



A majestic view of the meandering Blackfoot River from Lookout Rock

A River Runs Through It

Introducing The Green O, a game-changing retreat in Montana's beautifully rugged backcountry offering Wild West charm, high-concept dining and future-forward design. Alexandra Kirkman reports from the Rockies



A Light Haus, a 100sq m guest chalet with a generous terrace and outdoor fireplace

It seems to me Montana is a great splash of grandeur," wrote author John Steinbeck of America's fourth-largest and third-least-populated state, which borders Canada in the country's sprawling northwest. Nicknamed "Big Sky Country" for its vast, wide-open spaces and seemingly infinite vistas, Montana and its astounding landscapes have long inspired artists and writers besotted by the countless glories of the natural world.

Those seeking a singular sanctuary amidst this ineffable majesty need look no further than The Green O, an adults-only escape in its rugged and achingly picturesque west, where the jagged peaks of the Rocky Mountains sweep down from British Columbia. Tucked beneath a dense evergreen

PHOTOS FROM TOP: STUART THURLKILL, © THE GREEN O

Social Haus is The Green O's chicly cosy restaurant and nucleus, where the world-class cuisine soars as high as the surrounding pines

canopy in the southern corner of its sister property, The Resort at Paws Up – a nearly 15,000ha working cattle ranch bisected by 16 kilometres of the Blackfoot River, and arguably Montana's most luxurious destination – the intimate enclave delivers a novel and discerning take on rustic elegance. Having debuted in June 2021 to a primarily stateside audience due to pandemic travel restrictions, it's now luring discriminating visitors from further afield with its myriad charms and inimitable sense of place.

Twelve artfully designed chalets – or “hauses” – in four layouts showcase the region's endlessly enchanting environs. Perched seven metres above ground, the Tree Haus offers bird's-eye forest views via two storeys of floor-to-ceiling windows, while the Green Haus ushers the outdoors in with a glass-wrapped living room and a huge skylight over the king-size bed. Beyond modern yet comfy design – think supple leather couches and sleek wooden furnishings – all rooms feature gas fireplaces, outdoor hot tubs, and use of a Lexus hybrid SUV to explore Paws Up's expansive reaches and manifold amenities.

At the hideaway's centre stands the Social Haus, its chicly cosy restaurant and nucleus, where the world-class cuisine soars as high as the surrounding pines. In the open kitchen, executive chef Brandon Cunningham leads an award-winning team of passionate perfectionists, whose nightly nine-course tasting menu dazzles diners with its wildly sophisticated, no-pretence creativity. One evening, a luscious amuse-bouche of foie-gras ice cream with nectarine and compressed pistachio sets the stage for a show-stopping second act: a delicate slice of premium Japanese Wagyu beef served



Left: fly fishing the Blackfoot River at dusk; below: the view from a cosy corner of the Social Haus restaurant



with a screaming-hot river rock for grilling, then slathered with caviar mayonnaise and crowned with bibb lettuce and cucumber atop griddled milk bread. Later, saffron cavatelli with Dungeness crab earns raves, as does a silky chocolate torte with amarena cherry for dessert.

If you're not up for the tasting menu, the team will happily oblige cravings upon request (a recent visitor ate chicken-fried steak for three straight nights), or deliver a freshly baked gourmet pizza to your room. Open only to Green O guests, the Social Haus embodies an über-exclusive, ne plus ultra culinary experience that defies easy characterisation.

In between awe-inspiring gastronomic journeys, a slew of activities immerse guests in Montana's wondrous wilderness. In winter, snowmobiling and dogsledding enthrall adrenaline junkies, while ice skating and horse-drawn sleigh rides cast a subtler but equally potent spell. Intrepid daredevils can also try skijoring – Norwegian for “ski driving” – akin to waterskiing on snow-clad fields, with a horse replacing the boat.

Speaking of horses, you can amble on horseback along 160 kilometres of scenic

trails, or embrace your inner cowboy and join a cattle drive. An ATV property tour makes for an exhilarating jaunt through rolling hills blanketed in fragrant sagebrush, where herds of shaggy-maned bison roam. Or test your skill at sporting clays – often called “golf with a shotgun” – on the pristine nine-hole course, training your barrel on the neon target as it streaks across the azure sky.

To grasp the essence of Montana's transcendent allure, take to the Blackfoot, the legendary waterway made famous by the 1992 film *A River Runs Through It*, based on writer Norman Maclean's novella, to go fly fishing. Floating along its storied channels – the only sounds its gentle rush and your guide's voice as you cast your line and mend it, over and over again – conjures a rhythmic reverie, shattered only by the sudden jolt of hooking a fish. In that shining, fleeting moment when your catch (likely a cutthroat, brown, or rainbow trout) surfaces, its speckled sides flashing iridescent in the sunlight, all worldly worries fall away, and Maclean's immortal words seem to whisper on the wind: “Eventually, all things merge into one, and a river runs through it.” thegreeno.com –