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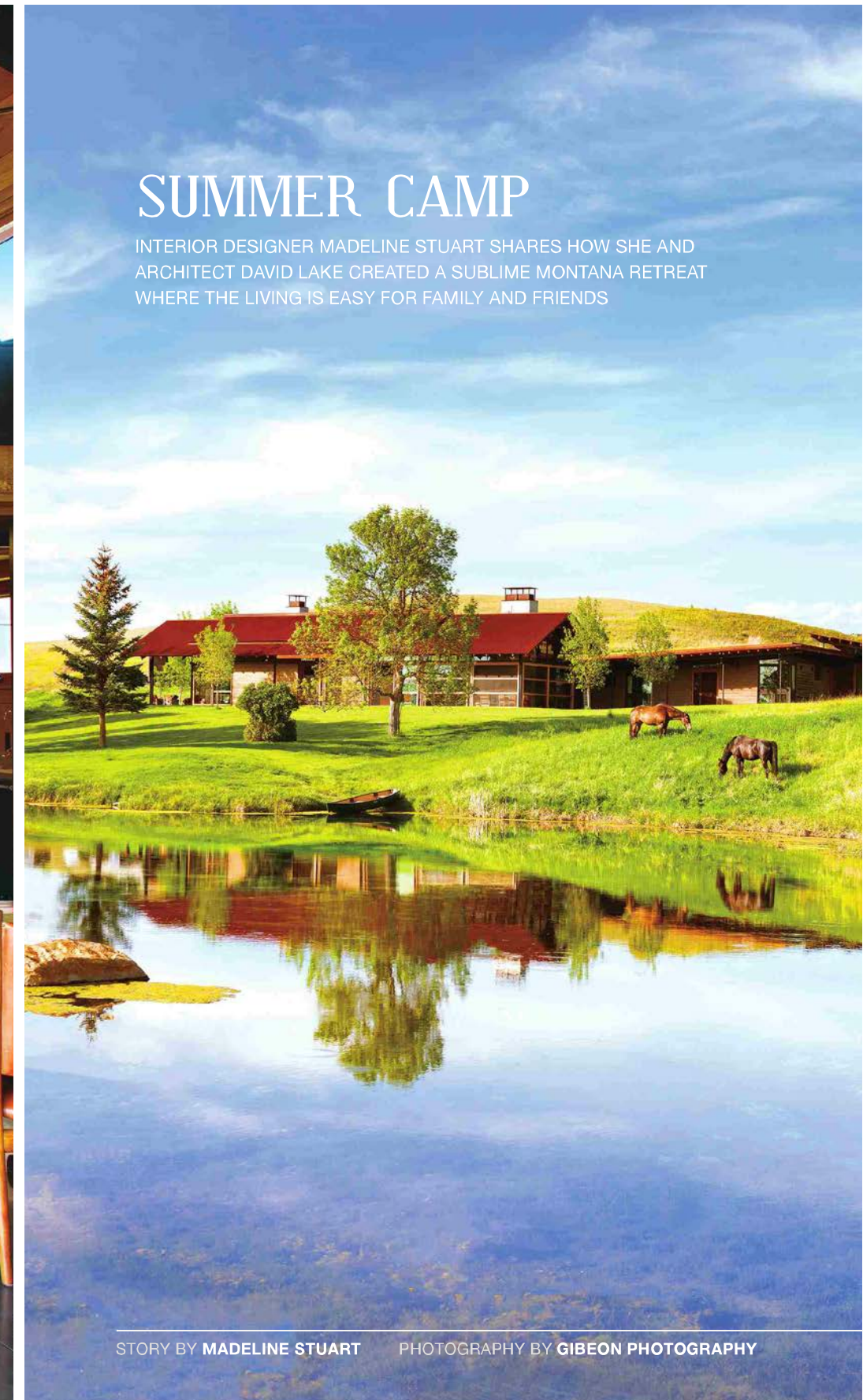
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A massive sliding wall of reclaimed barn wood separates the dining area from the adjacent kitchen. The vintage leather chairs are by Hans Wegner, the claro-walnut-and-bronze dining table was designed by Madeline Stuart, and two vintage Lightolier pendants are suspended from a custom steel armature. Verner Panton rockers can be seen in the distance. OPPOSITE: A view toward the main building and sod-covered bedroom wing from one of the spring-fed ponds that dot the property.



## SUMMER CAMP

INTERIOR DESIGNER MADELINE STUART SHARES HOW SHE AND ARCHITECT DAVID LAKE CREATED A SUBLIME MONTANA RETREAT WHERE THE LIVING IS EASY FOR FAMILY AND FRIENDS

STORY BY **MADELINE STUART** PHOTOGRAPHY BY **GIBEON PHOTOGRAPHY**



ARCHITECTURE BY LAKE|FLATO ARCHITECTS  
INTERIOR DESIGN BY MADELINE STUART & ASSOCIATES CONSTRUCTION BY YELLOWSTONE TRADITIONS



ABOVE: In the main living area, board-formed concrete walls contrast with the skeletal steel structure, painted in Pratt & Lambert's Obsidian. A pair of Sergio Rodrigues leather-and-rosewood chairs from the 1970s were the first pieces purchased for the project. The Mongolian-lamb-and-iron stools, Navajo-inspired wool rug and leather-and-rosewood sofa are custom pieces by the designer. OPPOSITE: The screened porch is anchored by a massive black-steel-and-concrete fireplace and furnished with a mix of vintage and custom pieces that can easily withstand the elements. Perennials fabrics were used for the cushions, and the coffee table's 600-pound stone slab was sourced at a local quarry.

## AS EVERY STUDENT OF AMERICAN HISTORY LEARNS,

Lewis and Clark set out to map the western United States in 1804. In 1805 they camped near Three Forks, Montana, where the Jefferson, Gallatin and Madison rivers converge to form the mighty Missouri. What the textbooks don't mention, however, is that the explorers most likely spent time on the property acquired 200 years later by my clients, who chose the same spot to build a far more exalted campsite.

With spring-fed creeks, verdant pastures, cool ponds and exceptional vistas that capture the glorious Big Sky sunsets, this place now provides sheer bliss for a family of four, assorted dogs and quite a few horses.

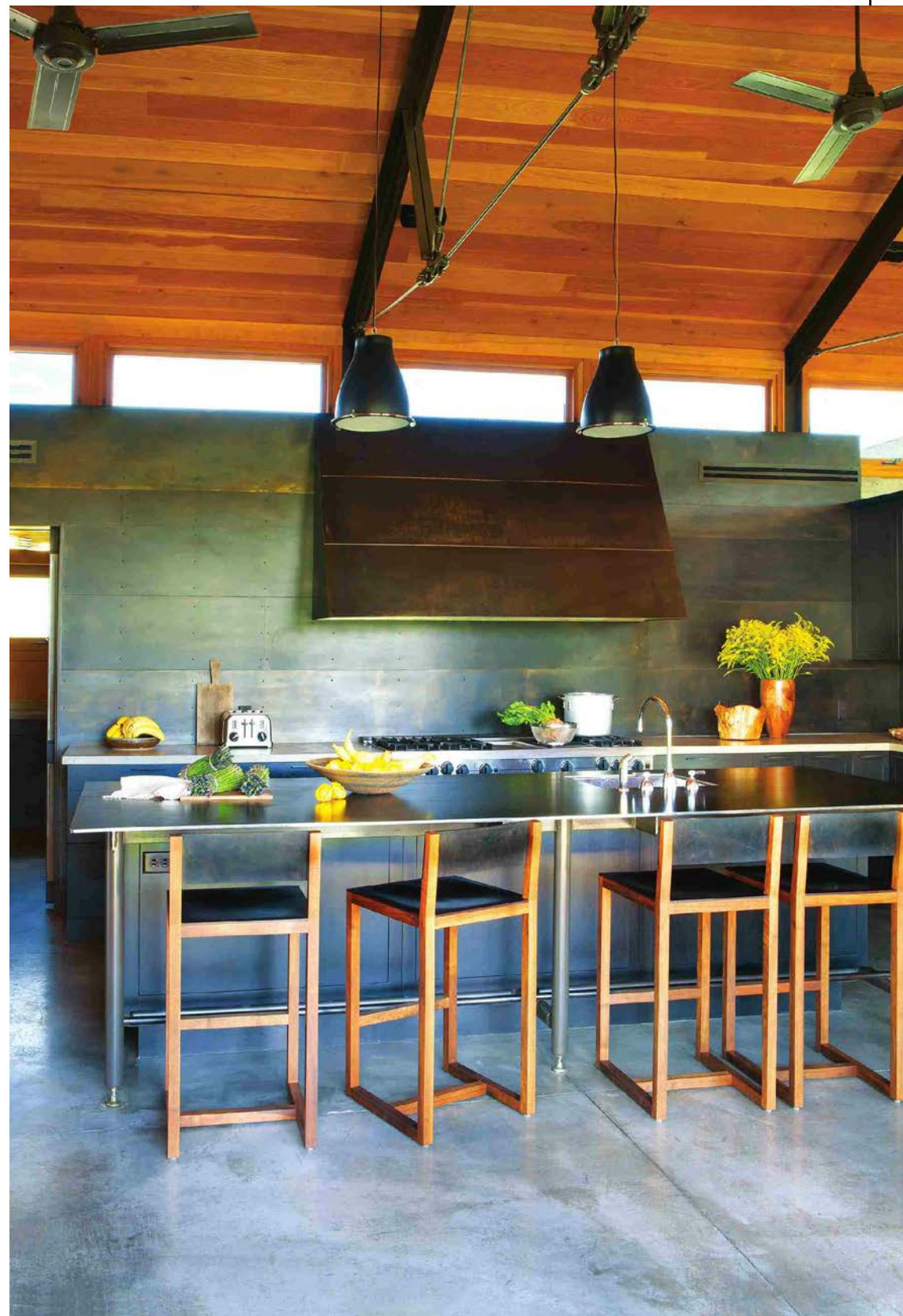
For years after making the purchase, my clients crowded together in a small, pre-existing log cabin. Cramped but comfy, it enabled them to spend summers forging a deeper understanding of the type of house they ultimately wanted to build for themselves.

Originally slated to be a much larger structure situated at a high point on the property, their home, designed by David Lake of San Antonio-based Lake|Flato Architects, ultimately became smaller and was built lower and closer to one of those creeks so the family could enjoy the sound of the water. >>





BELOW: A corner table on the screened porch is an ideal spot for a quiet supper or game of cards. Horses graze near the fishing creek just beyond the window. OPPOSITE: The kitchen island serves as breakfast bar and lunch counter, where meals are often served buffet style. The leather-and-walnut barstools are by BDDW and the backsplash is blackened steel.



## EASY, BREEZY INTERIORS

A home on the range shouldn't present obstacles to easy living. From my first ranch project I learned the following lessons that served me—and my clients—well.

**MAKE IT FAMILY-FRIENDLY** Performance-type fabrics and leather withstand heavy traffic, harsh environmental conditions and muddy paws. Dogs (and even kids!) are welcome to sit anywhere and everywhere.

**MAKE IT DURABLE** Polished concrete floors provide a terrific look but definitely need softening. The rugs we found or designed for the house are all wool (easy to clean) or hair-on-hide, which is virtually indestructible.

**MAKE IT PERSONAL** The clients entertain scores of people during the summer (lunches for 20 or more are fairly common), so while we never considered specifying fancy china, we wanted something fun and unique. We designed a 'brand' for the house, which we then had emblazoned on the kind of plates, mugs and bowls you'd find in a classic diner.

**MAKE IT EFFORTLESS** I often create bedding specific to various rooms and schemes, but here the goal was simplicity and ease. We found wonderful organic towels and bamboo bedding and ordered it by the case. Each room sports different throws and accents, but there's no problem determining which pillowcase goes where.

**MAKE IT TOUCHABLE** We decided early on that this house would be less about color and more about texture, so although the palette is limited there's no shortage of visual interest. Coarse linens, shearling and buffalo leather are combined with rift oak, weathered woods and vintage pottery to give the house a gutsy, rustic vibe.



“THIS IS A HOME WHERE DOGS AND MUDDY  
BOOTS TAKE PRECEDENCE OVER PRISTINE SURFACES.”

INTERIOR DESIGNER *MADELINE STUART*



“THE EXTREME CLIMATE OF MONTANA HAS  
SHAPED THE REGIONAL ARCHITECTURE,”

Lake explains, “and barns and sodbusters were the inspiration for this house. The compound is nestled into the hillside, taking advantage of passive cooling and heating, and the vaulted living space opens and closes to the environment with rolling insulated-steel barn doors.”

The house is deceptively simple. Bracketed by porches, it’s divided into areas for living, cooking and dining. Exposed trusses and the structural steel typical of Lake|Flato’s buildings support a seamed COR-TEN-steel roof with ceilings of Douglas fir. The no-fuss materials palette features polished concrete floors and board-formed concrete walls, stained fir and reclaimed wood, and blackened-steel kitchen and bathroom counters.

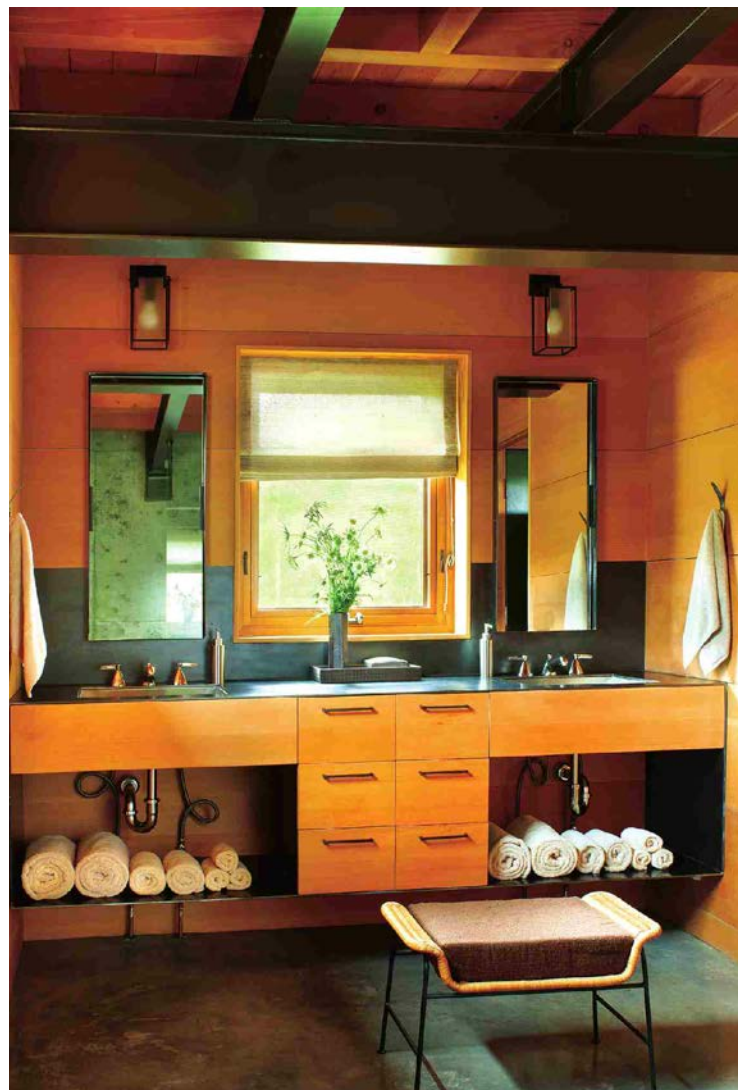
Accessed by a covered walkway, the bedroom wing is hidden from view by a sod roof completely overrun by native plants and grasses. This section contains the master and children’s bedrooms, all outfitted with built-in bunks to accommodate countless cousins. Cozy and inviting, each room features large glass openings that frame stunning views to the creek, the ponds and the pastures beyond.

Throughout the process, there was a spirited, charmed and extremely collaborative relationship between client, architect and designer (more like wrestling matches, according to Lake). For me, the mandate was relatively simple: Create an environment that’s warm and welcoming, understated yet chic, with colors and materials that defer to the rustic nature of the place without adhering to the plaid-and-antlers approach so often seen in traditional Montana homesteads.

My client set the decorative wheels in motion when she spied a pair of fabulously butch Sergio Rodrigues leather-and-rosewood chairs, circa 1970, at J.F. Chen in Los Angeles. With our design direction firmly >>

A view toward the sunset porch, which features custom chairs of reclaimed barnwood. Designed by Madeline Stuart, the chairs were made locally by Yellowstone Traditions, the contractor that built the house.





established by that purchase, we added several pieces by well-known midcentury designers, as well as a few of my firm's own designs.

It was imperative that each room offer a place for family and friends to gather or where one could find solace with a book. Every table welcomes a drink or a pair of feet. While we surely found and fabricated some lovely things for the ranch, there's nothing precious about the décor. This is a home where dogs and muddy boots take precedence over pristine surfaces. So, we augmented leather, shearling and coarsely woven linens with bulletproof fabrics, and softened concrete floors with vintage Moroccan rugs, patchwork hides and my own contemporary interpretation of a Navajo pattern.

I had never been to Montana before this project. And while I'd certainly heard it referred to as Big Sky Country, it was nothing more than a slogan until I came under the state's spell. Now I appreciate why Lewis and Clark chose to tarry here, and I feel lucky to have helped my clients make a home in the very same spot. ©



OPPOSITE: Designed for simplicity and efficiency, the home's bathrooms have Douglas fir cabinetry and counters of blackened steel. A Mathieu Mategot bench is a prized perch in the master bathroom. BELOW: Sliding doors open the master bedroom to the world beyond. A custom rift oak and woven leather platform bed is covered in a spread of beaver fur. The Arne Norell leather sling chair dates to 1961 and the solid ipe wood stump table is by the Brazilian designer Zanini de Zanine.