



RUNNING WITH THE SNAKE RIVER

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A MOSAIC OF COTTONwoods, wetlands, and native grasses percolates throughout the Jackson Hole valley, nurtured by ancient meanderings of the Snake River. A rare 23-acre parcel of this lush, riparian ground in Wyoming offered a unique landscape challenge. Seventy percent of the property was held in a conservation easement, and the owners had to choose between one of two 0.8-acre building sites to accommodate a home, guest home, and barn.

Sensitive to the surrounding natural resources and desiring to develop in an ecologically sound manner, the owners selected a site near a levee. Shallow swales or

depressions in the earth around the home site marked historic river channels created during natural flood events. But levees built in the 1950s had tamed the river.

“It’s important to step back and try to understand what is going on in terms of resource values,” says Jim Verdone, the landscape architect.

What Verdone found was that the existing wetlands in the bottom of the swales were disappearing and old cottonwoods were not regenerating as a result of the levees. The discovery propelled a concept to restore some of the hydrologic functions of the land—a complicated effort requiring consensus between several regulatory agencies.

Like an island, both the main home and guest home were sited among the cottonwoods and connected by a wooden walking bridge. Beneath the bridge, groundwater fills a lined river-rock source pool. Most of the water from the pool topples over a stair-step spillway into an ancient swale.

The swale was lined in order to maintain a steady water level, with the lining lowered in certain places allowing a small amount of water to seep out to the cottonwoods. The rest of the water gently encircles the home before flowing into a natural creek that empties into the Snake River.

A flume lined with Corten is also connected to the source pool, creating yet



another water feature to be admired. Reminiscent of an old sawmill that once operated on the property, the flume diverts water from the pool to a terraced patio behind the house. Built out of quarried stone, one end of the terrace gives the appearance of the rocks having eroded into the swale, which then creates a natural-looking cascade.

Existing wetlands and cottonwood groves along the approach to the home were also significantly enhanced by realigning the main road leading to the house. The new approach, featuring timber reclaimed from an old railway trestle, presents a causeway aesthetic

while lessening slope to minimize impact.

“Our design philosophy is not about what you do but what you don’t do,” Verdone says. “We live in an area of incredible natural beauty that inspires—it’s about bringing the landscape back to its natural state while embracing the mountain lifestyle.”

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