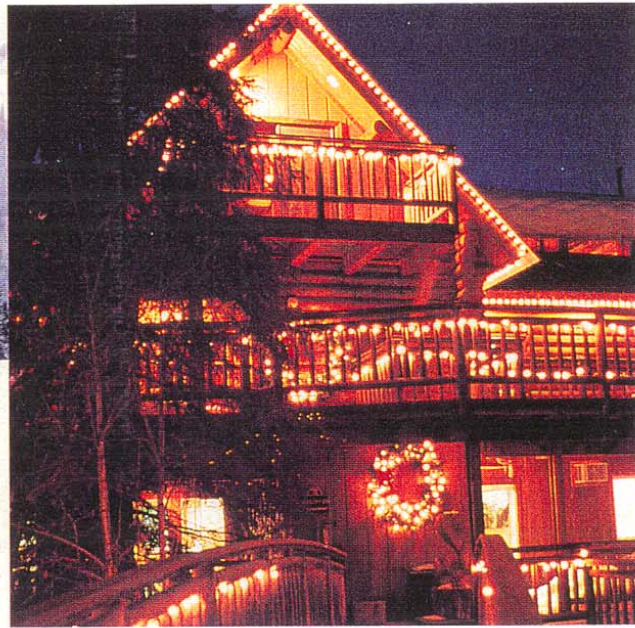


Big Sky Hideaway

Triple Creek Ranch provides a bit of heaven in the Montana wilderness.



WHEN INTEL president and COO Craig Barrett and his wife, Barbara, first visited Triple Creek Ranch in the mid-1980s, they probably felt as though they'd gone to heaven. Back then, Triple Creek was owned by a Detroit industrialist looking to create a year-round retreat for his family and colleagues. But shortly after construction began, he decided to share his luxury mountain hideaway with others. Word spread, drawing the attention of travelers from throughout the country—including the Barretts, who began making annual pilgrimages to the Darby, Mont., property from their Arizona home. In 1993, Triple Creek's owner turned his interests to cattle ranching, and the property went on the market. Keen to preserve their prized mountain getaway, the Barretts purchased the Triple Creek Ranch.

Set on more than 300 acres of protected wilderness and perched on the highest peak in the Bitterroot mountain range, this Relais & Châteaux resort offers 19 custom cabins and lodges surrounded by thick fir forest. All share a sturdy Western log cabin theme, with stone and pine construction, fireplaces, overstuffed leather couches, and king-size four-poster beds piled high with handcrafted quilts.

Horseback riders at Triple Creek Ranch are often treated to steaming mugs of hot chocolate during their treks.

"We want all of our guests to feel as if they own the place—as if they're at home," says Judy Kilpatrick, who, along with her husband, Wayne, manages the adults-only hideaway. "There aren't any tabs to sign, nor are our guests subject to an audit when they leave. Everything has been designed to treat them like owners."

Owners who enjoy the services of a full kitchen staff, that is. The main lodge, the center of ranch life, houses the dining room, where guests can partake of chef Marcia Hara's gourmet Western fare while gazing out the floor-to-ceiling windows. Hara's hearty but healthy cuisine features dishes that will attract gourmets but won't scare off traditionalists. Dinner is a case in point: Meat-and-potatoes types can dig into a beef tenderloin au poivre, while the more adventurous will enjoy Alaskan halibut Bangkok—grilled halibut served with a coconut milk and green curry sauce.

No matter what the meal, guests will need to pack in enough calories to get them through a day of cross-country skiing, snowshoeing, sleigh riding, or horseback riding.

Of course, curling up by the warm fireside with a good book and watching the snow fall on your cabin's front porch are sure to count as ambitious wintertime activities, too. This is your vacation, after all.

—Judy Alexandra DiEdwardo