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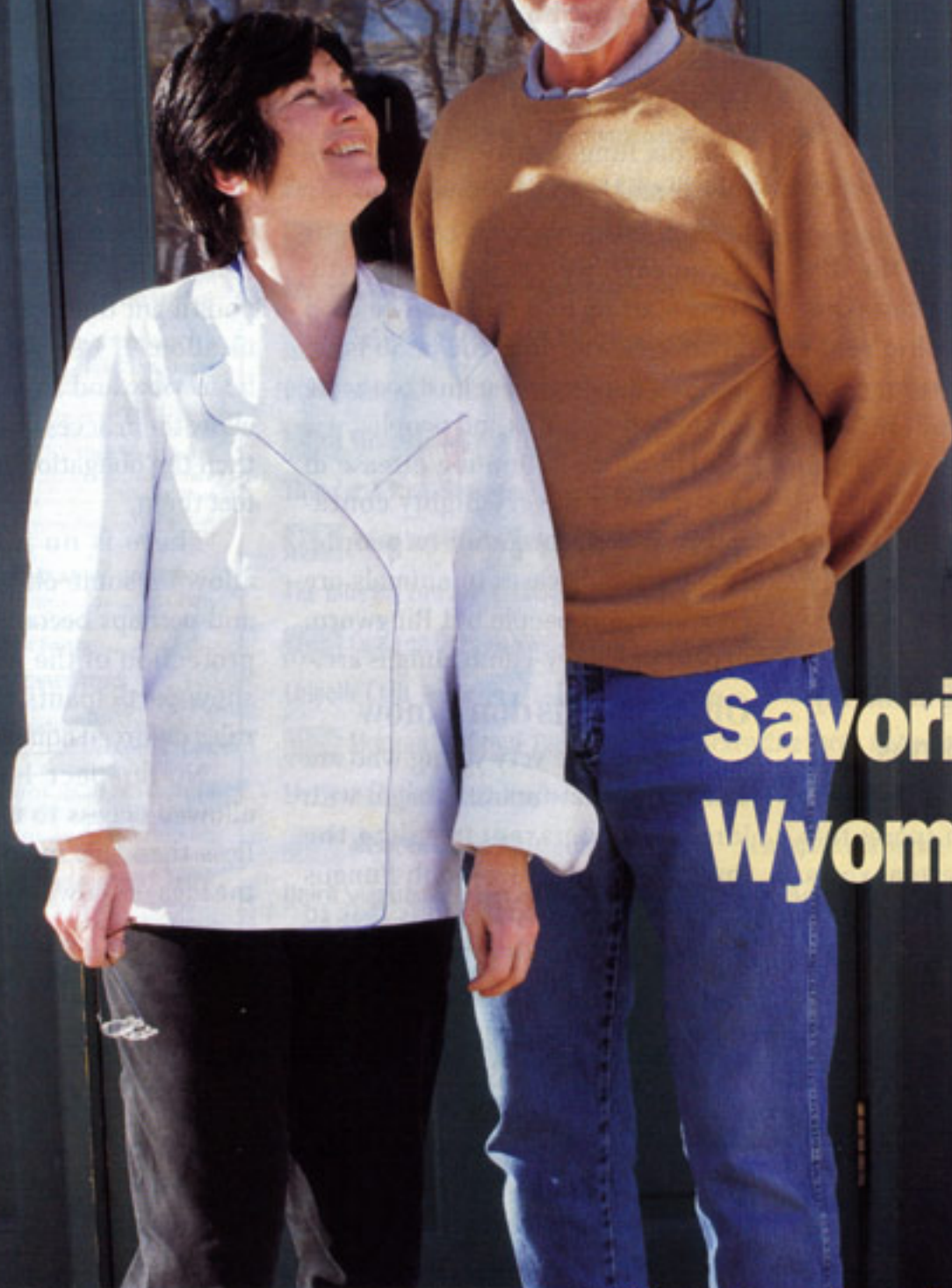
The

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## Savoring Wyoming

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Photos and story by ANTHONY PETTERSON

Situated in a secluded forest of cottonwoods on the banks of the Medicine Bow River, the historic Elk Mountain Restaurant and Hotel is located half-way between Laramie and Rawlins. The hotel provides a home-away-from-home atmosphere with

12 graciously appointed non-smoking rooms, a conference room, an elegant guest parlor and a Victorian-era restaurant which serves breakfast, lunch, dinner, and between-meal snacks. (And one of the best Reuben sandwiches ever!)

## Guests enchanted by Elk Mountain beauty

About 40 miles west of Laramie on I-80, the most prominent feature on the landscape is Elk Mountain. At 11,152 feet, its steep, juniper-covered ravines starkly convey a sense of veneration, almost foreboding, reaching out and grabbing my attention.

Approaching the Hanna/Elk Mountain exit, I'm looking forward to a friendly chat with Susan and Arthur Havers, new owners of the Elk Mountain Hotel. It is nestled on the tree-lined banks of the Medicine Bow River, invisible to passers-by until they are upon it.

### Musical history

This other-worldly location is appealing to some because of its synchronous easy access and isolation. Since 1905, when the hotel was founded, Elk Mountain has drawn many visitors. Renowned musical artists, Louis Armstrong, Harry James, Jim Reeves, and many others of equal fame have performed here at the no longer extant Garden Spot Pavilion. But times have changed. The Roaring Twenties and the big-band era of the fifties are but fond memories.

### Bit of facelifting called for

According to Cheryl Bowen, a life-long rancher in the area, the hotel has had numerous owners with varying degrees of success. Over the years, the building had become somewhat ramshackle. The business needed a new breed of entrepreneur to realize its full potential.

### Engaging and well-traveled

Originally from England, the Haverses have traveled extensively, working for various companies as marketing professionals. Their collective travel and living adventures include Continental Europe, Africa, and the Middle East. Trained in Paris, Susan is an accomplished chef. She ran a restaurant in Brussels for four years.

So how did this cosmopolitan couple come to own a hotel in Elk Mountain, Wyoming?

I visited with them in the comfortably furnished parlor of the hotel. A cheerful fire was dancing in the fireplace and autographed photos of the performing greats watched us from their places on the walls. Running a



hotel and restaurant was "a dream we'd had for twenty years," Susan relates in her charming English accent, a coffee cup warming her cheek.

The Haverses were working in the San Francisco Bay area when the dot-com bust gave them pause. With two children grown and gone, they decided it was now or never. They would combine Susan's culinary skills with Arthur's marketing expertise to realize their ambition. In 2005, Arthur started researching on the internet, looking for hotels for sale.

### Drawn to the area

"We liked the desert but Elk Mountain just sort of jumped out at me," he said. "I looked at several other places, but, almost inexplicably, I was drawn back here."

"As soon as we drove in here I knew this was the place for us," Susan added. "It's so secluded and peaceful. It just felt right."

### Previous owner fixed it up

The most recent owner, Peter Theriot, had completely refurbished the hotel, "right down to the studs," according to Susan. He had considered renovating the Garden Spot Pavilion where the artists performed for dances, but the pavilion had no "redeeming architectural value," in Theriot's opinion, so he razed the structure.

As it turned out, Theriot was also from the Bay area. He was selling because he wanted to be close to his family. As a matter of fact, while the Haverses were negotiating the deal, they met with Theriot in San Francisco more often than not, according to Susan.

### Integral to community

The Haverses are developing a series of market niches. "[The hotel] should be part of the community," Susan explains. "We want local people to come here for a relaxing time... a gathering place with dinner dances, meetings, and other community activities."

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Elk-Mountain-area rancher Cheryl Bowen and daughter-in-law Jennifer relax in the dining room of the Elk Mountain Hotel. The restaurant features country-style cooking with just a hint of Europe in relaxed and welcoming surroundings. The hotel is also ideal for adventure vacations, spiritual retreats, small conferences, company off-sites, receptions, and intimate weddings.

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# Elk Mountain

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But they also understand the need to reach a broader market.

"This enterprise wouldn't be possible without the internet," Arthur explains. "With the cost of advertising being what it is, we couldn't possibly reach the number of people we need to reach."

## Variety of opportunities

Hosting weddings at the hotel is one of the niches the new owners hope to fill. To meet the needs of large wedding parties, a tent capable of sheltering 150 people will be erected on the site of the Garden Spot Pavilion.

## More than a stop for resting

Recognizing that people have a limited amount of time and want activities that are planned, the Havverses feel adventure holidays will be an essential part of the hotel's success. They are developing alliances with outfitters who have the expertise and equipment to provide activities such as horseback riding, snowmobiling, fishing, and hunting.

They also want to tap into the mystique of western history and the regional heritage which reflects the immigrant background of the local populace. With links to other historic hotels, they would like to coordinate a tour of these historic places.

## Capitalize on Western stories

"There's a tremendous interest in the history of the American West," Arthur says.

They are confident that their location, a half-way point between Denver and Yellowstone, will make the hotel a convenient resting place for weary travelers. They are depending on Front Range travelers to provide much of their business.

## Valkommen

Eventually, they will develop the international side of things as well. They recently received a call from a tourist in England who was planning a trip to Yellowstone. He was quite impressed when Susan promised to return his call to confirm his reservation at Elk Mountain. "I'm in England, you know," he said.

## Stepping into challenges

Of course, the intrepid couple will face numerous challenges; a sparse labor force and getting skilled craftsman to work at the hotel, to name a couple. They're currently working with WDOT to get appropriate signage on I-80 and plan to put up their own signs as well.

"Getting heads on pil-



The hotel is clean and modern with amenities such as internet service. The menu and overnight packages are reasonably priced.

lows" is the name of the game, according to Arthur. "Once that happens, the rest will fall into place."

Contrary to the suspicious nature of some of the communities where they have lived, the Havverses have found the inhabitants of Elk Mountain to be supportive.

"People are wonderful ... open, friendly, very welcoming. We feel privileged to be here," they say.

Check out the web site, [www.elkmountainhotel.com](http://www.elkmountainhotel.com) or call (307) 348-7774 for reservations.

*Anthony Petterson is a freelance journalist. He writes from Fort Collins, Colo.*



The Snowy Range is easily accessible as are hunting, fishing, snowmobiling, horseback riding, hiking trails, and historic tours. One caveat: Beware the Wyoming winter winds. The mountain makes its own weather. Call ahead.