

## The Ranch at Rock Creek

Growing up in New Jersey, James Manley became infatuated with horses, guns and wide-open spaces by watching Westerns like “Bonanza” on television. But unlike other childhood fantasies, Manley’s dream of owning the quintessential Western ranch never faded. At 33, after he had his own bonanza in finance, he began a quest to find the perfect trophy ranch with a river running through it. Other requirements included an Alpine feeling at low elevation, no grizzlies or poisonous snakes, and an old mining town nearby. His search took him from the Canadian Rockies to Northern Arizona to Montana over the course of 20 years and tours of 500 properties. But in 2007, he discovered a property in Philipsburg, Montana, that fit the bill. He bought it that very day and transformed it into The Ranch at Rock Creek.

Manley originally intended as a private residence, enthusiasm from family and friends convinced him it could be a successful guest ranch. With the help of interior designer Jet Zarkadas, he filled every nook and cranny with Wild West details—saddles, cowhide rugs, vintage books, knickknacks, and scores of period photographs to create “a step-back-in-time feel”—not a resort ambience. “I spent a lot of money making new buildings look old,” he says. “The wood is all reclaimed from local barns.”

Today the ranch can host 84 guests in accommodations ranging from

guest rooms in the Granite Lodge to private cabins (some original to the property) and log homes to half-tented cabins for a more rustic Old West experience. Guests pay up front for the all-inclusive experience (\$1,900 to \$7,500 per night) to reinforce the homey vibe.

Manley considers his ranch “the evolution of the dude ranch.” And because the dude ranch experience is about play, The Ranch at Rock Creek offers activities for all seasons—riding, fly-fishing, shooting clay, paint ball, ice skating, snowmobiling, cross country skiing, and downhill skiing at nearby Discover Ski Area. “When you play, a lot of bonding takes place. Strangers make friends very quickly here.”

Manley’s favorite spot is the Silver Dollar Saloon, which he designed himself. Guests can sidle up to the bar, play a game of pool, watch a film in the theater or throw some strikes in the four-lane bowling alley. And for cigar lovers, cigar master and sommelier-in-training Tony Ardisson offers a menu that ranges from everyday smokes that you can take fishing without worrying if they fall in the river to menu highlights like a Rocky Patel Toro 15th Anniversary, a Gurkha Havana Legend and a CAO Brazilia Chango.

Visit [theranchatrockcreek.com](http://theranchatrockcreek.com) or call 877.786.1545.

—Laurie Kahle

