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# Carole King

THE SINGER-SONGWRITER  
HITS THE RIGHT NOTES AT HER IDAHO RANCH

Text by Therese Bissell/Photography by Mary E. Nichols



Singer-songwriter Carole King spent almost 20 years transforming a historic ranch in central Idaho into an environmentally friendly residence and recording studio. The main structure, which was used mostly as a guest lodge, dates to around 1900, and King "worked hard to maintain the character of the original building."





If ever an image captured the tenor of domestic life, it was the cover of Carole King's 1971 album *Tapestry*. The rustic window seat shared with a watchful cat on its paisley-covered pillow, sunlight sifting through Indian cloth curtains—and the background you could virtually hear: a teakettle's faint whistle over lute strains on the record player, the wood floor creaking under bare feet. It was a soft-focus mise-en-scène that indelibly linked the singer-songwriter's music with the simple, homespun living style of a generation.

Nearly 40 years later, King's life, as then, centers on the domestic (fittingly, her most recent release is titled *Welcome to My Living Room*). "Home is very important to me and consistently shows up in my lyrics," she says. "Home means comfort. But this house, more than any I've had, gives me the sense of being wrapped in the warm blanket of nature."

Brooklyn born, King spent her early songwriting years in Manhattan, before moving to California. "I was living in L.A. and wanted to go somewhere a little wilder. I looked around at different states out West, and there was something about the landscape in central Idaho, even the flat landscape down from the mountains, that was nourishing. This was the place I connected with."

She connected especially with Robinson Bar Ranch. The historic compound she acquired was a late-19th-century mining claim homesteaded in



King (opposite), an activist for environmental causes, opted for recycled materials whenever possible. The lodge was renovated by Robert C. Wyllie, who retained original logs and also salvaged dead trees on the property for posts, beams and paneling. THIS IMAGE: With designer Erik Gillberg, King created a "rustic and eclectic" living room.



about 1916 by future Idaho governor Chase Addison Clark, who expanded the existing lodge. Various as a guest ranch, a cross-country ski resort and a French country-style inn, it had been visited by luminaries from Clark Gable to the King of Sweden. Over almost two decades and through two major remodels, King, with the help of friends, family and local craftspeople, transformed the property from an exclusive commercial enterprise into her primary residence and private recording studio.

The now-7,000-square-foot, five-bedroom lodge and the studio are the main buildings on the 128 acres surrounded by forest. There is also a creek cabin, a caretaker's cabin, eight modest guest cabins (with electricity but no running water), a chicken house, a wood shop, a greenhouse, two barns and two pools—as well as, carved into a low hillside, a fairy-tale-like stone poolhouse.

"I'm not a visual artist," King says. "I worked in collaboration with people with a good eye and a feeling for the possibilities." Robert C. Wyllie did the bulk of the construction and much of the design on both remodels, and Dave Selene contributed metalwork. Design team member Erik Gillberg



ABOVE: The kitchen features a 19th-century Arcadian wood-burning stove but also boasts modern touches such as granite countertops. The room is heated geothermally, with water from a nearby hot spring piped under the adobe floor tiles. RIGHT: Musical instruments are found throughout the house, and the dining room, with its Baldwin spinet, is no exception.





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and King’s daughter Sherry Goffin Kondor helped conceive the interiors along with the design firm Citizen Properties. “I think of the ranch as a painting of ideas and elements, and I was the coordinator who provided the canvas. I wasn’t the one with the artistic vision but the first to say, ‘Yeah, that would be great; let’s do it.’”

Keeping the lodge’s footprint—a priority, as with each of the early ranch buildings—King structurally improved the walls and ceilings. Gravity-fed water from a hot spring heats the floors in the lodge’s significantly upgraded kitchen and baths. The log-constructed studio, with its added sleeping loft a boon to all-hours creativity, is also geothermally heated: The Steinway (a Baldwin spinet is in the lodge’s dining room) requires constant warmth. The paneling is from an old-growth spruce that fell on nearby forestland—“our good fortune,” says King, who was allowed to mill the giant tree on-site.

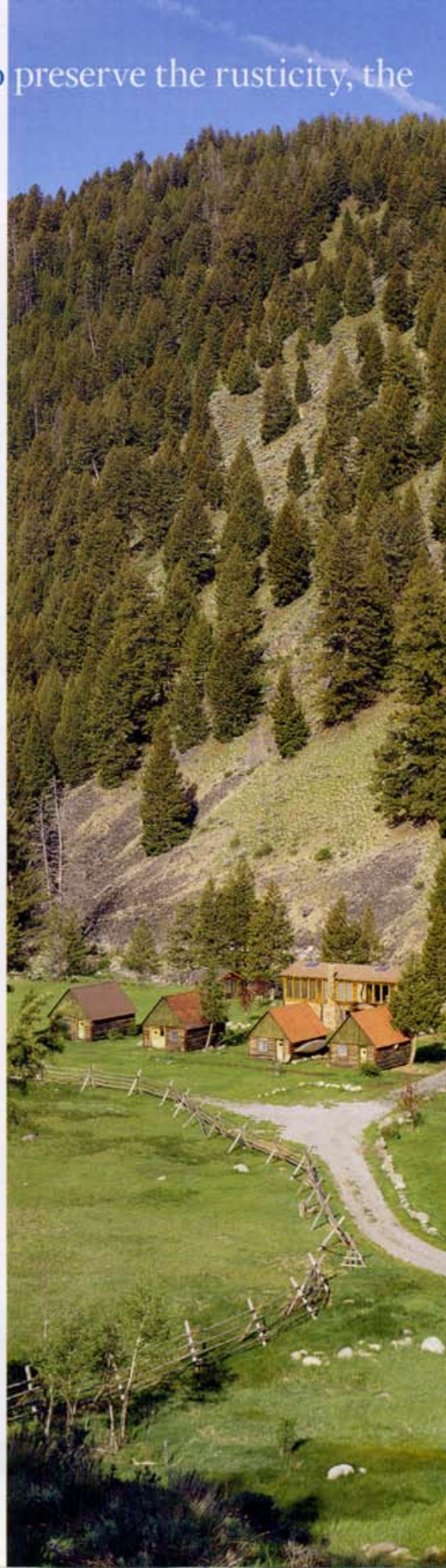
“My approach to the ranch was to preserve the rusticity, the tradition of it, using environmental efficiency,” she emphasizes. Toward that end, she replaced old roofs with Cor-Ten steel, installing dormers to gain sunlight. Her motto: “Make the improvement, make the change—but keep the spirit and integrity of what the place was.”

Furnishings and décor in the main and ancillary buildings are an eclectic mix of antiques, ranch memorabilia and heirlooms. In the lodge, tongue-and-groove knotty pine paneling and custom timber framing, and Wyllie’s stone fireplaces, provide a stately though informal backdrop to a South American low table, a 19th-century Arcadian wood-burning stove and a Tiffany lamp, among other distinctive pieces.

The “warm blanket” effect King speaks of extends beyond the enveloping outdoors to every aspect of her strikingly convivial residence. “Nowhere I’ve ever lived,” she says, “has represented home to me more than this does.” □



ABOVE: A bedroom at the west end of the lodge was designed by Los Angeles-based Citizen Properties and has a balcony with views of the meadow below. RIGHT: Tucked behind the main buildings are eight modest guest cabins. The 128-acre property is also home to a chicken house, a wood shop, a greenhouse, two barns and two pools.





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