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Sailing into Summer

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SADDLING UP IN STYLE

Recently, the landscape that launched a thousand cowboy fantasies has gone luxe, with a spectacular new crop of dude ranches. **Thurston Erickson** rounds up the best of the West.



Cowboy Comforts: One of the new safari-style, couples-only tented suites at the Ranch at Paws Up. Below: the Lodge at the just-opened Brush Creek Ranch



More than 150 years after armies of restless Northeasterners loaded up their wagons and started trundling toward that vast, promising expanse of open spaces and ecstatic landscapes that stretches from the Rockies south to Utah's red rock country, the American West still holds us in its spell. But today those who answer its call are finding that the West is a lot more Ralph Lauren than Lone Ranger.

"Nobody wants a hard bed and rough sheets anymore," says boutique investment bank owner Jim Manley. "They want to step back in time—but in comfort." To meet that need (and to indulge his lifelong *Bonanza* fantasy), Manley, who lives in Wilton, Connecticut, bought and spruced up a 10-square-mile Montana ranch nestled in a remote mountain valley, adding a spa, a small movie theater, and a bowling alley before opening it to the public last year. Guests at his 25-room **Ranch at Rock Creek** choose between handsome lodge rooms (there are few televisions here to drown out the song of the mountain larks) or safari-style riverside tent cabins (with gas fireplaces to keep them toasty in winter), and dine on astonishingly good food—including filet of local beef with butternut squash gratinée—that upends

any fears about franks and beans around the chuck wagon. Daytime diversions include shooting clays, cross-country skiing, horseback riding, and fly-fishing the blue ribbon Rock Creek; evenings begin with drinks in the lodge and often end with a karaoke competition in the ranch's own Silver Dollar Saloon.

Then there's the equally plush **Brush Creek Ranch**, a 13,000-acre working cattle ranch in Wyoming's North Platte Valley that opened recently with 37 rooms (some in restored vintage cabins), including nine multibedroom log houses. Here, guests can hop into the saddle year-round in the 28,000-square-foot equestrian center, shoot baskets in the gym, swing a club in the golf simulator, hike or ski some 50 miles of groomed trails, or load up their rifles and try their aim on big game, including antelope, moose, buffalo, and mountain lion.

Guest ranches such as these are a natural choice for family getaways, but those who want a little more privacy should check into Montana's 37,000-acre **Ranch at Paws Up**, just north of Missoula. In addition to its 28 two-to-four-bedroom houses, which are designed for families and come with kitchens, wireless Internet, and flat-screen TVs,

WHERE TO STAY

AMANGIRI

amanresorts.com, 435-675-3999; \$950–\$3,600

BRUSH CREEK RANCH

brushcreekranch.com, 307-327-5284; rooms \$720–\$1,300; cabin suites \$720–\$1,600; cabin residences \$1,800–\$6,600; all-inclusive

HF BAR RANCH

hfbar.com, 307-684-2487; \$280 per person per day; includes meals and many activities

THE RANCH AT ROCK CREEK

theranchatrockcreek.com, 877-786-1545; \$900–\$1,150 per person per day; includes meals, drinks, activities, and gratuities

THE RESORT AT PAWS UP

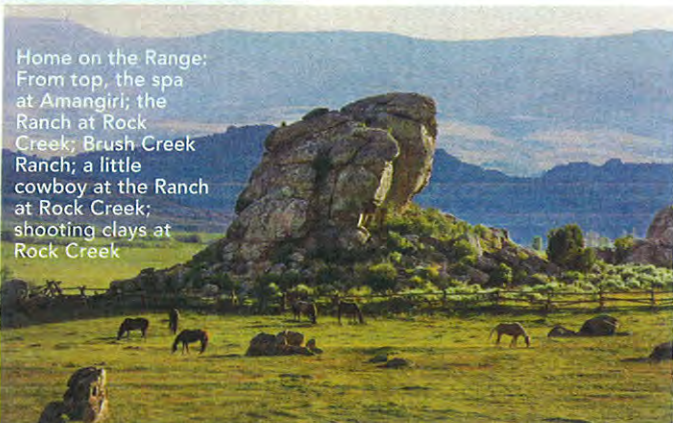
pawsup.com, 800-473-0601; 2-to-4-bedroom houses \$720–\$2,955; 1- or 2-bedroom tents \$820–\$1,620; includes meals



Paws Up recently opened its Moonlight Camp: six secluded safari-style tents with butler service, reserved for couples only.



Of course, if you prefer a purist approach to the Western sojourn—one that doesn't involve spas or butlers—there's always Wyoming's **HF Bar Ranch**. When it opened in 1911 as one of the country's first dude ranches, it promised guests that, after a few days there, "the years will have dropped from your shoulders like



Home on the Range: From top, the spa at Amangiri; the Ranch at Rock Creek; Brush Creek Ranch; a little cowboy at the Ranch at Rock Creek; shooting clays at Rock Creek



feathers from a molting hen." Today its mountain setting and simply furnished cabins—all with open fireplaces—attract families and couples who come for the Saturday night hayrides, wine-drinking around a campfire in the shadow of the Big Horns, or just the rare, simple pleasure of sitting on a rock at night under a star-smeared sky. And for those who cringe at the communal spirit and rustic atmosphere of a guest ranch, there's always southern Utah's



Amangiri resort and spa, where there's not a hint of the Wild West in the poured-concrete architecture and minimalist esthetic. But the surrounding sandstone mesas and sagebrush-studded desert are the quintessential cowboys-and-Indians movie set, and the 2,300-square-foot spa, which comes complete with outdoor treatment areas, reflecting pools, and a flotation room, is one of the best in the West (American or otherwise). Each of the 34 suites has floor-to-ceiling windows and private terraces for maximum exposure to the landscape. But as Jim Manley points out, the West isn't just about the scenery; it's about how the setting transforms us. "When people are surrounded by natural beauty they become wide-eyed. They remember what it's like to play." •

DISCOVERY

METAL MAN

A silversmith in Wyoming makes one-of-a-kind pieces inspired by his rodeo past.



As a rodeo cowboy, **Charlie Pattison** was enamored of the silver trophy buckles that winners received, both for their symbolic status and for the delicate work on the buckles themselves. He left the circuit two decades ago, turned a silversmithing hobby into a career, and now creates belt buckles, jewelry, and matchboxes in a shimmering combination of gold and silver. Pattison's intricately detailed designs, featuring Western motifs such as cowboys, steer heads, and pheasants, are hand-engraved onto each piece's every surface—not just the front. "Most people might not know the difference between hand-made buckles and factory buckles," the 50-year-old says with a laugh, "but when they see my work, they know they're looking at something special."

Brace Yourself: Pattison's silver concho bracelets are East Coast favorites.

Although Pattison's handcrafted creations are mostly sold at trunk shows on dude ranches near his hometown of Sheridan, Wyoming, some of his best customers are from areas not exactly known for cowboys. He has especially large followings on Long Island, in Boston, and in Darien, Connecticut, where his best-selling concho bracelets—pieces of silver linked by braided leather—are favorites. "Ladies try them on and say, 'It's so pretty, but I won't wear it back home,'" Pattison says. "But then they end up wearing it every day. I've heard it a hundred times." *Jewelry from \$350, buckles from \$450; capsilver.com*

S.W.

Photographs, from top: Courtesy Amangiri; the Ranch at Rock Creek; courtesy Dan Ham (Brush Creek Ranch); courtesy the Ranch at Rock Creek; Studio D (Metal Man)