

THE Californication OF Montana

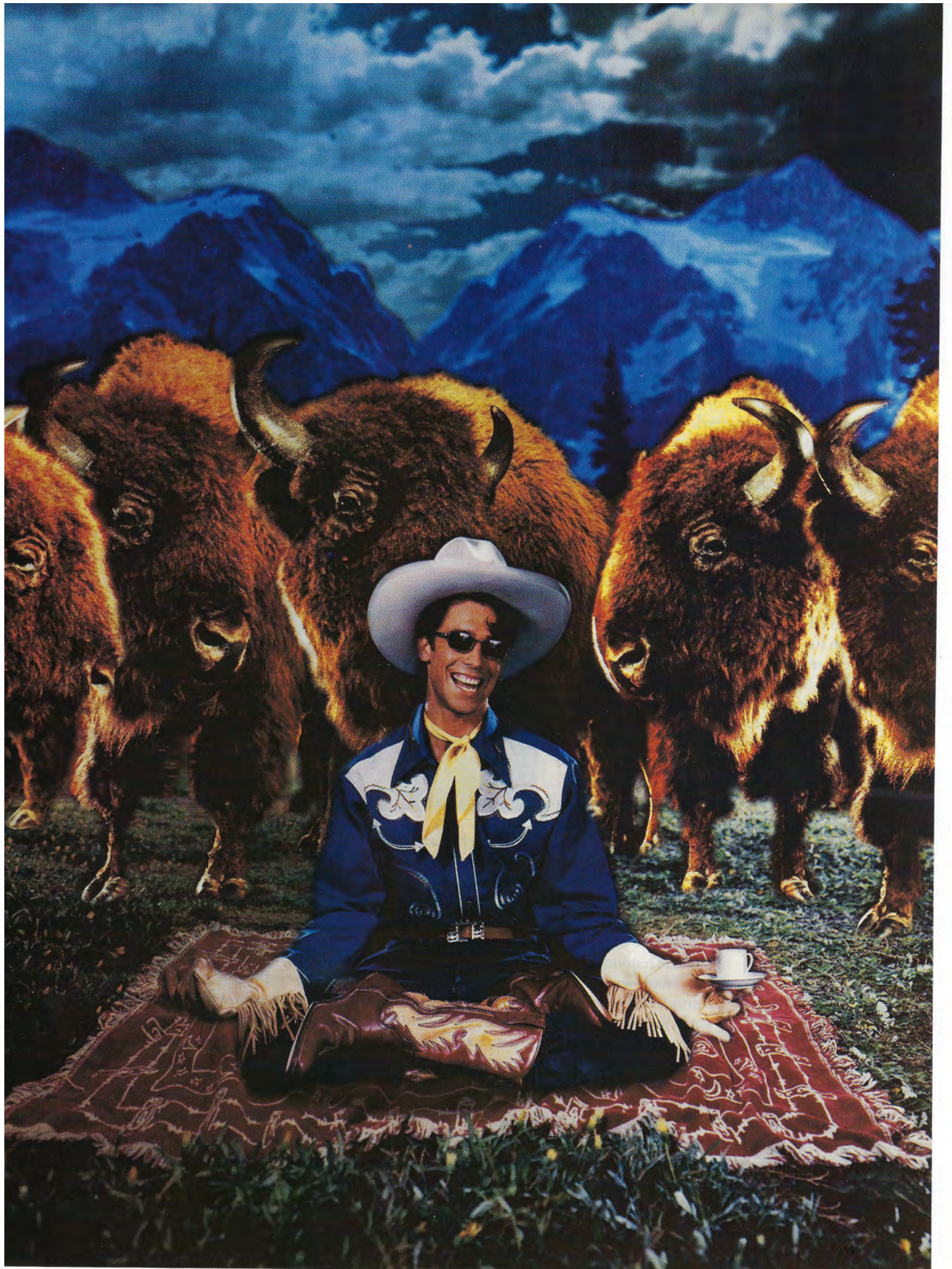
First came the writers. Then the actors. Now an onslaught of rootless West Coasters has brought a clash of cultures to Big Sky country. Try some sushi, cowpoke?

TED TURNER'S FLYING D RANCH, covering 167 square miles of some of the most blood-stirring countryside that God ever created for a billionaire, has the sort of royal lineage that, in this part of Montana, is usually reserved for prize bulls. Turner bought it in 1989 for \$20 million from Robert Shelton, director of Texas's fabled King Ranch, who'd picked it up from the Irvines, whose other ranch, in California's Orange County, is now a good-sized city. When he moved in, Turner built a log house for himself, sliced the top off a small hill and dug a fourteen-acre lake to enhance

his view of the jagged, snowcapped Spanish Peaks. To complete the tableau, he added Jane Fonda and stacked her Oscars in his trophy case. All of this was reasonably acceptable behavior in a state that had grown inured to the quirky ways of celebrities, whether it was the late Sam Peckinpah's inclination to spray gunfire around his hotel room or fashion photographer Bruce Weber's fondness for staging jet-set parties inside designer teepees. Then, well, Turner pushed it a bit. He now owns 5,000 head of buffalo.

Ranch manager Bud Griffith took me up the dirt road just past Spanish Creek for a couple of miles, and, by God, there they were: about 700 of the massive, woolly mammals, each one seemingly a good match for Griffith's pickup, which they eyed suspiciously. Nearly motionless across the grassy valley, they had looked, from a distance, like so many bales of hay. It was only when we got close that the cognitive dissonance hit. It was like seeing dinosaurs in *Jurassic Park*—damned impressive, certainly, but a little out of date. Buffalo haven't been here in well over a century—if, in fact, they'd ever pushed this far up into the mountains. This is cattle country. Until Turner came along, the Flying D had always been a cattle ranch, and there were a

By John Sedgwick



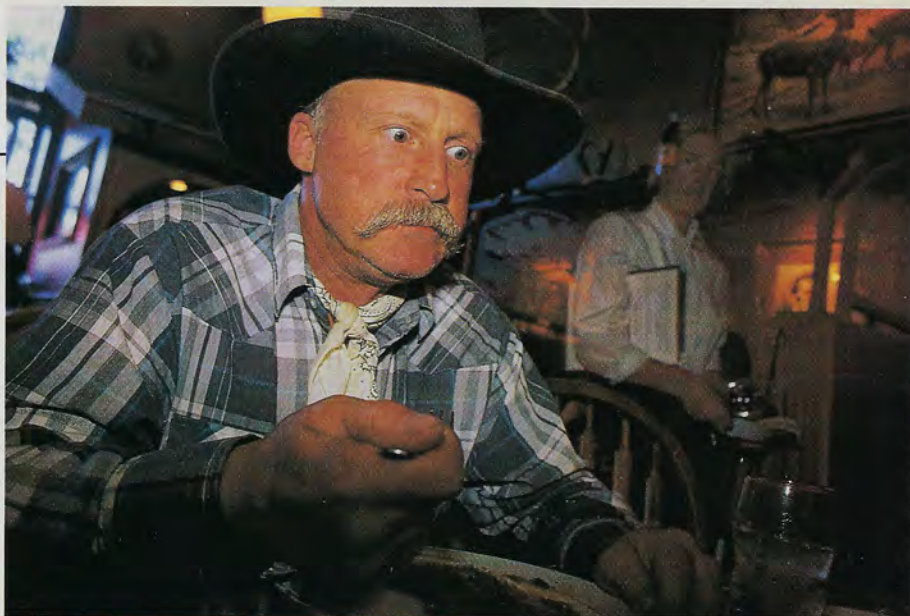
When Californians migrate to Montana, they do not leave their suburban ways behind. Worshipers of sun and *caffè latte*, they are unlikely to adopt a cowboy ethic.

lot of people who regarded the coming of the buffalo as a violation of natural law. A graffito that appeared around town tidily expressed this sentiment: It depicted Ted and Jane and a buffalo in an unlikely act of sexual congress.

As Griffith maneuvered his pickup through the herd, the animals gave us a sleepy, docile look that was entirely deceptive, and when I got out to take a photo, Griffith cautioned me to keep my distance. When a Frenchman got a little too close to a buffalo in Yellowstone, fifty miles to the south, the beast charged, thrust the tip of his horn into the man's rectum and hurled him into the air. The Gaul had to be flown by helicopter to Utah for emergency surgery.

Turner says he brought in the buffalo for the same reason he started CNN—to turn a profit. He says that they cost less to raise than cattle and that buffalo meat is lower in fat than beef; thus it commands higher prices from the few trendy restaurateurs who offer it. But local cattle ranchers question his economics. Among other things, Turner had to rip out 250 miles of interior fences and install seventy miles of four- to five-foot-high electrified fence around the perimeter to keep the buffalo in, since they hardly even notice the barbed wire that deters cows. There is also the small matter of that \$20 million price tag for the land. More distressing, whatever economies Turner has achieved have come largely from eliminating cowboys. Indeed, when a young ranch hand was electrocuted in the course of setting up the electrified fence, locals viewed the tragedy as all too symbolic.

LOCAL RANCHERS WOULD BE MORE sympathetic to Turner's oft-expressed claims of restoring the ranch to its "natural" state—even though the hand of Turner is everywhere—if the billionaire would just quietly raise his buffalo and stop lecturing the cattle ranchers about the supposed moral deficiencies of their industry. He called cows "fat and lazy," for example, in a recent interview in the local paper, the *Bozeman Daily Chronicle*. "Turner's always making unfounded statements about cattle," says Jim Peterson, executive vice president of the Montana Stockgrowers Association, which has clashed frequently with Turner in the past. "He was real bad about it when he started, then he got some common sense,



and now he seems to be falling back into his old ways." To Peterson, who makes his living running a ranch near Lewistown, Turner's buffalo operation has more in common with the menagerie of Louis XIV than with any genuine ranch.

About the only people in Montana who wholeheartedly approve of Turner's buffalo are the Native Americans, who believe that the bison harbinger a return to happier days. Curly Bear Wagner, a "cultural coordinator" of the Blackfoot tribe, calls Turner the "new Wovoka," after the nineteenth-century Paiute who dreamed that "our buffalo would come back." In a gesture of solidarity, Turner has allowed several tribes onto his land to perform ceremonial rites with the buffalo, although only Jane has turned out to watch them.

Turner has an array of high-powered binoculars set up on the deck of his ranch house, and he supposedly takes a special delight in watching the cavorting of the buffalo calves in springtime, each one of which is worth up to \$1,200. Still, he has acknowledged that the Atlanta Braves alone generate more revenue than the entire buffalo industry. So

it is hard to tell what, precisely, he gets out of this. As we were leaving the ranch, Griffith stopped to chat with a couple of government officials who had come up to check on the progress of a bear-census project and Turner's Land Rover pulled up right behind their Jeep in an unmistakable gesture of "get going." Griffith tried to say hello as Turner rushed past, but the mustachioed Turner just stared straight ahead, his eyes locked on the future. "Ted's always in a hurry," Griffith said, with a slight shake of the head, as he made his way slowly back down the road.

BIG CHANGES ARE COMING TO THE great state of Montana, and they're coming fast, on four-wheel drive, sending up a plume of dust over the Gallatin Valley. It's not just Ted and Jane, although they have done a lot to personify the transformation. It's not just Ted and Jane's buffalo, although the animals have certainly done their bit, too. And it is not just the passel of other glitzy, high-handed celebrities, like Jane's brother, Peter Fonda, Michael Keaton, Dennis Quaid and Meg Ryan, Jeff Bridges, Brooke Shields, Glenn Close, Andie MacDowell, Tom Brokaw and Mel Gibson, who have come to lay their claim to a piece of paradise and ended up turning Montana into an expanded, higher-altitude version of Bel Air. When I asked Peterson about Brokaw's ranching skills, he became positively indignant. "You think Brokaw's a rancher? Come on, gimme a break! He's not a rancher. He owns a ranch, all right?" Mel Gibson is in worse trouble. He'd been doing fairly nicely, selling what are termed "semen straws" of his champion bulls for \$500,000 a pop (although he might have done even better marketing his own) at his Beartooth Angus ranch, near Columbus, until he fired his ranch manager, George Ellis, who collapsed and died six weeks later. After a pair of lawsuits by Ellis's son and a countersuit by Gibson, the matter was settled out of court. Nor is it the unparalleled invasion of outsiders in general, particularly the much loathed Californians, who, like minor league Ted and Janes, have brought their own distinctive brand of holiness to the region, along with their Birkenstock shoes, *caffè lattes* and faith in aromatherapy. Nor, even, is it the encroachment of the most frightening sort of Californians, the fringe religionists who came up from Malibu by the thousands to establish the world headquarters of the Church Universal and Triumphant—complete with nuclear-bomb shelters to preserve them from the coming holocaust predicted by their Ascendant Masters and with armored trucks to keep their less prepared neighbors at bay when Armageddon arrives—in the stretch of loveliness aptly named Paradise Valley. Rather, it is all of these things together, hitting like a cyclone, pitting insiders against outsiders, filthy rich against dirt poor, cowboys against everyone, and causing such a whirlwind of outrage and distress that it is hard, amid all the groaning, to tell precisely what the problem is. The debate, such as it is, was nicely summarized on the walls of a toilet stall at the cowboy bar Stacey's, where one person rather elegantly opined, "Montana is a birthright not an invitation,"

causing the next to reply, "Had it not been for the invitation, I would have never acquired the birthright..." Then, truer to form, perhaps, the dialogue broke down completely:

Fuck you

Na

Fuck you

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U

Faggot cunt

"Plainly and simply, the issue is change," says Jane Jelin-ski, who, as Gallatin County commissioner, catches grief from all sides. "Human beings have a limited capacity for change, and we've exhausted it here. There is frustration, uncertainty and fear that we're going to love this place to death. I really mean that. I'm afraid we're going to kill it."

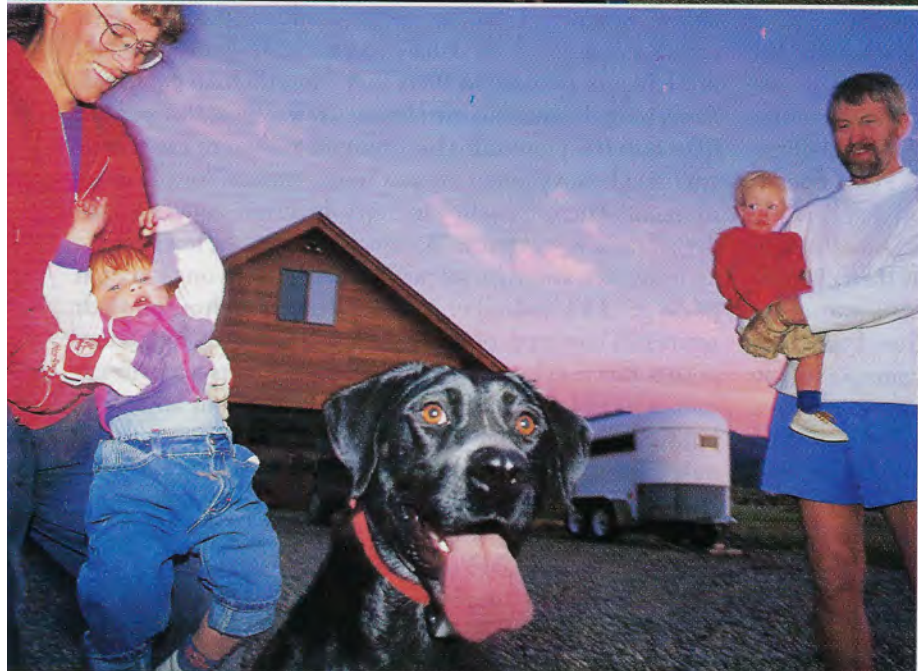
Drive into Bozeman from Turner's ranch outside of Gallatin Gateway and you can see the deadness spreading. First comes a pastel-colored faux-Moderne café-bar that would not look out of place in West L.A., and then an emu-and-llama farm. Llamas are used by the New Agers who want to hike into the mountains but want an animal to carry their stuff and believe mules are too "high-impact" for the environment. Then, sprawling in every direction, come the subdivisions, a word that in Bozeman, amazingly, has become an irony-free synonym for *neighborhoods*. Each one is a tight package of a hundred or so nasty little tract houses, their teeny lots bordered, often, by split-rail fences in an attempt at that *Bonanza* look, on suburban-style streets with tin-ear names like Mountain Splendor Drive. Without any of the landscaping that might have taken the edge off their boxiness, they rise up from some of the finest agricultural land in the world—the very latest cash crop. Hideous as they are, their average price has doubled in the past five years, now ranging from \$135,000 to \$155,000, even though a quarter of the population lives below the poverty line. The houses stretch across the valley clear to the foothills, prices rising with the altitude, where the roads terminate behind gated cul-de-sacs. Suburbanites by training, these new residents are sometimes shocked to discover that, way out here, all city services are not immediately available. Pablo Elvira, the New York Metropolitan Opera baritone, had a close call due to a chimney fire because a heavy snow prevented the volunteer fire department from getting to him quickly.

And then, finally, you come to Bozeman itself. A pleasing little cow town once, Bozeman is now one of the fastest-growing cities in the Rockies, a region that is itself the fastest growing in the nation. It is now a dreary amalgam of overpriced art galleries, tacky-tacky luncheonettes and tony new cafés such as the Leaf & Bean, which was started by Glenn Close and her sister Jessie. Having introduced the region to the joys of java, they then took over the newsstand next door, where Glenn sanctimoniously refused to stock *Playboy* and *Penthouse*, to the delight of the British tabloids, which pointed out that she herself had gotten her start by appearing in the buff in *The Big Chill*.

Montanans themselves like to blame the Californians for all their troubles. In local parlance, the Gallatin Valley is being "Californicated." Why can't you get a good blow job in Califor-



Attractive as it is, life in Montana can be demanding. For every ten new immigrants, five are gone in five years and all but one are gone after ten years.



fession, she “does hair,” and proudly notes that back in California she’d “rubbed elbows with the Who’s Who of hairdressing.” While the natives might cling to Bozeman’s wildness, she thinks of the area as a “mecca for alternative health” and takes advantage of its burgeoning New Age therapies. “I’ve been doing some work on myself,” Shaw says. Quite a lot, actually: something called foot-zone therapy, naturopathy (a version of homeopathy) and “high colonics,” which involve regular cleansing enemas. “Death begins in the colon,” she tells me sternly. Antithetical as her principles are to the old Montana ways, she thinks that Californians get a bad rap. “I hear folks complain about ‘all those people from California with money’ and dah-dah-dah-dah,” she says. “I’ve never experienced it personally, though. It’s just, like, an aura.”

In fairness, the California refugees aren’t all La-La lulus. When Michael Utter came to Bozeman from Los Angeles six years ago, he was running for his life. “I got L.A.-ed out,” he explains. At the time, he was the associate director of a computer school at the corner of Wilshire and Vermont. Although that was a prime location along the “Miracle Mile,” once the priciest stretch of real estate in the world, there were four murders in front of his building in the four years he worked there, and he twice had to step

nia anymore? goes the local joke. Because all the cocksuckers have moved to Montana. David McCumber, a local writer and a former publisher of the *Big Sky Journal*, calls the Californians the “new Okies,” as they are “despised and reviled” everywhere they go in their flight from the congestion, pollution and crime that have made a cultural dust bowl of their native state. There is something disturbing about the way they take over. One couple moved in from Palo Alto, paid \$225,000 cash for the biggest house in their subdivision, complete with a Jacuzzi in the back (which a moose promptly stepped through), and had enough left over to buy an office building downtown. Now, distressed by the poor quality of the public school, they’re thinking of starting a private school, unfazed by the half-million-dollar price tag and unconcerned that it would drive down the quality of the public school still further.

Philosophically, the Californians are a little different. When Linda Shaw moved to Bozeman from Santa Monica eight years ago, it was, she calculates, the sixtieth move of her life. She now lives with her husband and two children in a small house by Bozeman’s Montana State University. By pro-

around the bodies when he came to work. So he brought his wife and three kids to Bozeman, the last safe place. He bought a house ten minutes outside of town and sent his kids to the local high school. He set up a marketing firm that he guesses is now the largest of its type in Montana; it primarily serves out-of-state clients whose companies are in the \$5 million to \$150 million range. Is he happy? “Yes,” he says, “and you’ll notice that I said that without qualification.” He likes the “real friends” he’s made, the area’s cosmopolitanism (“I went to the opera three times this summer”) and the idea that he is back in nature. “I’ve got my own well,” he says proudly. “I like my water. It’s clean. I’ve got a thirty-foot picture window looking out over several acres to the Bridger Mountains. I have a fantastic view-scape. The schools are good. There’s no crime. I never lock my car. In L.A. I would never not lock my car. And I go to the rodeo. I’ve never been a rodeo guy. I’m more the urban intellectual, analytic type. But I tell you, I get off watching those rodeo guys ride bulls.”

Much as these Californians groove on Montana, they still

don't seem to quite get it. To them Montana is just another item for consumption. In order to maintain their incomes, few of the invaders depend on the local economy, hooking up instead to the coasts, as Utter does, by phone, fax and modem—making them the Montana equivalent of Manhattan's scorned "bridge and tunnel" people. They can get by without knowing the first thing about life under the big sky. Everyone has dumb-Californian stories, like the one about the Californian who was so proud to have shot his first bear that he drove the animal into town in his trunk, only to have a native point out that he'd plugged a Black Angus cow. These are probably apocryphal, but there is more than a germ of truth in the idea that the new immigrants come to Montana with a distanced view of nature. The Montana state legislature got so peeved by all the out-of-staters calling for wolves to be reintroduced to Montana's federal lands, where they were sure to get loose and go after cattle, they passed a retaliatory proclamation calling for wolves to be reintroduced to New York's Central Park. Every spring and fall since time immemorial, Montana's farmers have burned off the last of the crops to prepare the soil for the new year. But now, as soon as the smoke starts to rise, Jane Jelinski says, she gets sixty angry phone calls an hour from new citizens appalled by the air pollution. "They want to look at agriculture," she says. "They don't want to smell it."

This may explain the otherwise puzzling fact that for every ten new immigrants to Montana, five are gone in five years and all but one are gone after ten. The conventional explanation is that the winters are too long and too cold and that the jobs are too few. But the deeper truth is that Montana can come as a shock to a suburbanite who regards nature as a view out the picture window and all animals as pets. My favorite story along this line is the tale of the California family that moved in with several German shepherds next door to a working ranch. When the dogs got loose and went after the rancher's lambs, the rancher came around to have a little talk with the family. If the dogs didn't stay away from his lambs, he said gravely, he'd have to shoot them. The family didn't pay much attention. Inevitably, one of the dogs went after the lambs again, and the rancher took down his rifle and shot it and then carried the animal back in his arms to his neighbors. "I warned you," he said. Now, compare the image of the Californians' reaction to the sight of their dead dog in the rancher's arms, that look of blind incomprehension, tinged with grief and anger, with the rancher's own cold gaze, hardened by economic realism, and you have a good idea of the culture gap that runs through the Gallatin Valley.

No less an authority than Peter Fonda is aghast at the latest round of invaders. After nearly twenty years of residence in Paradise Valley, fifty miles to the east of Bozeman, he has gone so completely native that locals don't even notice him anymore. (They have trouble keeping track of all the celebs anyway. After five years, Michael Keaton is still almost universally referred to as "Batman.") I bumped into him at Sax & Fryer, a general-merchandise store in Livingston that still uses the old-style cash registers dating from 1924. Fonda wore dusty cowboy boots, blue jeans, a work shirt and a baseball cap with the logo of a local construction company. The

only clashing detail was the long ponytail poking out the back of his cap. His wife wouldn't let him wear the little handgun he normally stuffs into a small holster on his hip. "She says it upsets everybody," he explained. Fonda was in to pick up a supply of book mailers. Proprietor John Fryer was trying to plan the next meeting of the "Board of Directors," a loosely formed band of local men who gather primarily to drink; Fonda, now that he's a family man, remained noncommittal. I took the opportunity to ask him how he was withstanding the celebrity invasion; he said he had nothing to fear. "Those Hollywood types are pussies, man," he said, meaning the current crop of Hollywood types. "They can't take the cold." He added that the winters were so brutal here that there should be just two designations on a Montanan's wristwatch—"winter" and "summer." But the Californians were another matter. Near his ranch, a California family moved in, applied fake brick to the house's exterior and, as is becoming increasingly common in the valley, put up mercury-vapor security lights that burned brightly all night long, extinguishing the stars and making the valley twinkle alarmingly like San Fernando. What are they protecting themselves from? I asked. "I don't have a clue," Fonda replied with disgust. He was thinking of using the lights for target practice. "I'd use a big enough caliber that I wouldn't just get the bulb, I'd knock out the whole head." He figured that Charlie Johnson, the local sheriff, would take him off to jail, but he didn't care. He'd have made his point. "Besides," he added, "Charlie wouldn't put the cuffs on me when he drove me away, because he's a friend." Fryer watched Fonda amble off. "He's still got that busy little head of his," he said admiringly.

THE RESIDENTS COULD PROBABLY deal with the Californians themselves if these interlopers didn't reflect a larger and more sweeping blight on the landscape that has come along with the economic shift away from a functional engagement with the land, namely, the loosing of postmodernism on a part of the world always considered so rugged, so permanent and so down-to-earth that residents have legitimately come to view it as reality itself. But, no, postmodernism has descended on the Gallatin Valley, dropping its invisible quote marks on everything, turning the most sacred aspects of everyday life into nothing but empty signifiers. The cowboy hat, the horse, the ranch, the mountains, even the dust and the high, wide sky—all of these have somehow lost their original, urgent meaning and become little more than design elements for a slew of transients eager for a change of scene. It's gotten so that the *locals* have grown wary of being deconstructed. One writer said that, after thirty years, he'd finally given up wearing his cowboy hat into town because, as he put it, "I don't want to subject myself to the interpretive process."

The process goes on, regardless, wearing everything down. I happened to attend the parade that troops through Bozeman in celebration of the College National Finals Rodeo that is held in Montana State University's gym, where several tons of

soil are actually dropped right onto the basketball court. The parade has always been one of the highlights of the Bozeman year, and it was a pleasure to see the curvaceous Miss Rodeo Montana canter by on her frisky stallion, and the ample women of the Sidesaddle Club, and a couple named Michelle and Jeremy, who were getting married midparade aboard a flatbed truck, and hundreds of others, all of them, one way or another, celebrating the traditional culture of the small-town West that is everywhere under siege. Before the spectacle began, I turned to the woman in sandals and designer sunglasses beside me, with a baby in a backpack and a toddler named MacKenzie at her feet, and asked what she thought this was all about. She quickly dropped into social-satire mode and said, "This is for"—she flexed her arms in a macho gesture, paused two beats for dramatic effect, then grunted—"cowboys."

The cowboys have borne the brunt of Montana's sociological shift, probably because they so purely represent the traditional way—working with animals, staying close to the land—that they have become virtually the only point of cultural reference. But cowboys are pretty scarce these days. The word itself has devolved to express the transition, as *cowboy* is now used more as a verb than a noun; it's an occasional activity, not a way of life. I did meet one nearly genuine cowboy named Joe Gunter at an all-night coffee shop. He looked the part, in his black hand-sewn cowboy hat, his white silk neckerchief and his handsome cowboy shirt, the kind with all the snaps. He is a member of the Sheriff's Posse, a group of volunteers who seem to spend much of their time retrieving Californians who have misjudged the rigors of the Montana wilderness—often by hauling their sorry corpses out of the Gallatin River. Gunter may very well have been the last man to ride a horse into Bozeman without being part of a parade, something he accomplished near midnight with the aid of two six-packs in the mid-1980s. But he's a cabinetmaker by profession. His favorite hunting camps are gone for house lots, and his hunting trails have been taken over by mountain bikers who come up on him so silently they spook his horses. "What the *government* did to the Indians," he told me, "the Californians are doing to us."

As for real, full-time cowboys, I never did meet one, but I heard about one from Steve Van Antwerp, owner of the stylish Tonsorial Parlor on Bozeman's Main Street. His name is Snuffy. He's 40 years old, "but you'd think he was 65," and he spends most of his time in the mountains. Envy him? I ask. "Envy him?" Van Antwerp repeats, aghast at the thought. "I think he's fucking crazy."

EVERY IMMIGRANT HORDE STARTS with a lone pioneer, and in the case of the Gallatin Valley, the first one of any note was probably the novelist and screenwriter Thomas McGuane, who arrived in Livingston in the summer of 1968. What Robert Frost did for New England, McGuane has done for Montana through novels, such as *Nothing but Blue Skies* and *Nobody's Angel*, and several screenplays.

Like many of the people who speak most forcefully for

Montana these days, McGuane was not born there. He was born in Grosse Ile, Michigan, one county over from the better-known Grosse Pointe, the son of a manufacturer's agent. He'd spent his summers on a cattle ranch in Wyoming, and when it came time to settle down, he picked Livingston, partly because it was the home of a fly-fishing outfitter he fancied, Dan Bailey's. "Being a writer is usually like living in a Hovercraft," he says. "But in Montana, I find it's nice to be embedded in a culture with nonverbal problems." He got a job as house sitter for a man named Duane Neal, and then he started inviting his friends.

The first one to come was his writer pal William Hjortsberg, who is now known as the author of the book *Falling Angel*, which was turned into the Mickey Rourke vehicle *Angel Heart*. A hippie then, he appeared in a VW microbus, appropriately decked out for the '60s, closely followed by the writer Jim Harrison. The three of them set up their portable typewriters in Duane Neal's barn amid a jumble of tractor parts and deer hides. After Harrison, until then a poet, stunned the little group by suddenly publishing a novel, McGuane, until then a novelist, went him one better by writing a screenplay, selling it and getting it filmed before the year was out. The movie was *Rancho Deluxe*, a rather giddy comedy about a New Age cowboy played by Jeff Bridges. Although the 1975 film attained cult status at best, it put the Gallatin Valley on the map. Everybody had such a good time making the movie that several of the actors decided to stay. Jeff Bridges not only stayed but he married a waitress from a then-divey resort called Chico Hot Springs. "He told me she'd stolen his heart," says Chico's longtime owner Mike Art. "I said, 'Your what?'" The late character actor Warren Oates put down stakes in town and made the mistake of inviting director Sam Peckinpah to share a ranch. That was hell for everyone. "Peckinpah was a huge pain in the ass," says McGuane. "He was insufferable." Perhaps mistaking Paradise Valley for the Wild West, he always traveled with an entourage of hired goons, most of them ex-rodeo stars. "They were some of the worst human beings I've ever known," Hjortsberg remembers. "He had one former steer-wrestling world champ whose face looked like a condom pulled down over a pumpkin." Peckinpah would pick a fight with someone, then stand back while the pumpkinhead threw the guy out a window. When not out marauding, Peckinpah was at the Murray Hotel, where he had set himself up with a healthy supply of whiskey and cocaine and placed a sign outside his door that read THE OLD IGUANA SLEEPS AND THE ANSWER IS NO. It was at the Murray that he fired ten rounds from his Colt .45 into the ceiling. No one complained until it started to rain. Peckinpah found other ways to be more immediately annoying. He once entered the hotel's high-stakes poker game, plunked down an even grand and promptly lost \$700. The director picked up the remainder, said "Boys, you'll never get this," and swallowed it.

That's how it went. One celeb brought others. After Peter Fonda moved near McGuane, he ended up marrying McGuane's ex-wife, Becky. Everyone was cool about it. McGuane picked up with Laurie Buffet, sister of Jimmy

Author Thomas McGuane helped romanticize the image of Montana for outsiders. Below: A real estate agent plies her trade in booming Bozeman.



(who also appeared in *Rancho Deluxe*). Richard Brautigan, the '60s writer, came through to thank McGuane for a career-making review of *Trout Fishing in America* he'd written for the front page of *The New York Times Book Review*. He stayed on in a ranch outside of town that he nicknamed the Lead Disneyland because he amused himself by taking what can only be called potshots at various items inside his kitchen, then went outside to obliterate other objects he placed on top of a cottonwood stump, including a pirated Hungarian edition of his works, a television set and a Japanese version of pinball known as a pachinko machine.

Even as the Hollywood contingent grew, McGuane remained somehow at the center of it all. When Whoopi Goldberg bought a cabin near his latest spread in Big Timber, she felt obliged to introduce herself the day she arrived. She'd come because some friends from a film crew wanted

her to go in with them on a country place. "She spent somewhere around ninety minutes here," says McGuane. "The thing just didn't work out." And he has inspired the infiltration of a younger generation of writers, like the adventure journalist Tim Cahill and the detective-story writer Peter Bowen, who often congregate at a bar called the Owl.

As the celebrities came, so did the noncelebrities, chiefly from California, partly because the Montana outback was suddenly in. Does McGuane feel any guilt? "We were lively, verbal people," he says, "in contradistinction to the people who live out here. As we got better known, we contributed to the place getting better known. To that degree, we were all a little culpable, I suppose." But he insists that his own contribution to the deluge is modest compared with that of the late NBC news anchorman Chet Huntley. He acted as the front man for Big Sky resort, a massive development forty-five miles south of Bozeman that was funded in part by the Chrysler Corporation. Huntley appeared in a brochure headlined CHET HUNTLEY WELCOMES YOU TO HIS HOME. But, in McGuane's view, the most influential image maker is Norman Maclean. The Livingston-based movie of his book, *A River Runs Through It*, or, as locals like to say, *A Realtor Runs Through It*, might have been one long real estate ad for the Gallatin Valley, and it

kicked off the real estate boom that is still surging. "And Maclean didn't even live here," says McGuane. "He lived in Chicago for forty-five years, and he was kind of annoyed that everybody had changed Montana. But he wasn't sufficiently enamored of the place actually to live here himself."

Nevertheless, McGuane questions the whole premise of outsiders being at fault for anything. He believes this idea plays into what he terms the "Montanoid" style of politics, whereby natives place blame for their plight everywhere but with themselves. "The West has always cultivated the iconography of the bad guy, the greenhorn, the dude, the outsider, the stranger, to explain away their problems," he says. "Locally, a lot of people hit upon a problem and the first thing they do is stare around the horizon and decide who they can point a finger at." And he is right about this, of course. After all, the truly native (continued on page 246)

JEFF MEKRELS/TEIN

(continued from page 245) Montanans are all currently living on reservations. Scratch virtually any of the "natives" who are now complaining so hard about the out-of-staters and you'll find an immigrant. The mournful cowboy Joe Gunter grew up in Atlanta and worked in the service department of an Oldsmobile and Rolls-Royce dealership, where he remembers seeing a "snot-nosed kid" named Ted Turner. Besides, no one put a gun to the heads of local landowners and forced them to cut up their land into those hideous subdivisions. And if the greater public objects to that arrangement, in the United States there is an organization called the government that might be able to help. As it is, the area has lacked the political will to assemble the most rudimentary long-range plans to deal with the growth, which is certainly going to continue. Bozeman has been busy addressing picayune design details—deciding on sign ordinances, for instance—but no one has addressed the bigger questions of land use, water quality and transportation. It's hard to legislate against postmodernism, obviously, but a good master plan could bring some order to the chaos. Instead, the few fitful efforts to take control of the area's future are sure to backfire, like the current proposal to hit housing developers with an "impact fee" of \$6,630 in Bozeman and \$2,092 outside, a regulation that will only contribute to the nasty urban sprawl as people are encouraged to economize by buying out of town. But, of course, in this militia-crazed part of the country, in a state that, for years, had no daytime speed limits on its highways, peo-

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(continued from page 203) him the right kind of attention. "That way," Banderas says, "nobody can say to me, 'Ahh, you came here, and because of your face or this or that, you got this part.' I'd say, 'No, no, no, excuse me. I start here from the bottom, like everybody else'—despite his momentary notoriety four years ago, when Madonna singled him out in *Truth or Dare* as the one actor in the world who made her moist. "I could have used Madonna, and it would have been faster for me," Banderas says. "It would have been perfect: I would have gotten immediately all the attention. But I said no, because I didn't fall in love with that woman."

Now he's enjoying his hard-won stardom, and all the dubious perks that come with it, such as being a presenter at the Academy Awards. "All you see are famous people," he says. "It's like a wax museum, all these guys: Warren Beatty, Liza Minnelli, Jack Nicholson, Kevin Costner. They

ple would rather die than trust the government for any guidance. They think government was designed solely to restrict property rights that are handed down from God himself. Property rights to pillage the landscape, to build absurd bomb shelters, to light up the night with security lights and, yes, to bring in a bunch of silly buffalo. And they are enjoying the consequences.

I'd like to think there is still something unconquerable about Montana that will continue to resist human despoliation, but maybe that's simply the wan hope of a confirmed easterner who is a sucker for the myth of the Wild West. In a week's visit, I had put nearly 1,000 miles on my rental car without quite realizing it. Yet, for all the ground I covered, I felt that I hadn't come anywhere close to capturing anything I could mentally file away under the heading "The Real Montana." No matter how far I went, the mountains kept retreating into the distance, and the valleys always remained too wide to cross. It seemed as if the whole state were one vast optical illusion. I came away thinking that I hadn't quite gotten there—wherever, or whatever, the "there" was. I mentioned that to McGuane when we spoke on the phone after I got home, and he said that was the splendor of the place. "If you've lived here a long time and you go away for a while, there's a tremendous sense of relief coming back over the Piper Stone Pass. The horizon suddenly drops away, and you're looking out maybe seventy-five miles, and suddenly you just sigh. You feel a physical

comfort to feel the space resume."

But the new immigrants are sure doing their damndest to knock that space down to size. Before I left, I dropped in on Tom Wells, a lawyer turned entrepreneur who'd come to Montana from, yes, California and started another one of those moneymaking enterprises that completely violate the traditional spirit of the region. He offers mountain climbing *indoors*. He took 1,200 square feet in a small industrial park on the outskirts of Bozeman and put up something that looks like an ultracool SoHo loft: The walls are splotted with Miró-esque pink, yellow and green blobs, and the floor is covered with shredded rubber. When I dropped in, a thirty-ish stockbroker named Jordan Werner was on the wall like a spider, nimbly moving from blob to blob. He was quite pleased with the convenience of the artificial mountainside compared with the real thing. "I can leave the office at four and be climbing by four-thirty," Werner said. I wanted to point out to him he wasn't climbing; he was "climbing." This wasn't a rock face; it was a gymnasium wall. We were indoors here, guys. But I knew it was useless. They'd think I was merely another dork who couldn't handle progress.

And maybe they'd have been right. There is something marvelous about Wells's accomplishment. It's one of the greatest triumphs of packaging in our age, a commercial for commercialism, and, as such, it's the perfect emblem of the New Montana. He's put the Rockies in a box. ♦

John Sedgwick is a contributing writer at GQ. He lives outside of Boston.

look like they have fangs, all these guys just testing you. It's like, if you fall down, they'll say, 'Out of here!' " he shouts, with a laugh. "Back to Spain!"

These days such a scenario seems unlikely, and Banderas knows it. "Now I am having a good time in terms of what they call being hot in Hollywood," Banderas says. "But I know that you have to learn to deal with the flops. I don't want to lose the capacity for failing or doing something bad. Now people are saying I'm sexy, cool action hero, blah blah blah. But what happens when I'm in something not so good? It's gonna be, 'Oh, Antonio's losing his power...' You're only as good as the last thing you were in.

"The other day, someone was asking me, 'How do you feel now being the hottest actor in town?' And if you think about it seriously, one of the hottest actors in town this summer was a pig. It's true. *Babe* is a movie that's done tons of millions of dollars, so you are in the same package. And I

don't feel really special to be compared with a pig."

We head back to the house for a lunch of lobster tails with Melanie, who's about to fix me her favorite drink—a ginseng-based concoction that "feels like a drug, only it's all-natural and healthy," she says. Banderas tells the story of his budding career as a soccer player, which was cut short one day when he broke his foot. But, he claims, the pain wasn't so bad. "Because I think I saw written there"—he indicates the place where a cast might have been—"You will meet this amazing woman." At which point Melanie, who's just twirled her tongue around a hunk of plump lobster meat, attempts to climb into the slender cane chair Antonio is sitting in, although she's thwarted by its curving arms. Banderas pulls her onto his lap. "Can I cuddle her just a little?" he asks me, and plants his face into the side of her breast.

Late in the afternoon, Antonio has a