



**2008 Award of Excellence
AIA Montana Design Awards Program**

Merit Award



Photography by Gordon Gregory, Ralph Kylloe

Architects of Record:

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Watkins Creek Ranch

The Bennetts had been fishing and recreating in Southwest Montana for years, and searching for a piece of property they could call their own. Mike Bennett is involved in renovations of historic buildings in Charleston, South Carolina, and knew they preferred property with a long history. Once they located an old ranch on the south shore of Ennis Lake the new search was over. On the ranch were dozens of buildings, including one intricately crafted main log house with great connection to the region. Its original builder, Jack Watkins, was involved in the construction of the Inn at Old Faithful in Yellowstone National Park. The style of the cabin is greatly influenced by the "Western Park" style that Jack had been crafting in Yellowstone, but with its small scale, the cabin and surrounding buildings are also reminiscent of an Adirondack camp.

The goal for the project was to renovate the main cabin and adapt the other buildings into a variety of uses, including guest quarters, an office, and perhaps the most unique adaptation is a billiard lounge renovated from an old barrel-vaulted cellar dug into the hillside. There were no large alterations to the main cabin, and along with enlarging the windows to open up the interior spaces we added covered porches, a mudroom, a new kitchen, and new bathrooms. However, many of the other log buildings on the property were dismantled, relocated, and reused. That is the case for the building referenced as the "Dogtrot", which consists of two smaller cabins rebuilt as guest suites and separated by a covered deck. Due to their small size, each suite also has a bathroom addition extending off the back. Another of the old hewn log buildings on the ranch was relocated and rebuilt as an office.

In addition to the adaptive reuse of the old structures on the ranch, we were also tasked with designing a few new buildings. On the one hand, these new buildings needed to relate to the historic structures on the ranch, but on the other hand the intent was not to copy the style Jack Watkins had incorporated into the buildings a century before. A new garage and boathouse were based on adaptations of the Adirondack boathouse style, with heavy log detailing wrapped around the reclaimed Douglas fir siding. Lastly, a pavilion was designed to connect the homestead portion of the ranch with Ennis Lake and provide the Bennetts and guests with a place to enjoy summer activities and the stunning vista.