



## **South Fork Lodge, Swan Valley, Idaho**

**Herbert R. Schall, FASLA, EDAW, Inc., Fort Collins, Colorado**

### **PHOTOGRAPHY BY HERB SCHAAL**

For years, the South Fork Lodge outside of Swan Valley, Idaho had been a small but popular mom-and-pop type of operation, a fly-fishing retreat with a restaurant and an RV campground. While many a good fish tale might have been told there over the decades, the site itself didn't do much to enhance the spectacular scenery of this particular bend in Snake River. Concrete RV pads, lawns and haphazardly placed buildings dotted the river bank.

When the 30-acre property came up for sale in 1997, Mark Rockefeller saw a diamond in the rough. Along with landscape architect Herbert R. Schaal, principal of EDAW, Inc. in Fort Collins, Colorado, Rockefeller envisioned an environmentally friendly fishing resort, something more in line with the area's natural beauty.



Spectacular views of river and mountains mark South Fork Lodge. Cottonwoods were reintroduced to this portion of the river.



Cabin units were tucked into the land and screened behind spruce.

Rockefeller, of New York, spent boyhood summers at a ranch founded by his grandfather, John D. Rockefeller, Jr., in Jackson Hole, Wyoming. "My uncle, Laurance Rockefeller, always made it available for members of the family to use as a getaway," he explains. "I always loved the beauty of the area, but when I graduated from college, I wanted something for myself. In 1991, we found a collection of ranch properties along the Snake River in eastern Idaho that we bought as an investment and a retreat."

Through an architect, Rockefeller found Schaal and asked him to spearhead some long-term improvements and environmental restoration for the ranch, including returning old wheat fields to native prairie and building roads for accessibility. When the South Fork Lodge became available a few miles upriver from his ranch, it seemed like an ideal project to continue Rockefeller's environmental efforts along the Snake.



Land around the main lodge was revegetated with native prairie plants.



A small pond and wetlands were added to the site to encourage visits by wildlife, which include moose, fox, osprey, trumpeter swans and bald eagles. Away from the river, Schaal supervised the restoration of the natural alluvial plain, creating a native prairie that was seeded with yarrow, sage and rabbitbrush. The site was also heavily planted with trees, including cottonwoods, spruce, willows and aspen, which help shield the property from the adjacent scenic byway.

Schaal helped site the main lodge building, designed by Sasaki Associates of San Francisco in association with Hawtin Jorgensen Architects of Jackson, Wyoming, so that the restaurant has views up- and downstream at a bend in the river. Cabin units were also placed carefully on the site, for maximum scenery and minimum impact.



Constructed wetlands on the site invite wildlife.

An innovative aspect of the project was the creation of a submerged wetland wastewater treatment system, Schaal notes. "A standard septic system would have taken up too much of the site," he says. "With this system, the wastewater gets filtered through gravel, wetland plants and sand before being released into the groundwater. It's the first of its kind in the state, well monitored and very clean. No extra nutrients are released into the river."

The project opened to the public in 2000 as an inviting, luxurious retreat focused on the river's many charms. "The landscape is natural, peaceful," says Rockefeller. "When you walk it, you can't help but enjoy it."



The lodge's restaurant was sited to capture views of the river.

Apparently jurors in the 2006 Colorado Chapter ASLA design competition agreed. They gave the project an Honor Award, citing its many environmental accomplishments.

**Landscape architecture:** EDAW, Inc., Fort Collins, CO; (970) 484-6073 or [www.edaw.com](http://www.edaw.com).

**Architecture:** Sasaki Associates, San Francisco, CA; (415) 776-7272 or [www.sasaki.com](http://www.sasaki.com); and Hawtin Jorgensen Architects, Jackson, WY, (307) 733-4364 or [www.hawtinjorgensen.com](http://www.hawtinjorgensen.com).



One of the major efforts at the site was to stabilize the river banks, which had been badly eroded during a flood. Tall trees shield the lodge from a nearby roadway.