



While hundreds of brand-new buildings sprout up in the Flathead Valley, there is a group of builders, developers, and owners who are breathing new life into old structures. For the Kootenai Lodge, this means a full restoration of many of the original 1920s buildings within the Kelley-

Evans Estate. For Montana River Properties owner Sherry O'Hearn, it means restoring and adapting a hundred-year-old Swan River barn into a living space; and for Wild Wood Eccentrics, it means rescuing wood from aging, dilapidated structures to give it a second life in new construction.

Each of these old buildings carries a history—much of which becomes recorded in the structure.

The Kootenai Lodge on Swan Lake was a 20-building retreat patterned after the Great Camps of the Adirondacks, developed by Anaconda Copper Mining Company's Cornelius Kelley and Lewis Orvis Evans in the 1910s and 1920s. You can't help but feel that the log buildings have collected the great stories of the elegant parties, the giggling children frolicking amidst towering pines, the

# Something Old SOMETHING NEW



Evans Lodge at Kootenai ▲



Open House at the Main Lodge at Kootenai ▲

tually everything," notes Morton. Original blueprints were obtained from the collection of architect Kirtland Cutter to help guide the restoration. They jacked up the building, poured new footings, and replaced deteriorating logs. The flooring in the two wings off the Main Lodge was pulled plank by

JL Halverstad of Wild Wood Eccentrics ▼



Sample of JL's work ▼



plank, refinished, and reinstalled. Cedar log purlins were wrapped to protect their bark while the larch logs were soda-blasted and refinished. Impressions were made of the Charlie Russell etchings in the crumbling cement courtyard, and then they were cut out to be reinstalled in a new location. The new cement was stamped with the etchings to replicate the old courtyard. The courtyard fountain was restored to working order for the first time in decades.

Nearly two dozen animal mounts were refurbished, many of them returned to their original location in the magnificent Great Room of the lodge. The hundred-year-old Steinway and pool table were also refurbished. The copper bar was restored and made mobile so it could be used on the porch for special functions. Modern additions of a sound system, lighting, and heating and air systems were carefully disguised so that new would blend into old.

Evans Lodge saw a similar process, but also required some adjustments to transform the sleeping lodge into a full-service home. A crawl space was hand-dug under the building to accommodate plumbing and electrical, and a second story was added when the roof was replaced. Amenities, including luxurious bathrooms, a state-of-the-art kitchen, walk-in closets, laundry room, and garage, were also added.

Relocating the Kootenai Lodge barn, which had become home to hundreds of bats, was postponed until they migrated. Bat

houses were erected nearby to provide homes for them on their return. The restored barn now houses an employee room, a woodworking shop, and storage areas for equipment and reclaimed materials.

These are only a few of the sometimes-painstaking measures being made to retain the integrity of this historic property.

Project manager Doug Syme has found similar commitment and care from Sherry O'Hearn in restoring the Swan River barn. "The frame of mind of the owner is so important," he says, noting that it provides him the freedom to take the extra time and expense required for a quality restoration. "You have to enjoy the process... This is not a starter castle," says Syme. Even though major work was needed to convert the barn into a home, extensive measures were taken to preserve its historical integrity.

Syme says that the first step in restoring the O'Hearn barn required stabilizing the hundred-year-old building. "The barn was listing, so we had to make a parallelogram plumb," he explains. The project expanded when Sherry had the vision to turn the barn into a gathering space for her six grown children and their families. To convert the rustic barn into a weatherized living space, it was necessary to re-side it, so they carefully removed the charming old siding and used it for trim and baseboards. The upstairs bathroom was sided with the weathered red boards to create the playful illusion of an "outhouse."

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GIVING NEW LIFE TO OLD STRUCTURES

Story and Photos by Kay Bjork



Kootenai Lodge Great Room ▲



Paul Milhous at Evans Lodge at Kootenai ▲

Chris Craft wooden boat races, the presence of visiting Western artist Charlie Russell, and family milestones that occurred during the heyday of the Copper Kings.

Pam Morton of Kootenai Lodge Estates says, "It is a fascinating project—we are preserving a piece of Montana."

From a real estate point of view, the property itself is a gold mine, with nearly 2,400 feet of frontage on Swan River, Swan Lake, and Johnson Creek meandering down the middle. But it was the historic element that

captivated Paul Milhous, who purchased the property in 2005. Milhous explains that Kootenai Lodge is of an era that fascinates him. Since 1959, he has collected automated musical instruments and cars from the 1900s to 1920s, and he displays them in a private museum in Boca Raton, Florida.

Morton says, "Paul has a heart and passion for this property. He is one hundred percent committed to doing it right." She points out that few people could take on a project of this magnitude.

Restorations at Kootenai Lodge have been intricate and intense. For example, instead of replacing the windows in the Main Lodge, they chose to retain the charming, wavy glass windows since most of the use will be during the summer season. The 82 French windows were carefully removed and refurbished, which included deglazing the glass, insulating the panes, and refinishing the brass gliders.

The Main Lodge was restored closely to its original form. "They were able to save vir-