

MANHATTAN

RED HOT

ASHLEY
GREENE

Wakin' Up With Michael Strahan

Watchin' With Reed Krakoff

Dancin' With Charles Askegard
and Alvin Ailey

Sneakin' Around With Michael Kors

SINNING IN
THE CITY:

A History of
Manhattan
Madams



Western Grand

Saddle up for luxury at The Ranch at Rock Creek. | *By Beth Weitzman* |

Jim Manley had a dream. As a fan of Westerns, he grew up yearning to own a place where he could ride horses and shoot guns. Fast-forward to 2007, when the successful entrepreneur purchased a sprawling 6,600-acre ranch with plans to transform it into a private residence so that he, his family and his pals could, well, horse around. Not long after preparation on the ambitious turnaround took shape, another vision spurred what became the manifestation of Manley's lifelong pursuit: The Ranch at Rock Creek (theranchatrockcreek.com).

GO ON, GET WILD! Clockwise from top left: The great room inside the Granite Lodge is a cozy spot to enjoy a coffee or a cocktail; the Granite Lodge is the epicenter of the resort; The Ranch at Rock Creek owner Jim Manley.

Situated about 20 minutes from the tiny town of Philipsburg (population less than 1,000), about a 100-mile drive from Missoula International Airport, in the heart of Montana's Anaconda-Pintler Wilderness, The Ranch is tucked away in the mountains where the state's storied sky looms majestically over a series of peaks, meadows, lakes and streams. The landscape is as unreal as the history is rich—The Ranch, now a luxurious Relais & Châteaux property, traces its roots back to the 19th century, when it was a mining claim, then later, a cattle ranch.

Stepping out of the hotel's SUV and into the fresh scent of winter, I trade one luxury for another (and many more to come). Giving new meaning to rarefied air is the combination of crisp coolness and warmth from crackling fireplaces blazing in the Granite Lodge. Here, in the heart of the resort's epicenter, which houses nine



uniquely decorated guest accommodations, along with a lobby lounge/great room and bar, plus a concierge area and dining room, I'm welcomed by general managers Maja and Thomas Kilgore, who set a hospitable tone for the sublime service to come. A husband-and-wife duo who joined ranks with The Ranch in 2011 after five years

managing Laucala Island in Fiji, the Germany natives fit right in, looking like Ralph Lauren models in riding pants, perfectly tailored tops and matching ascots. More like vacation curators than GMs, the Kilgores treat guests like personal friends; creating bespoke guest experiences is their No. 1 priority.

Manley wouldn't have it any other way. Appreciating and attending to every detail, he's trained his staff to anticipate the needs and wants of the discerning travelers who often CONTINUED...



sleep up to five guests (these are closed during winter).

Chic surrounds are just one perk of an all-inclusive stay (\$950 per person, per night, to \$7,500 per home for two to six people) at The Ranch. “All-inclusive” really should read “over-the-top,” as activities, meals, cocktails and wines (with the exception of the reserve list featuring rare vintages) are all standard, as is the opportunity to travel light. Most sporting garb and gear (plus cowboy boots and an array of toiletries beyond the shampoo-and-conditioner variety) are provided. And, because The Ranch requests that guests supply personal specifics—everything from food allergies to activities preferences and clothing and shoe sizes—pre-stay, there’s not much more to do other than relax and indulge.

The chances to do so are endless, with the culinary exploits of rave-reviewed chef Josh Drage enjoying a high ranking. His seasonally influenced menu features organic ingredients and produce, as well as Montana-raised wild game like elk, bison, beef and lamb. Cuisine lives up to its rightfully touted reputation, with starters



...CONTINUED make up The Ranch’s repeat business. Credit the high rate of return to impeccable service (but don’t forget the great-tasting cuisine, activities galore and seriously comfortable beds). Not only is the staff knowledgeable and sincere, they assist in casually cool ways. A lack of stuffiness makes way for predictability. The answer is always, “Yes, we can do that.”

Authentic exchanges make the exquisite setting that much more delightful. Settling in at the classically designed great room and bar area, for cocktails and conversation by firelight, my mind wanders: “Do I really have to get up?” I think to myself, knowing I could easily sit for hours in chairs you literally sink into. When I finally arise, I glimpse the cozy lodge from all points. The old photographs lining the walls establish a sense of place and reflection, while leading the way upstairs, like breadcrumbs, to top-level guest rooms. Everything about The Ranch feels homey, but the decor—a Western theme elegantly recast to appeal to modern-day sensibilities—is impeccably conceived. Also on offer are 12 private log homes, for two to 10 guests, and glamping options to boot. Eight modernized canvas cabins peppered along Rock Creek

LET THE GOOD TIMES ROLL! Clockwise from top left: The four-lane bowling alley provides hours of entertainment; chef Josh Drage constantly surprises with his culinary creations; the Appaloosa suite inside the Granite Lodge; the cozy living room of the five-bedroom Bear House, which sleeps six to 10 people.

like wild chanterelle mushrooms with russet potato gnocchi, puree of leeks, roasted shallots, maitre d’ butter and Ibérico ham; and entrées like Sweet Grass Valley lamb porterhouse with oven-dried tomato, Cerignola olive relish and herb-smashed red potatoes. Save room for dessert, as the chef wows with faves like vanilla pinot grigio-poached pears with ginger spice cake and bay leaf crème anglaise. And, while menus are a given, the chef will prepare anything desired, so long as the ingredients are available. (Cabin dwellers have the added bonus of arranging for a private dinner in their confines, should they so choose.) Morning, meanwhile, follows suit, with freshly brewed coffee and, for breakfast, hearty favorites like organic eggs cooked as you like it, oatmeal, pancakes and other specialties.

Winter at The Ranch (which is CONTINUED...



...CONTINUED busiest in spring and summer) is its best-kept secret. Expert-led sporting experiences change seasonally, but unchanged is the full slate of pastimes and on-your-own-time scheduling. Loads of equestrian adventures (varied terrain and diverse scenery make for exceptional riding year-round), sporting clay and pistol shooting, cross-country skiing, hiking, ice-skating, wild-game watching and snowmobiling are just some of what's on offer for the snowy season. Just 25 minutes outside its borders is Discovery Ski Area. With 67 runs—split almost evenly into beginner, intermediate, advanced and expert—discovery is right. Here I find no-wait lift lines, wide-open runs, well-groomed terrain and excellent skiing. Spring brings fly-fishing (blue-ribbon Rock Creek snakes through The Ranch), archery, mountain biking, riding, paint ball, hiking and more. No matter the season, the authentic weekly rodeo is a must.

LOOK OUT! Clockwise from top left: The bartenders who man the Silver Dollar Saloon serve up seriously good libations; nearby Discovery Ski Area offers varied terrain for all levels (be sure to try the famous chocolate chip cookies in the lodge, après-ski); don't be surprised when you see deer and other wild game around The Ranch; beautiful horses are available for riding year-round.

It doesn't take long to realize that anything is possible. Before coming to The Ranch, I'd never held a gun—but I do here, for sporting clay shooting. Gearing up at the Rod & Gun Club, I tag along with other novice skeet shooters and our much more seasoned guide Theo, who regales us with tales of safety and form. Next, we take aim, with Theo on a mission to make sure our entire party hits a clay target—we come close. More to the point, we have fun, more than I ever imagined.

On the opposite side of the spectrum is the luxury spa, and, here, The Ranch shines, too, with the à la carte Granite Spa, a quaint five-room facility proffering a customized spa experience. The Saddle Sore Soak and Massage, a soak in a custom blend of aromatic and healing herbs, followed by a 90-minute rubdown, and the Rock Creek Ritual, incorporating a scrub, wrap and massage, are standouts. Joining these therapies are facials and Ayurvedic healing treatments, yoga, and mani/pedi and salon services.

Cocktailing, on the other hand, is a specialty of the Silver Dollar Saloon. The ultimate “man cave,” which women also adore—a staple of Old West culture contemporized for modern day—is an absolute wow, with an old-style bar, saddle-style seating and bartenders who mix up serious cocktails. Also on the roster is a movie theater-sized screen (for showings of locally shot classics, like *Legends of the Fall*) fronted by plush couches, a four-lane bowling alley, a pool table, pingpong and a karaoke system (for after you've knocked back a few of The Ranch's specialty libations). This spot makes for serious fun and lots of good-time memories. Bonding, anyone?

In true homesteading decadence, The Ranch at Rock Creek is indeed taming the wilds of the West. **M**