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RANCH REDUX

*A modern lodge rises
in a Montana flood plain*



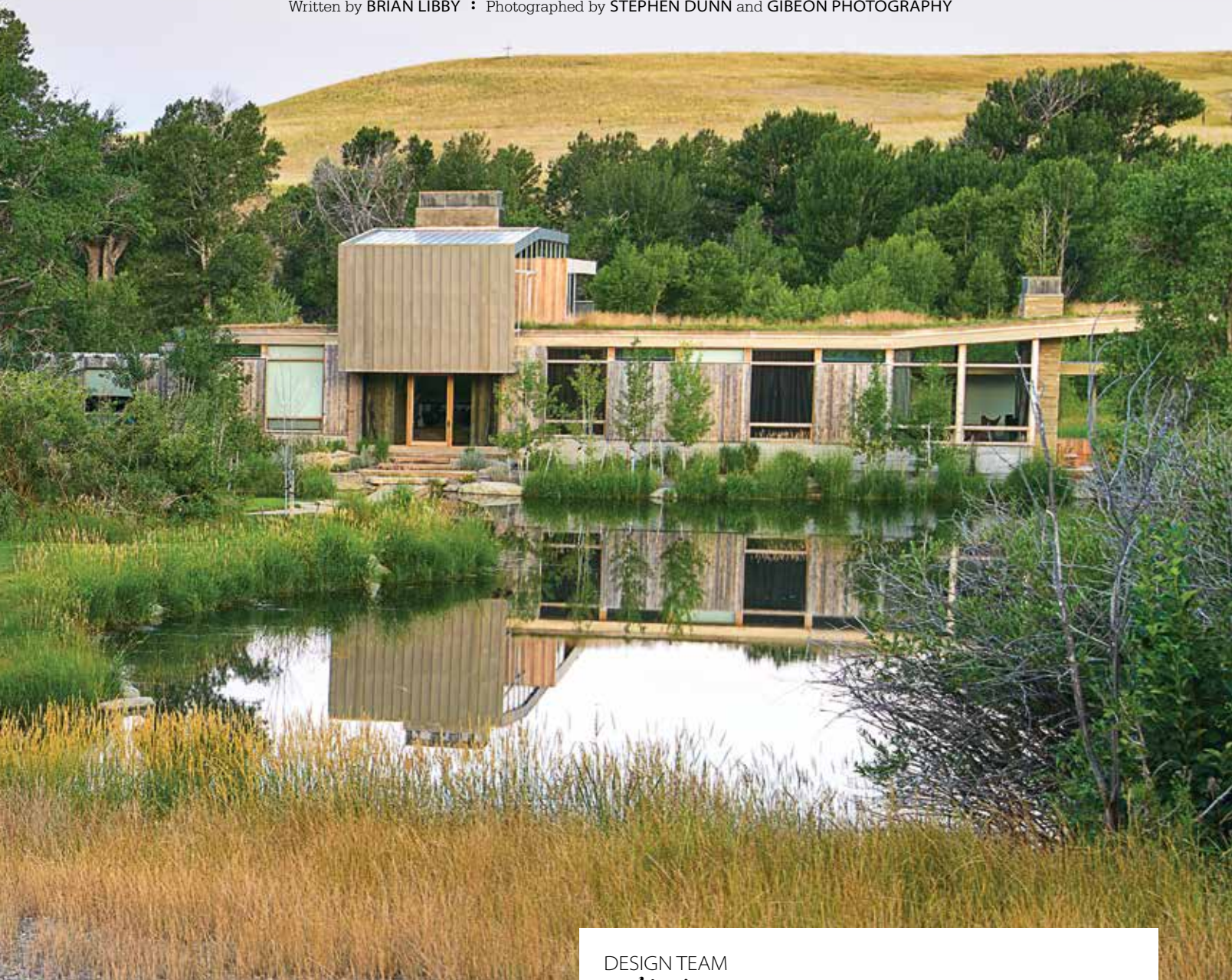
The Watershed Lodge is nestled amid a grove of cottonwoods in southern Montana, part of an abandoned ranch brought back to life by taming its often-flooded plain. Architect Scott Hughes and landscape architect Raymond Jungles's design diverts water to retaining ponds through a custom channel built into the foundation.

STEPHEN DUNN

WATERSHIED

A riverside Montana ranch is reborn with sustainable land management practices and smart, striking architecture.

Written by BRIAN LIBBY • Photographed by STEPHEN DUNN and GIBEON PHOTOGRAPHY



DESIGN TEAM

architect: Hughes Umbanhowar Architects

construction: Highline Partners

landscape architect: Raymond Jungles Studio



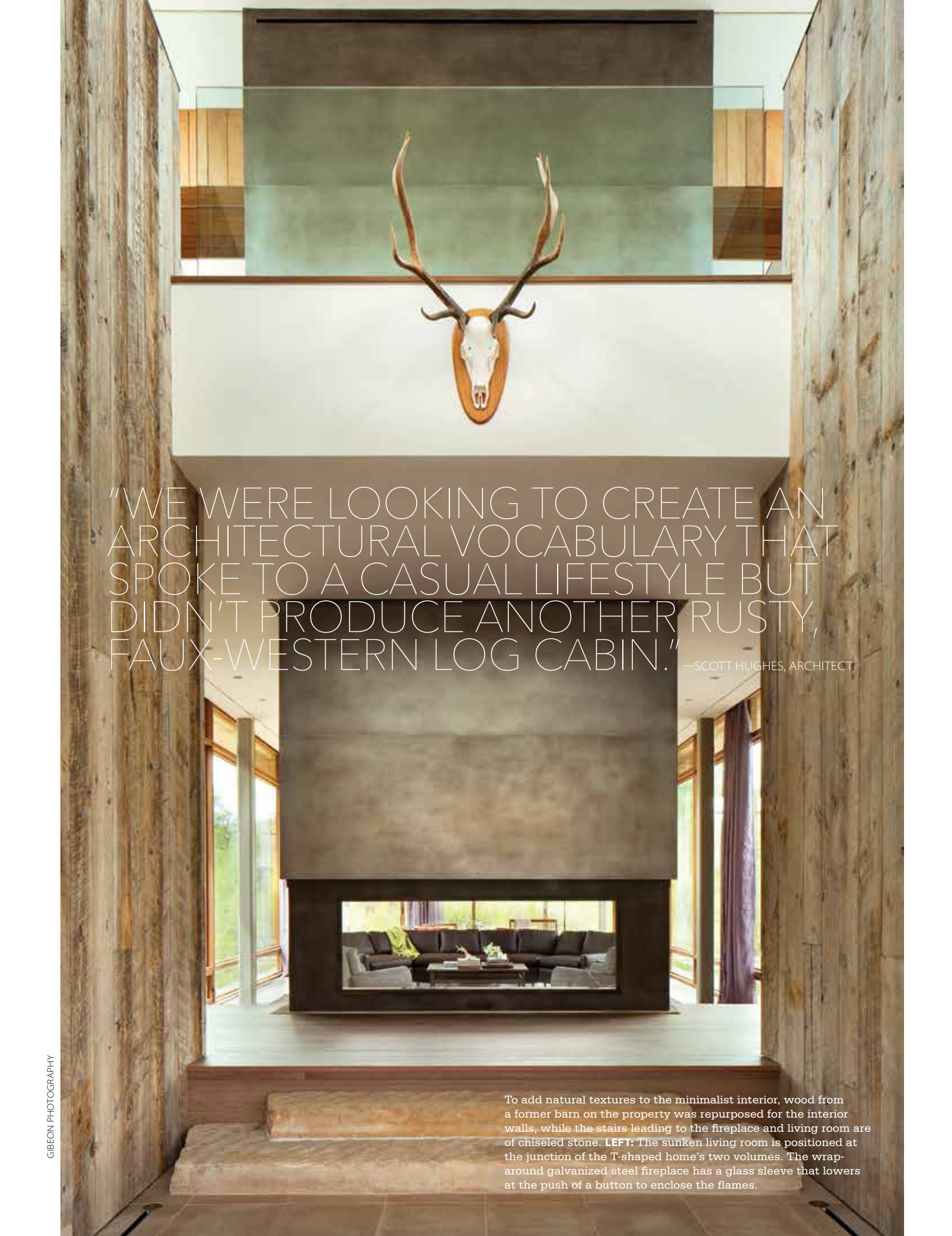
GIBEON PHOTOGRAPHY

In a world increasingly grappling with climate change, floods are a growing threat able to rupture communities and landscapes. Yet humans—from ancient Egypt to modern-day Holland—have relied upon this natural phenomenon for millennia as a means of irrigation and sustainable land management. This old-yet-new strategy helped to birth the Watershed Lodge, a residence on a once-abandoned ranch in Big Timber, Montana.

The site is stunning, a 2,000-acre property with gently rolling hills and a grove of mature cottonwoods. But it's also challenging. The Yellowstone River bisects the ranch and overflows its banks each spring, and a tributary creek runs


alongside the house. Although constructing a luxurious 3,000-square-foot house in an active flood plain might seem counterintuitive, architect Scott Hughes, of Florida- and Los Angeles-based firm Hughes Umbarhowar Architects, saw a chance to create groundbreaking modern architecture at one with its surroundings.

Hughes had worked with the husband-and-wife clients on two previous projects in Florida, where the couple and their three young children spend winter months. For their new residence in Montana, they wanted to embrace the outdoors and build a glass-sheltered view of the natural landscape. "We were looking to create an architectural vocabulary that spoke to a casual lifestyle but didn't produce another rusty, faux-western log cabin," the architect explains. »



"WE WERE LOOKING TO CREATE AN ARCHITECTURAL VOCABULARY THAT SPOKE TO A CASUAL LIFESTYLE BUT DIDN'T PRODUCE ANOTHER RUSTY, FAUX-WESTERN LOG CABIN." —SCOTT HUGHES, ARCHITECT

To add natural textures to the minimalist interior, wood from a former barn on the property was repurposed for the interior walls, while the stairs leading to the fireplace and living room are of chiseled stone. **LEFT:** The sunken living room is positioned at the junction of the T-shaped home's two volumes. The wrap-around galvanized steel fireplace has a glass sleeve that lowers at the push of a button to enclose the flames.



Hughes collaborated with acclaimed Miami landscape architect Raymond Jungles on a water management plan inspired by the Dutch, who have reclaimed hundreds of square miles from the North Sea by constructing polders: low-lying tracts shielded by dikes, ponds, and channels that divert rising water. Similarly, the Hughes-Jungles team designed and dredged a series of deep ponds, running parallel to the house, to hold the river's seasonal overflow. Counter to expectations, the house is set between the creek and the polders. As such, the home itself "becomes sort of a channel that controls flooding," Hughes explains. The design enables rising water to flow around the home on its way to the polders, but if the water rises


beyond a certain height, it is diverted through a small channel built into the foundation. The team also incorporated the ponds into the geothermal system that warms and cools the house year-round, and they're part of the plumbing supply used for irrigation and flushing toilets.

The house, located across a bridge from its carport and sitting atop a 3-foot plinth for added flood protection, is composed of two interlocking volumes: a two-story portion lined with floor-to-ceiling windows and a single-story oblong that runs perpendicular to it. "The two-story glass wedge is the public space, the entertaining space, that takes advantage of views," Hughes says. "The one-story element is the private space and is more enclosed." »



The earthy colors and natural materials of the living room's lounge chairs and daybed ensure the home's interiors don't compete with the views beyond the custom Duratherm windows. When the site floods in early spring, water advances to the edge of the house.





A pristine kitchen by German manufacturer Bulthaup is centered upon a larch-topped kitchen island. A variety of woods, including ipé hardwood floors, cedar ceilings, and salvaged barn-lumber walls, warm up the minimalist space.

The T-shaped layout is one Hughes frequently employs in his designs for its access to light and views. “We don’t do square houses with rooms in all four corners. We tend to pull houses apart,” the architect explains. The Montana project’s main spine runs from the front door out toward the river, and an interior hallway—the perpendicular axis—heightens the sense of procession and drama as the vistas unfold. Broad eaves that protect residents from the elements allow easy indoor-outdoor living—a tactic Hughes learned well when designing for warm, wet Florida climates. The two axes intersect in the dramatic, light-flooded two-story space that serves as the home’s entry hall, where a wraparound galvanized steel fireplace’s glass screen frames a view into the living area on its opposite side. The second floor is reserved for the

master bedroom suite, while the single-story oblong is dedicated to children’s and guest bedrooms.

Pristine and glassy as its contemporary architecture may be, the house makes ample use of wood to add texture and warmth, including lumber salvaged from a demolished barn on the ranch and used as exterior and interior cladding, as well as elegant Brazilian ipé floors and rough-hewn cedar walls. Materials such as slate flooring and the copper custom master-bathroom tub speak to the geology of the mountainous landscape. The home’s minimalist style doesn’t strive to make a statement or deny its vividly beautiful surroundings. Instead, its design ensures there’s always a breathtaking view—one that’s constantly changing as the seasons cycle and water levels rise and fall. »







TOP: The family room includes the house's sole use of brick, in its fireplace, which doubles as a display wall for the clients' art collection, including this Warhol print. **ABOVE:** The master bathroom features a custom two-person copper soaking tub. **LEFT:** The master bedroom was designed with not only floor-to-ceiling glass, but also a band of clerestory windows to offer a view of both land and sky. The hanging fireplace is by Fireorb. ❄️

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