked; the latter the way ranchers selectively breed their herd. We're not in California anymore, kids.)

There's a welcome sense of slowness and connection to a bygone era that, despite the quickly changing taste in tourism trends, remains mostly the same.



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From top left: A herd of longhorn cattle; a wrangler on the ranch wears custom leather chaps; house smoked bacon and pancakes are served at breakfast; the great room boasts Western decor and views of Wyoming.

Though cowboys certainly have had a resurgence in fashion and popular culture thanks to the success of shows like *Yellowstone*, there's always been a fascination with the American West. The idea of a dude ranch started in the Dakotas in the 1880s, when wealthy Europeans and folks from the Eastern United States would come out and pay a pretty penny to experience the romance of cowboy life on the open frontier.

Located on a portion of the Oregon Trail outside Douglas, Wyoming, Reid Creek opened its guest lodge on the historic property in 2022. The operation is owned by Art and Catherine Nicholas, and overseen by Andrea Nicholas Perdue, the CEO of Wagonhound Holdings. Because the accommodations are built inside a single lodge rather than separate cabins, it's the perfect place for a multi-generational family trip.

"I feel really passionate about that innate connection between humanity and nature. Having young kids myself, I really see the need for people to be outside, to be in the moment, to experience dirt on their hands, and the wind in their face. It does something to your soul," says Nicholas Perdue, who brought the idea of adding the lodge and guest experience to Wagonhound. "It allows us the ability to really slow down and appreciate the largest shared resource that we have, which is the land on which we live, and make conscious choices that are good for you, for me, and for the next generation."

Each day on the ranch opens up a new element of discovery, picking up new skills with a childlike enthusiasm

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and a lack of self-judgment. On our trip, I witness a retired senior giggle with delight as he learns to rope on horseback, skeet shoot, and confidently ride on horseback—a side of him his equestrian wife of over 30 years has never seen.

Each day offers a fresh perspective, starting off with a wildlife safari looking out for the Reid Creek Big Five—mountain lion, pronghorn, white tail deer, mule deer, and elk—as we head to our chosen activities, all of which are inclusive and can be done on your own timeline. Think skeet shooting, horseback riding, roping, wildlife viewing, rock climbing, and more, all with private, in-house guides. There truly is something for every level of adventurer, from tame to Bear Grylls, whose crew filmed at the ranch just a few weeks before our visit.

“Maintaining that connection to



the past is critical,” says Nicholas Perdue. “When people come out and see how natural that connection is—even folks from the city that have never camped a day in their life—it can help reconnect them to the importance of this way of life, and the blood, sweat, and tears it takes to support our food systems.”

Owner Art Nicholas is an advocate for preserving those traditions. Reid Creek houses his preeminent collection of Western art from the Traditional Cowboy Arts Association. It’s a veritable museum of impeccably crafted leather saddles, chaps, bits, and braided rawhide ropes—pieces that prove they really don’t make ’em like they used to. There’s even a room dedicated to horse-drawn carriages from around the world, a nod to the fact that Wagonhound is situated on land that the Oregon Trail went through, and how the business got its name; a precarious creek on the property often caused carriage’s wagon hounds, which connected the horses to the wagon, to break. Imagine making it all that way, and then getting stuck in Douglas because of a pothole.

Frankly, it’s a beautiful place to stop. As a Californian, I am a bit baffled to find out Wyoming has such a spectacular superbloom. Spring is prime time to visit, particularly









From top left: The property includes a lake for stand-up paddleboarding and fishing; Indian paintbrush bloom during wildflower season; boating out on the lake; catching trout on a mid-morning outing.

this year, when there was lots of rain that made way for incredible stands of wild irises, sawtooth, poppies, and, most important for the ranchers, lots of grass. The wet winter was a welcome one, as Nicholas Perdue emphasizes that ranching is, at its purest form, farming grass.

“You will never find a better land steward than a rancher. When you look at the individuals who are choosing that lifestyle, you do have that next generation that’s coming up, but they’re making the choice for a cognitive reason. It’s a lifestyle choice. There’s even a cowboy code of ethics. They find peace and happiness by waking up every morning and saddling a horse and going out and checking cows.”

That care makes for happy cows, and happy people. Heading to the airport to return home to Los Angeles, we hit our first paved city road in three days, and there’s an immediate sense of longing, not to be home with my dog and my creature comforts, as I typically am at the end of a trip, but for the past. Not just the past 72 hours, but for the old way of life that I was able to step into, if ever so briefly. While it’s true that we tend to idealize these simpler ways of life, it’s hard to deny the draw of the frontier. And there’s something truly comforting to know that even in a world that seems to be changing at an exponentially faster rate, it can still exist in this special corner of the West. 🌞





**Code of the West**

**COMMANDMENTS OF WESTERN COWBOYS THAT STAND THE TEST OF TIME.**

**1**

Live each day with courage.

**2**

Take pride in your work.

**3**

Always finish what you start.

**4**

Do what has to be done.

**5**

Be tough, but fair.

**6**

When you make a promise, keep it.

**7**

Ride for the brand.

**8**

Talk less and say more.

**9**

Remember that some things aren't for sale.

**10**

Know where to draw the line.





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GUTTER CREDIT

Reid Creek's glamping site is made up of safari-style tents situated in fields of wildflowers.





Ranchlands



Alisal



Lone Mountain Ranch



## New West

**THESE RECENTLY OPENED RANCH RETREATS OFFER AMENITIES FOR THE NEW GENERATION.**

There's a big difference between a dude ranch and a working cattle ranch, and this new generation of ranches is bringing a modern touch to a storied Western tradition.

### RANGLANDS

This Colorado agricultural business operates large-scale cattle and bison ranches in addition to hospitality stays focused on preserving the legacy of ranching in the American West. They also have a mercantile with expertly crafted leatherworks. Guests who stay on-site can learn these time-honored crafts like natural dyeing, all of which are geared toward preserving native grasslands while creating meaningful experiences.

### LONE MOUNTAIN RANCH

This petite resort housed inside a restored 1915 homestead in Big Sky, Montana, hosts rodeos and Western concerts for both guests and locals in the northern Rockies. The property opened for its first season this year, offering 53 miles of trails, access to Yellowstone National Park, excellent fly fishing, and the full-service farm-to-table Horn & Cattle restaurant and saloon.

### ALISAL RANCH

Situated on 10,500 acres in California's Santa Ynez Valley, this historic ranch hosts regular wellness retreats, including one offering an equine therapy program, where guests explore the human-horse connection. Guests experience multiple sessions that build on each other, walking away with new inter- and intrapersonal skills.