

AN UNLIKELY ART MAGNET IN **SOUTHERN MONTANA UNITES** LARGE-SCALE SCULPTURE, SUSTAINABLE RANCHING, AND LIMITLESS HORIZONS.

BY JENNIFER REUT

EOPLE DON'T COME TO MONTANA

for the modern art. They come for the skiing and snowboarding, of course, and also the camping and hiking (both Glacier and Yellowstone National Parks have access points in Montana), and the fly-fishing and hunting. They might even come for an experience that falls under the nebulous category of "lifestyle"—some combination of outdoor recreation and socially sanctioned day drinking, but really they come for the landscape, because that is what makes all of the state's pleasures and its economic growth possible.

Montana has dozens of named mountains and ranges (including my favorite, the Crazy Mountains) and nearly as many rivers flowing east or west on either side of the Continental Divide. Planes of the river valleys open out into highly marketable horizon view corridors, punctuated by dispersed towns and a few cities, places to stop rather than places to stay on your way to the main show, Montana's unfolding, highly variable, never-less-than-astonishing landscape.



LEFT

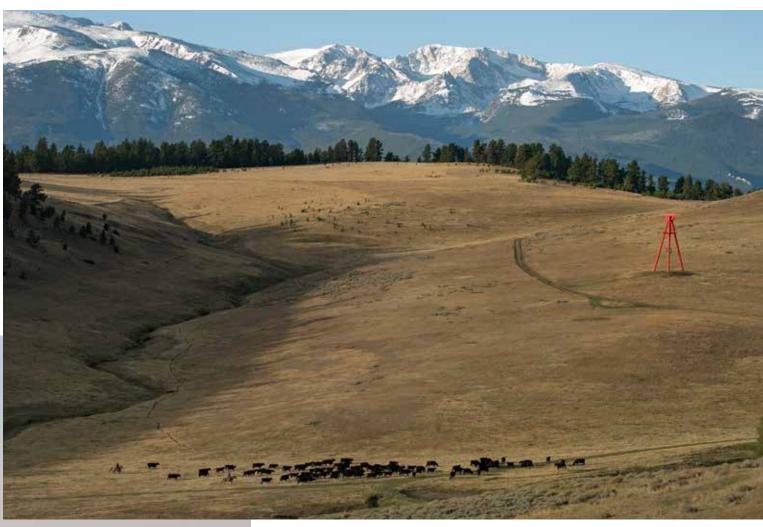
Though there are few trees because of the arid climate, Tippet Rise is adjacent to the Gallatin National Forest to the west.

воттом

Oehme, van Sweden's careful reveal of the Olivier Music Barn made excellent use of the undulating approach.

OPPOSITE

Views of the Beartooth Mountains frame Mark di Suvero's *Proverb* in Box Canyon.



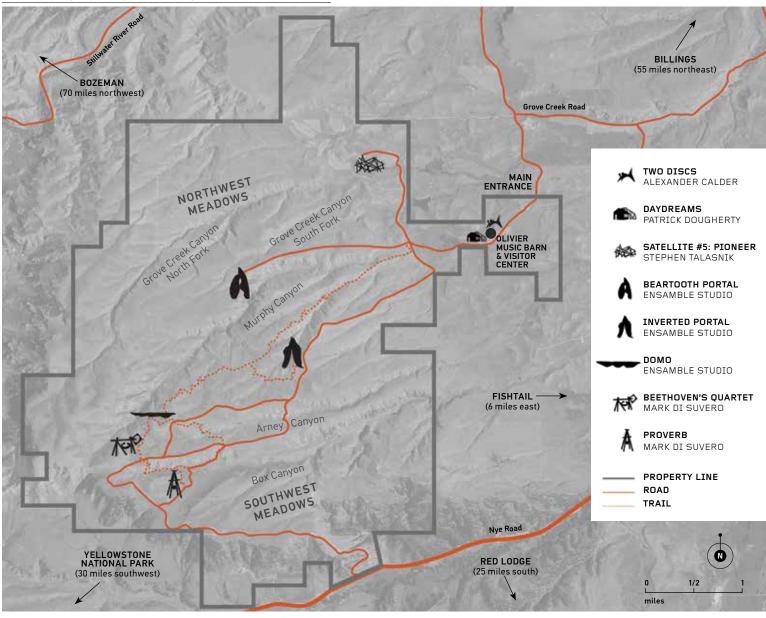


Into this scene, in 2016, arrived Tippet Rise Art Center, a music and art complex that hosts seasonal classical music performances in the intimately scaled, acoustically pristine Olivier Music Barn, set within a vast outdoor sculpture park that includes massive works by Mark di Suvero and Alexander Calder. At 10,260 acres, Tippet Rise dwarfs similar endeavors such as Storm King Art Center (500 acres) or Marfa, Texas (about 1,000 acres), but only permits 250 people on the site per day in its short summer season. In the two years it's been open, Tippet has hosted about 5,000 people each season, most of them from Montana. Tickets for the season's musical events sell out within minutes.

If you are driving to Tippet Rise—and you definitely are, because that is the only way to get around in Montana other than on horseback—you'll get a full complement of the state's offerings. The main interstates follow the rivers, the

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TIPPET RISE ART CENTER ROAD AND TRAIL MAP



evolution of the work-anywhere economy.

from Bozeman, and you'll have a sublime view of demographic shift is either a consequence of or the Beartooth Mountains for much of the drive. responsible for a number of rapid changes in the Ranchlands to either side hint at the state's interstate over the past dozen years, including Bozedependent and often incompatible economies of man's skyrocketing growth, a housing crunch that agriculture, ranching, resource extraction, and is driving East Coast-worthy sprawl, and the wave outdoor recreation. The scenery won't, unless of legacy ranch families selling off their land to you look closely at who is living in the bright, developers and newcomers. And, depending on newly built ranch homes, tip you to the fact that where you stand on that, it could also be seen as Montana is becoming a bit of a tech and finan- the reason a place like Tippet Rise Art Center can cial services hub, with expats from California exist and flourish in a state more likely to subsiand Washington State flooding the state, drawn dize its cow-calf pairs than its cultural centers. But in part by the boomer retirement wave and the that is a distant, even coastal, perspective. While Montana's reputation for great literature is well

Yellowstone and Stillwater if you are coming Depending on whom you talk to, this subtle



ABOVE

Left to right: Ricardo Sanz Soriano, Débora Mesa, and Antón García-Abril, of Ensamble Studio: Lisa Delplace, ASLA, OvS; Josh Hallengrogg, On Site Management; and Javier Cuesta, Ensamble Studio.

established, it has been less visible as a locus of ambitious art, particularly sculpture, which does thrive and evolve in the state's open spaces and individualistic culture in places such as Butte, Willow Creek, and Lincoln.

Cathy and Peter Halstead began assembling the first of the seven ranches near the town of Fishtail that would become Tippet Rise Art Center in 2010. Cathy is an artist, and Peter is a poet and musician, and they had a pretty good idea of the kind of landscape best suited for their plans. The Halsteads wanted to create a state-of-the-art music performance space embedded in a spectacular landscape, like Snape Maltings, Benjamin Britten's venue set

"IT'S SO BIG AND SO EXPANSIVE... IT'S JUST LIKE THIS GREAT WIDE OPEN AND IT'S TOUGH, YET ALSO REALLY **INTRICATE AND DETAILED."**

-PETE HINMON





acres over the course of several years, a consolidation of legacy ranches knit together into one place, to be called Tippet Rise.

resources on the site, which included all the suet says.

into a riverine landscape in Suffolk, England. To geotech or geology considerations for making meet the acoustic and visual standards they had, buildings or for extracting or making use of it would have to be big and it would have to be geothermal properties of the ground or water," relatively remote. After settling on south-central he says. Water was particularly important. With Montana, they purchased a little more than 10,000 around 17 inches of precipitation annually, this part of Montana is extremely arid and dependent on underground springs and snowmelt to revivify rivers and maintain ecosystems. The study also had to consider how to get people on In 2009, the Halsteads hired Arup to look at and off the site, which is about six miles from ideas for a concert hall on the site. Alban Bassuet, the closest town up a mountain road, conduct a multidisciplinary acoustical engineer then at sustainability analyses for making the best use Arup, worked with the Arup team on a feasibility of resources, and, finally, how to accomplish all study. Bassuet, who now runs his own practice, this with minimal intervention to the landscape. PresenceLab, spent two years working out every "It was a very difficult situation where we really type of question before the shovels went into the had to think very, very hard about where is the ground. "We looked at all of the environmental best place to build. Just answering that question conditions, weather conditions, [and] available took a really long time, and a long process," Bas-

Sketches helped determine where the various elements could be placed on the small 10-acre site.

ABOVE

The Cottonwood site before development.

The Johnson ranch, one of the Halsteads' purso therefore being sensitive to the placement of chases, had a conservation easement that stipulated that one 10-acre parcel out of 3,000 acres could things is really important." The final location of be developed for agricultural or educational uses. what is now called the Cottonwood campus was The Halsteads snapped that up for the site of their chosen for its relatively protected situation near music building and other infrastructure. Bassuet a stand of trees along a creek. With few trees to brought in the Washington, D.C.-based landscape break the winds that rake across the grasslands, architecture firm Oehme, van Sweden (OvS) to Delplace observed that ranch homesteads would look at a few potential sites within the 10-acre site have used similar strategies, tucking their buildfor development. The work, which was collaboraings into the landscape where possible to take the tive, entailed siting the Olivier Music Barn, which best advantage of what little shelter was at hand. was designed by Gunnstock Timber Frames, but also developing strategies for vehicle and pedes- Unfolding out from the central Cottonwood camtrian circulation—how to get people there and get pus, which now includes a dining hall called Will's them around to see the sculpture. Lisa Delplace, Shed, artists' residences, as well as the music barn ASLA, is the CEO and a principal at OvS and and the Tiara Acoustic Shell, an outdoor perforwas the lead landscape architect on the project. mance venue, are the classic, topographically varied "One of the interesting complexities of the site is vistas of the mountain west. Low basins of grass-

that it's visible from just about everywhere, and lands stretch out, framed by flat-topped benches,









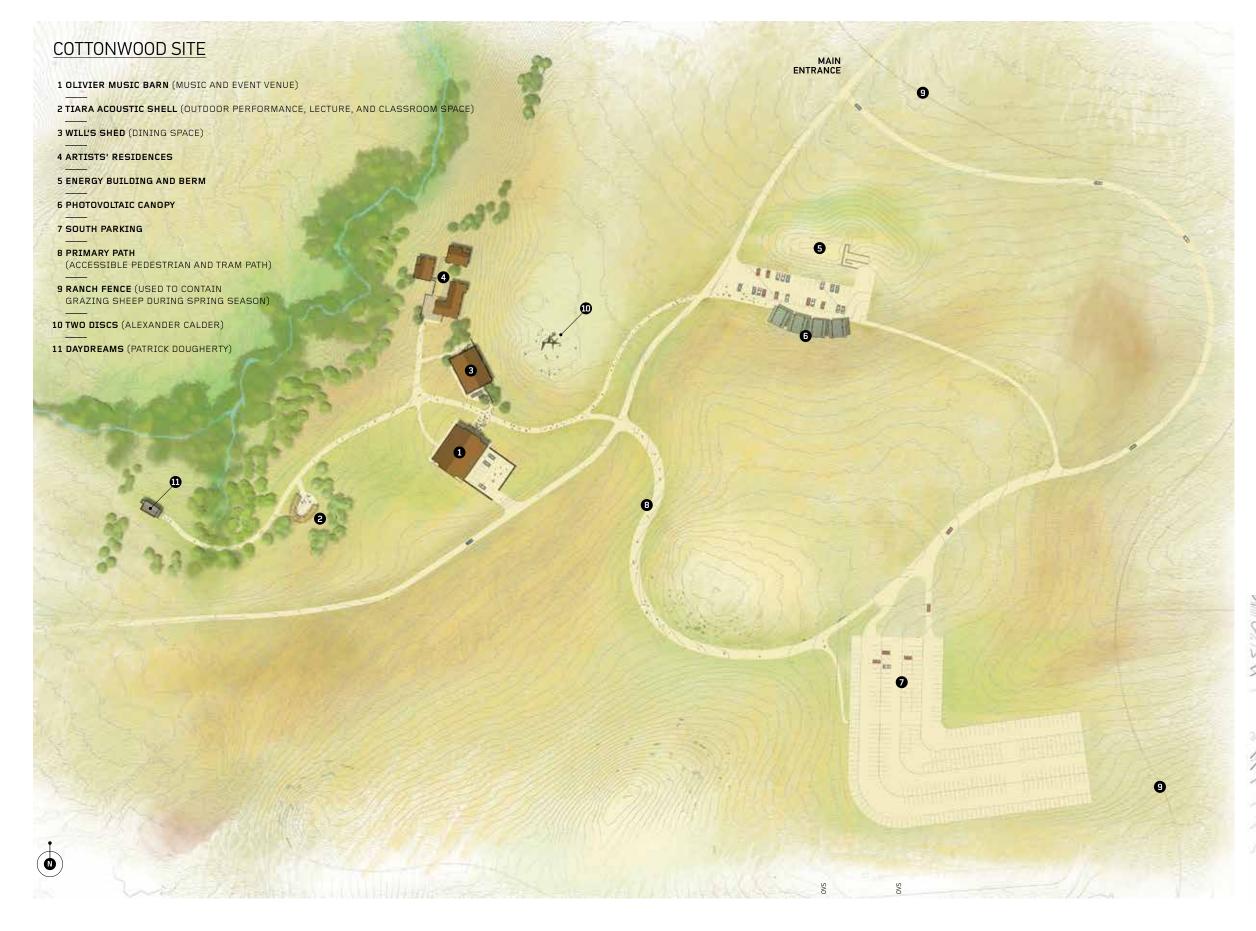








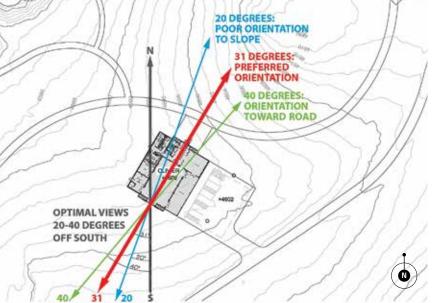




canyons, and hills that help locate the visitor within the disorienting prospect. Tucked in the landscape at strategic points are nine sculptures, some of which were site specific, and others that were acquisitions of existing pieces from admired artists.

Pete Hinmon is the director of operations at Tippet Rise, and, with his wife Lindsey, who is the director of outreach and logistics, is the engine behind Tippet's day-to-day success. Hinmon is from Colorado, a place generally thought to be fairly beautiful, but he is effusive about this part of Montana. "I mean, it's mind blowing. It's so big and so expansive. I've probably never been in an area with so few trees, you know? It's just like this great wide open and it's tough, yet also really intricate and detailed."

OLIVIER MUSIC BARN AND AMPHITHEATER ORIENTATION



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"WHAT YOU THINK YOU SEE AND THINK IS ACCESSIBLE MAY TAKE YOU HOURS TO GET TO. UNDERSTANDING HOW PEOPLE MOVE THROUGH THE SITE

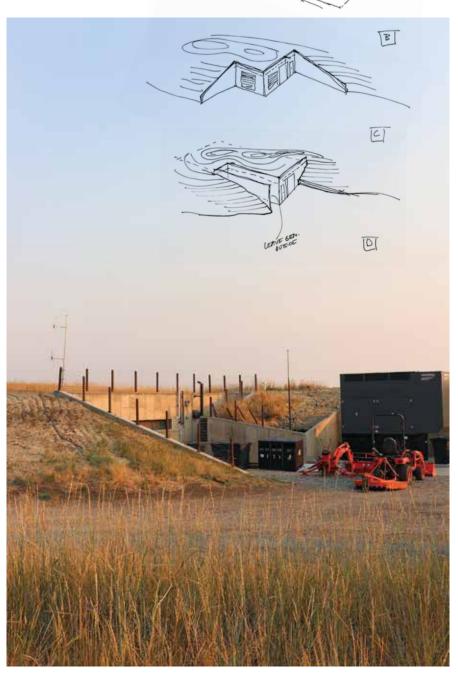
WAS REALLY IMPORTANT."

-LISA DELPLACE, ASLA

Circulation around Tippet is deeply thought through and managed but designed to disappear into the experience. Nine miles of hiking trails, 13 miles of bike trails, and loops of pedestrianvehicle paths wind in a circuit through the artworks. Delplace says the question of how to move people around involved testing multiple methods of transport. Pedal-assisted bikes, fat-tire bikes, mountain bikes, golf carts, and vans were all evaluated. "There are some unique things to Montana that people may not be aware of that you also have to consider," Delplace says. "That exposure is one of those big things, where you might be out hiking and not realize you're being exposed to a lot of wind, and not have access to water."

Because trees are sparse at this elevation, owing in part to the lack of rainfall, understanding how to scale the design of all the elements for human engagement was a preoccupation of the design team. "What you think you see and think is accessible may take you hours to get to. Understanding how people needed to get to this site and move through the site was really important," Delplace says. "Also, fire is a unique challenge. If people are driving themselves through, even a hot muffler could start a range fire." In the end, they settled on electric vans to shuttle passengers around.

The circulation design was also influenced by decisions about how many people to allow on the site each day, both for the experience and to reinforce the intention to be extremely light on the land. The clarity of the Halsteads' vision for different scales of intimacy helped frame the way the design team approached the problem. "One of the questions that Lisa posed was, what would be a satisfying day? What would that look like? Do they



LIZ STETSON/OVS, DRAWINGS; LIZ STETSON, PHOTO

OLIVIER MUSIC BARN AND SOLAR CANOPY

RIGHT

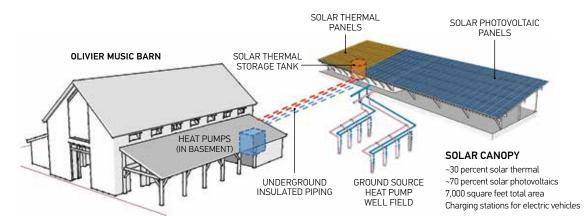
The geothermal heating and cooling system uses noiseless ducts to maintain the barn's acoustic precision.

BELOW

Before and after construction of the cistern that collects rainwater below the staff parking.

OPPOSITE

The banked Energy Building contains both mechanical systems and climate-controlled piano storage.

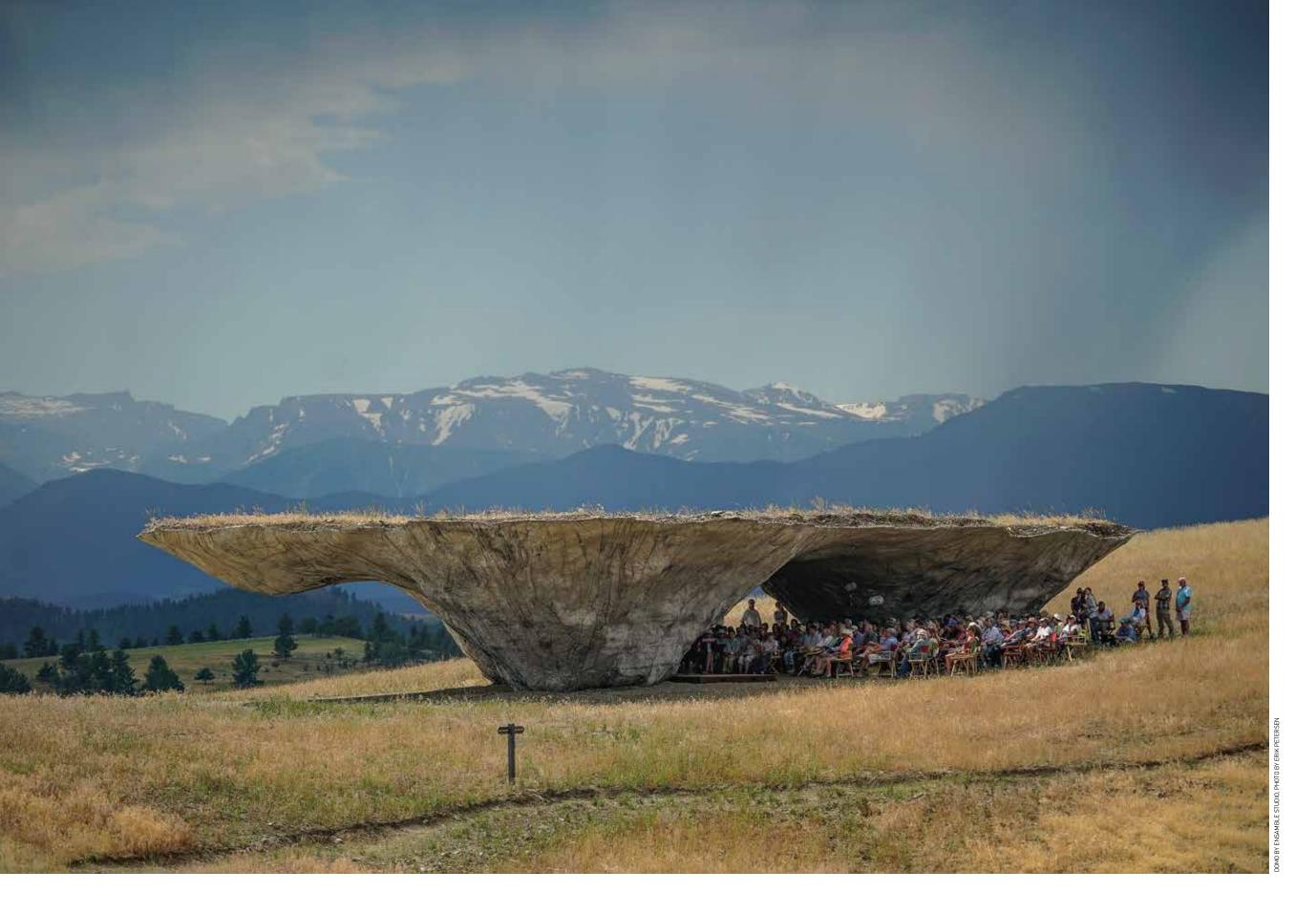






have to see any art? How much art should they see?" Pete Hinmon says. "There's a vision, and I would say the vision is to allow a single piece of art, a single sculpture in an incredibly untouched landscape. That's one of the major goals, and I think that's what is unique about Tippet Rise. You can go and experience amazing sculpture by itself. I mean, you don't see that often."

Arriving at Tippet Rise is perhaps one of the team's most subtle accomplishments. The road from Fishtail or Absarokee turns to gravel quickly and is alternately snowy and muddy (spring) or dusty (summer), or somehow, all three at once. As you ascend, passing scattered ranch houses and a sign that says "No Outlet," which you are meant to disregard, small, subtle signage urges you forward, part of the wayfinding and graphics that OvS designed for Tippet. Visitor vehicles are directed down a road behind a small rise and into one of two parking lots, a sequence that keeps vehicles well out of the sight lines at Cottonwood. Standing by the music barn, visitors leaving their car and walking down the hill appear as small figures drifting down the hillside in twos and threes, shadowed by Alexander Calder's Two Discs. It is the farthest thing you can imagine from hordes arriving on a bus and inundating a museum or other tourist attraction. Because the vehicle arrival and parking sequence is so highly



OPPOSITE

Outdoor concerts at the *Domo* are challenged by sudden rainstorms and the sensitive tuning of the instruments.

designed, it minimizes the visual clutter, but also keeps cars well away from the rest of the site and primes visitors for an immersion in landscape at a different scale.

The parking also hides other things at Tippet Rise. A 20-by-65-foot concrete bunker called the Energy Building contains the center's mechanicals, including the pumps and exchanges for the geothermal heating and cooling systems and the electrical distribution infrastructure from Tippet's 8,000-square-foot bifacial solar array. It also doubles as climate-controlled storage for three of the Steinway concert pianos at Tippet. Most visitors have no idea it is there—it's not on the tour, and the building profile, solar array, and vehicle parking are carefully banked in the landforms. "We said, you know, by looking at the landscape and looking at the contours, we think we can fill over the top of this building, and then just literally plant over the top," Delplace says. "You start to see the contours fade off as you come into the road. And now you can't even tell there is a building there, because we just filled around the building, and then continued the contours in the natural rise and fall of the landscape." Under the staff parking lot at the music barn, rainwater is collected in a 100,000-gallon cistern that hooks into the center's graywater system.

Per the conservation easement, the developable land was just 10 acres, which left something like 10,250 acres of former ranchland to manage. That job falls to Ben Wynthein, an Iowan who

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had come to the area to rebuild fences after the Science is alive and well on the ranch, and it isn't Derby fire in late summer 2006, a conflagra- hard to see why. There are 27,400 farms and tion that scorched some 200,000 acres before ranches in Montana, and 65.8 percent of Monit was extinguished. "It probably burned 75 to tana's land is in pasture and range. That totals 80 percent of what is now Tippet Rise, as well \$55.9 billion in farm and ranch assets, and some as lots of other homes and ranches," Wynthein \$1.6 billion coming from livestock production, acsays. Fire is part of the ecosystem in Montana, a cording to the latest numbers from the Montana cycle of destruction and renewal that includes the Governor's Office of Economic Development. In grazing of ungulates, predators like grizzlies and order to get a ranch to be profitable, the number wolves, small mammals such as prairie dogs, and of animal units (say, a cow and calf pair) on a piece a host of insects, to name a few human-managed of land has to be fairly high, which risks overgrazelements. The recent reintroduction of bison ing, erosion, and soil and water contamination. and wolves notwithstanding, there is no restor- Sustainable ranching strategies have been around ing the grassland ecosystem to its precontact for a while, and though the focus is the environstate. In the modern context, managing fire and mental health of the land, they are also meant to water and restoring, or perhaps more accurately sustain the culture and the way of life rooted in re-engineering, Tippet's ranchlands was the voca-ranching. But it isn't clear that the numbers work. tion Wynthein took on when he was hired by the Tippet Rise fits into a modern pattern that sug-Halsteads in 2013.

gests that infusions of philanthropic capital, and

Ben Wynthein has brought the ranchlands at Tippet Rise back to ecological health with a combination of the latest technology and science and close daily observation.

OPPOSITE

Wynthein's schematics and detailed notes on spring development have meant better dispersal of livestock across the land.

King Spring / State water system 2"sdRII (3)

> not profit from livestock and agriculture, is the only way the economics of landscape restoration can be sustainable. Keeping the land as a working ranch is likely a serious financial commitment, but it is also probably the most environmentally ethical way to manage it.

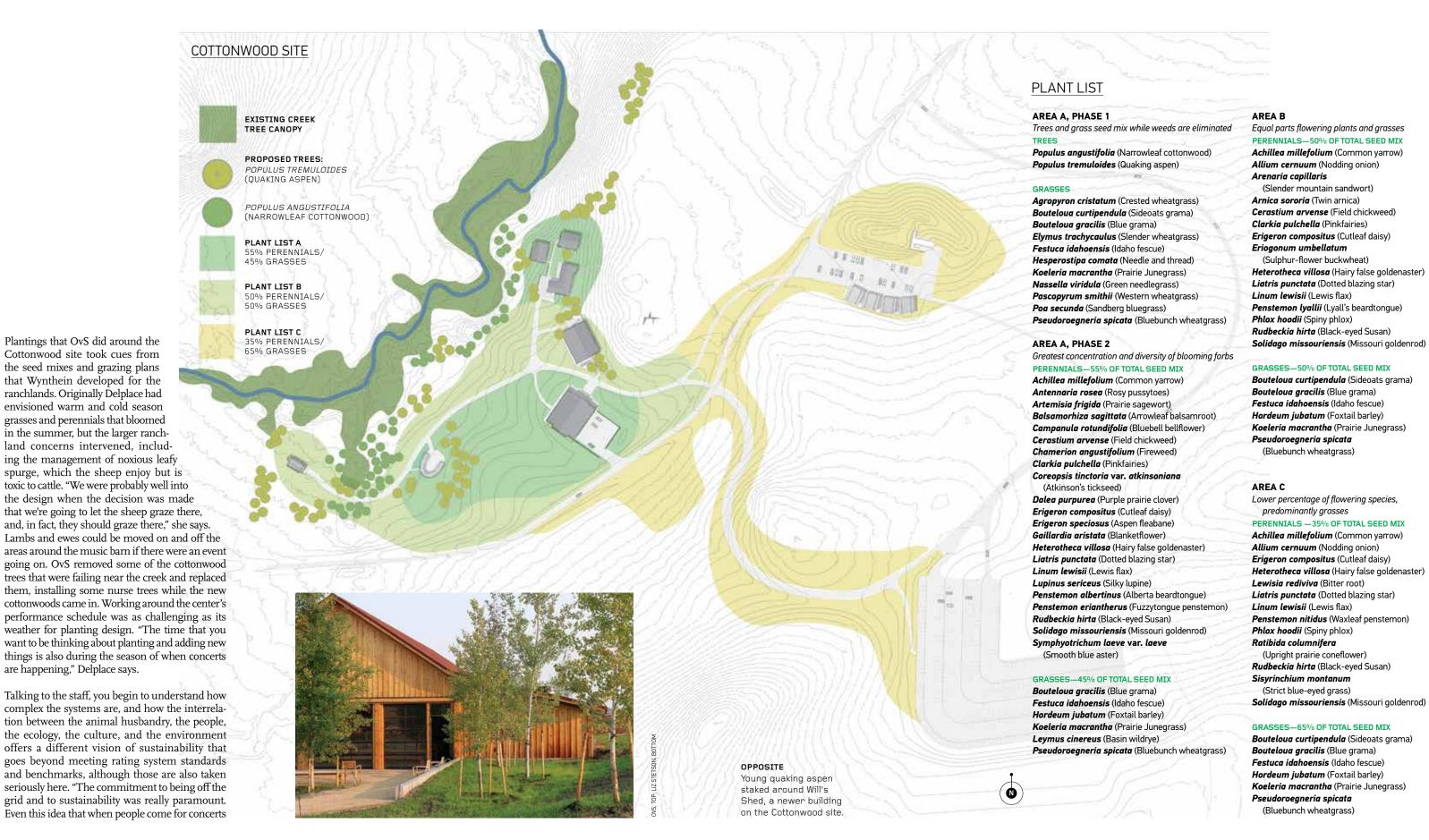
Knitting the seven ranch holdings into a single entity has entailed more than taking down fences. Water scarcity meant that extant springs were often overused by cattle and sheep, contaminating Wynthein says that Tippet's being an art center the water and the soil. Where those springs had grazing had allowed opportunistic invasive plants point they don't even know exists."

to outcompete native grasses, Wynthein has been doing extensive soil testing and root stock measurements and carefully targeted weed management. He developed new grazing patterns for the cattle and sheep when the traditional approaches didn't work as well as he liked.

noter line desin valve in first tank

Water is by far the most precious and scarce resource. What is collected from springs, rain, and snowmelt is sent into underground cisterns not just for animals but for firetruck access, a legacy of Wynthein's experience with the Derby fire. He estimates that there are about 70,000 gallons of water spread out all across the whole ranch, with fire hydrants that he can tap into if he needed to. "I'm thankful that someone bought this place who cares about that kind of thing and is willing to invest in the land, because it doesn't take long to tie up a lot of money in water development. It's not something you just do flippantly or haphazardly, because it isn't cheap."

meant that some of the systems he devised had to become degraded, Wynthein installed barriers, be thought through from a design perspective as first mapping and then redistributing water access well. "Everything I do, a lot of it's underground or across the ranchlands with new solar-powered I used the hills very carefully. So, when people are wells, about 30 so far by his count. Where overgoing up the roads, they may drive by a watering



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LEFTRiders break for art
on Tippet Rise's
13 miles of bike trails.

in May and June, they're not going to know that the ewes and lambs have been on the site. It's all about being sustainable and allowing multiple things to happen on the site," Delplace says. "It fits pretty seamlessly, but it took a lot of effort to make it that way." •

Project Credits

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