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THE Love ISSUE

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THE SURPRISING MAGIC OF DUNTON HOT SPRINGS

97.7714° W / 108.0928° N

ROMANCE

AT 11,000 FEET

Just one of the romantic
and awe-inspiring scapes
you will stumble upon in
the San Juan Mountains of
Southern Colorado.

TOP: THE DOLORES CABIN IS AN ORIGINAL FROM THE 1800'S. BOTTOM: EACH SEASON BRINGS A DIFFERENT MOUNTAIN-TOP EXPERIENCE.



I met my husband, Bennett, through a mutual friend when I was 22 years old. He was an intriguing introvert who was always tinkering—building wooden boats, or welding in the driveway. I still remember the first thing he said to me. My best friend Jenny and I were hanging out with his roommate, making late night breakfast tacos and Bennett was working on one of his projects in the driveway. As she and I were leaving, he asked, “Do y’all need something fixed?” In that moment, he looked like a young Ryan O’Neal, complete with a white T-shirt and Wrangler jeans—his signature look at the time. It was a whirlwind romance, and we were married almost exactly 18 months after the night we met. As we drove deeper into Southern Colorado’s San Juan Mountains towards Dunton Hot Springs for our 10 year wedding anniversary trip, we reflected on the last decade and how we grew up together—two baby girls, three house moves, four job changes, and a

construction project in the works.

We have travelled on both the east and west coasts, and spent vacations at the beach and in the desert, but we continually long for the mountains. I have been ogling photos of Dunton Hot Springs, the dreamy former mining town built in 1885 that had been transformed into a luxe resort on 183 acres, for years. We opted for the scenic route and flew into Albuquerque, driving north through Durango. I didn’t mind the three-hour drive along the sweeping San Juan Forest. The last part of our trek was down a dirt road with just a few houses or other signs of civilization.

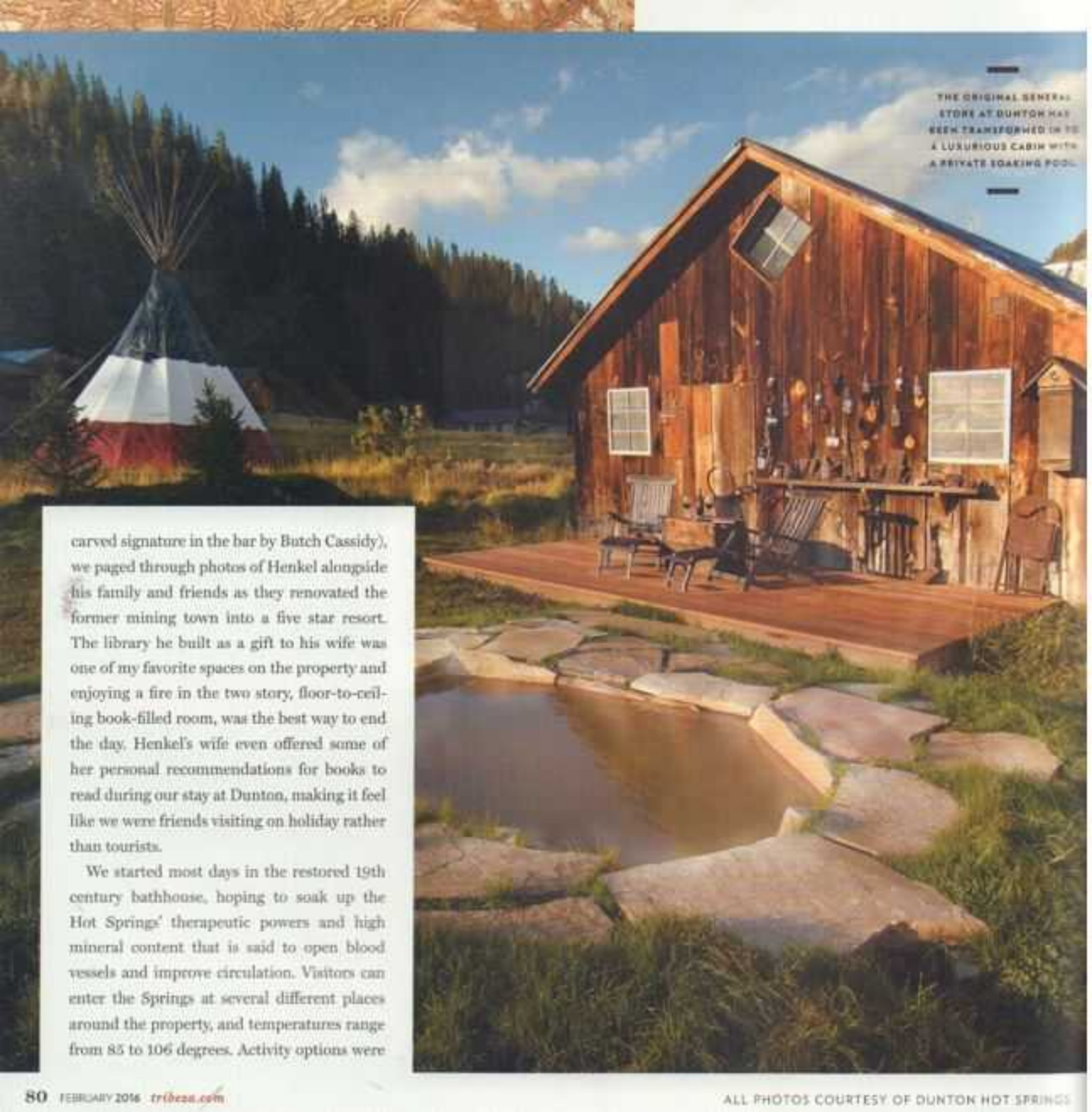
We arrived at our home for the next four days, which sits at 11,000 feet elevation, and our initial tour of the property left us pinching ourselves that we actually got to stay at this picturesque place as we discovered one surprise after the other. From the outside, our hand-hewn log cabin (one of only 13 on the property) looked unassuming, but inside it felt incredibly inviting, hitting all the right



notes of an authenticity that honored the historic bones of the structure along with touches of an understated luxury in its stunning textiles and beautiful antiques. Outside our cabin, the main source of the natural hot springs and bath house was just steps from our front door, and hiking paths offered routes to a 100-foot waterfall one direction, or up to scenic views the other way.

This theme of understated luxury carried through every part of our experience. I spied a grand, four-story modern home hidden in the trees that was markedly different from the other structures on the property. The house, which looked straight out of the pages of *Architectural Digest* (turns out it actually ran in the magazine in 2008), was the home of the German billionaire Christoph Henkel, who bought the property in 1994. Even though Henkel was not at the hotel while we were there, over our stay I became fascinated with his story and his impeccable taste. In the main building where you have all your meals, the Saloon (that boasts a supposedly authentic wood

INSIDE THE RESTORED
19TH CENTURY BATH
HOUSE THAT WAS ONCE
USED BY MINERS TO REST
AFTER A LONG DAY.

A large, rustic wooden barn with a steep gable roof and a wide porch. The porch is furnished with several wooden chairs and a table. In the foreground, a stone hot spring pool is partially visible. To the left, a large teepee stands in a grassy field. The background shows a dense forest of evergreen trees under a blue sky with scattered clouds.

THE ORIGINAL GENERAL STORE AT DUNTON HAS BEEN TRANSFORMED IN TO A LUXURIOUS CABIN WITH A PRIVATE SOAKING POOL.

carved signature in the bar by Butch Cassidy), we paged through photos of Henkel alongside his family and friends as they renovated the former mining town into a five star resort. The library he built as a gift to his wife was one of my favorite spaces on the property and enjoying a fire in the two story, floor-to-ceiling book-filled room, was the best way to end the day. Henkel's wife even offered some of her personal recommendations for books to read during our stay at Dunton, making it feel like we were friends visiting on holiday rather than tourists.

We started most days in the restored 19th century bathhouse, hoping to soak up the Hot Springs' therapeutic powers and high mineral content that is said to open blood vessels and improve circulation. Visitors can enter the Springs at several different places around the property, and temperatures range from 85 to 106 degrees. Activity options were

endless: private guided hikes in the San Juan Mountains, rock climbing, horseback riding, fly fishing, heli-skiing (in the winter), yoga, Pilates, or day trips to Mesa Verde, a unique archeological preserve.

The staff hit all the right notes of service, somehow always knowing what we wanted (sometimes even before we did). When Bennett started asking about ideas for which four-teener hike he should do, they packed him an elaborate picnic lunch and a walkie-talkie in case he got lost before we even thought to ask. When the bartender learned one of the guests only liked sake, there were three options waiting for her at the next evening's complimentary cocktail hour before dinner.

The resort is all-inclusive, so most everyone has meals together in the Saloon. For being in such a remote location, we were always surprised by how fresh everything was and each meal brought new, unexpected flavors. Think venison tenderloin with roast-

ed squash, leeks and herbed farro, or mushroom risotto with black truffles. (And, we still swear the homemade granola at breakfast was hands down the best we have ever tried.)

To be honest, I was nervous about the communal dining aspect of the hotel (most guests have all their meals together at the 30-foot long antique table at the center of the Saloon). I was sure awkwardness would ensue, but could not have been more wrong. Each person we met was more fascinating than the next: a retired couple from upstate New York traveling the world for six months and heading to New Zealand next; a couple from Denver who owned an extremely rare vintage Mercedes and was at Dunton with a German photographer to shoot the car in the mountains for a Mercedes Benz owners' magazine; a newlywed couple who was just married at the hotel the weekend before (she is an actress on *The Walking Dead* and he is Katy Perry's guitarist), and our partners

in crime for the week and now dear friends who will be visiting us in Austin soon, honeymooners from NYC, Leland and Tim.

Over just four nights, they all became our friends. We talked around the fire wrapped in Pendleton blankets while making s'mores (with organic marshmallows no less) until late in the night, we delighted in hearing each other's plans for the day, and, when Bennett finally made it back from his hike up Mount Wilson, our new friends gathered around to cheer. We became our own little eccentric community in the solitude of the majestic beauty that surrounded us in every direction. And we missed it, and the way time slowed down in the stillness of Dunton, the moment we drove away. Our four day trip, where it was easy to let go of everyday worries, reminded us of our bond and how much fun we have together. We will always be grateful to Mr. Henkel for letting us experience a glimpse of the stunning escape he created in the mountains. 🏡

LEFT, A PEEK INSIDE THE LIBRARY THAT WAS A GIFT FROM THE OWNER OF DUNTON TO HIS WIFE. RIGHT, EACH CABIN FEATURES A MIX OF TEXTILES, ANTIQUES AND TRIBUTES TO THE AMERICAN WEST.

