



Photos by Ellen M Bishop

Minam River Lodge, perched above a wet meadow, offers an expansive deck with a view of the Minam River Canyon.

**Wilderness luxury succeeds**

**Ellen Morris Bishop**  
Wallowa County Chieftain

It is luxury in a most unassuming place, a respite seemingly built of wilderness and fresh air. The Minam River Lodge, a new incarnation of a 1950's classic log hunting lodge, opened last summer after six years of rebuilding and renovations.

Sequestered in the Eagle Cap Wilderness, the lodge is accessible only by hiking, horseback or airplane. It's an 8.5-mile trek from the Moss Springs Trailhead near Cove, and a 25-minute flight from Enterprise by short takeoff and landing (STOL) planes. There's no Internet. No cell phone service. "It's like dropping into the 18th century in some ways," remarked one guest.

The lodge's transformation from a revered but ugly duckling hunting lodge to an elegant solar-powered swan has been breathtaking. Portlander Barnes Ellis purchased the place—including the surrounding 126 acres—for \$500,000 in 2011. He decided to completely rebuild the lodge on the footprint of the original structure and add multiple well-appointed rustic cabins. It would be a high-end destination, he said. Ellis added solar power, and a greenhouse to grow organic vegetables. He resurrected the crumbling barn. He tore down the original weather-beaten lodge and flew in the huge pine beams to give the reborn building a warm and welcoming elegance that echoed its hunting lodge heritage. He hired local artisans and landscapers to give the new building local flair. He built the new cabins from local logs harvested on the property. By some estimates, he invested around \$6 mil-



Minam Lodge Manager Anna Kraft pours a glass of Elk Cove wine for a diner.



Bread is baked fresh every morning at the Minam River Lodge.

lion into his dream. In Wallowa and Union Counties there were doubts about his sanity.

But after just 1½ years of operation, the answer to the lingering local question of "But will anybody go there" is a resounding "Yes." The 16 rooms—including cabins and "glamping" wall tents—accommodate a total of 34 guests, and are fully booked for the season. The five-course wine-pairing dinners are sold out. And if you want a massage from the full time massage therapist, make a reservation well in advance. There may be quiet moments

here, but there are no dull ones.

"Our biggest draw is for people to come here and completely unplug," said lodge manager Anna Kraft. "It's hard for some people to do, but after three or four days they kinda get the hang of it." The lodge provides access to hammocks, books (the old-fashioned paper kind) and miles of wilderness hiking trails to ease the transition.

Staying here is neither for the faint of heart nor faint of wallet. If you are on a budget, you can glamp in a wall tent, replete with queen-

sized bed, fresh linens, and battery-powered lamps, for \$195 per night. Rooms upstairs in the lodge are \$245 unless you reserve the Eagle Cap master suite, complete with a hammered copper bathtub, for \$495. If you prefer something a bit more private, cabins go for \$395 to \$595 per night.

Breakfast is priced at \$25. Lunch does too, and can be made up in picnic or hiking format. The regular dinners, produced to perfection by Chef Karl Krause, are \$75. Special dinners, such as the five course wine-paired dinner cost more. But considering that everything at the lodge is either flown in, packed in, or grown there, these prices for wilderness luxury seem pretty equitable. What is not grown on the property is locally sourced and sustainably produced, including beef from Carmen Ranch in Wallowa, poultry from the Hawkins Sisters, also in Wallowa, and buffalo from Stangels Ranch in Enterprise. Guests tend to rave about the food. "This is HOME-MADE ricotta, and it's absolutely the best thing I think I've ever eaten" one diner opined – and that was just the appetizer course for last week's five-course meal, paired with Elk Cove wines.

Despite its expense and haute cuisine, an air of informality still pervades Minam River Lodge. The big doors of the main building open completely to provide access to the expansive deck. Dogs of staff and guests are welcome to hang out – though crossing into the dining area proper is forbidden. Hiking to the Minam River and along the trails is encouraged. The lodge has even produced its very own hiking guide for guests.

Guests come from around the country and around the world, said manager Kraft. "Many of our guests come

from the Northwest, especially the Bend area, and Portland. Some are from places like San Francisco and Boston," she said. "We've had people from New Zealand and France. But it makes us really happy when local people come to

stay, eat, or just drop in." And the people who stay at the Minam River Lodge are equally enthusiastic. "This place is a bucket list experience," said Bob Vosburgh, who had flown in from McCall Idaho. "It's simply not to be missed."

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