

Openings



# Trout Paradise

A new Montana resort beckons fly fishermen

by MONTE BURKE

**F**OR TWENTY YEARS Jim Manley searched for his ideal Western ranch: a remote spot with abundant wildlife, relatively low elevation (to thwart altitude sickness), a mix of forests and meadows, and a great trout river running through it all. Those lofty standards made his quest almost quixotic. “I got so frustrated that I nearly gave up,” says the fifty-something founder of the Greenwich, Connecticut, private equity firm Atlantic-Pacific Capital. Good thing he didn’t.

He eventually found his dream property, the **Ranch at Rock Creek**, located near the old Montana mining town of Philipsburg, an hour and a half from airports in Missoula and Butte. The 6,800-acre ranch fit all of his criteria. It was miles from the nearest highway. Its forested ridges surrounded golden meadows. And best of all, it had four private miles of Rock Creek, one of Montana’s premier trout streams (as well as easy access to the Blackfoot, Bitterroot, and Big Hole rivers). After closing on the property in 2007, Manley used it only for family and friends. But luckily for the rest of us, after realizing how much fun everyone was having—from the grandparents to the grandkids—he decided to turn it into a luxury guest ranch.

To conceptualize the guest experience, Manley asked himself what he would most want out of a Western ranch (answer: hiking, horseback riding, mountain biking, fly-fishing, sporting clays). Then he asked his wife (answer: hiking, world-class spa, exceptional food, Carlyle hotel-quality bed linens). And they agreed that the ranch should welcome children as well.



Manley asked himself what he would most want out of a Western ranch. Then he asked his wife

To that end, Manley has created a family haven. While parents fish Rock Creek, ride horses, or indulge in the spa (which offers a treatment called a Saddle Sore Soak), kids can attend a camp or go on nature hikes to alpine lakes. There’s even a vintage stagecoach, and the saloon is outfitted with a four-lane bowling alley and a theater with a fourteen-foot, high-definition screen. Guests can choose to stay in the nine-room Granite Lodge or in one of the cabins or log homes on the property. Those who crave a little more adventure can opt for the high-end safari tents on the banks of the creek. The cuisine is prepared by chef Josh Drage, who specializes in local dishes, including elk and bison.

**Cowboy Couth**  
Clockwise from above: The well-appointed Silver Dollar Saloon; fly-fishing Rock Creek; a riverside cabin.



“I think people these days want to rough it during the day, then have a great meal and slip into some comfortable sheets at night,” Manley says. Welcome to the fully evolved dude ranch. ☺

► For more information, go to [theranchatrockcreek.com](http://theranchatrockcreek.com).

Courtesy of Ranch at Rock Creek