

‘Extreme is our passion’

BY OLLIE REED JR. / FOR THE ALBUQUERQUE JOURNAL

Saturday, August 7th, 2021 at 10:45pm

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Teepee Lodge offers guests sophisticated comfort and culinary adventures in the midst of Canyon Madness Ranch’s rough and alluring terrain. (Roberto E. Rosales/Albuquerque Journal)

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CANYON MADNESS RANCH – To get here, drive 32 miles east of Wagon Mound and take a right into 14,000 acres of a land that time forgot.

“You get down into these canyons with an ATV and, except for the ATV, there is nothing that looks like the 21st century – or the 20th century,” said Dennis Law, the retired thoracic/vascular surgeon who purchased the 14,000 acres five years ago.



Dennis Law, pictured here on a deck at the Teepee Lodge, is a retired thoracic/vascular surgeon, a producer and director of musical theater, a photographer, an art collector, restaurateur, real estate manager, and the founder and owner of the \$15 million Canyon Madness Ranch resort in northeast New Mexico. (Roberto E. Rosales/Albuquerque Journal)

Since then, Law has turned the exceptionally rugged, but stunningly beautiful, terrain into a resort that is intended to mix extreme outdoor adventure with the boutique luxury comfort of the eight-suite Teepee Lodge, which hovers above the Canadian River like a magnificent Jules Verne airship.

In this remote canyon and cliff country, you don't even see the lodge and its triple teepee peaks until the up-and-down, this-way-and-that gravel road you've been traveling on just about drops you on it.

"I used to go between Denver and Santa Fe, and never knew this place existed," said Law, 73, who practiced medicine in Denver. "I dreamt up the (Canyon Madness Ranch) name because everybody thought I was mad trying to build this lodge. It is sort of a wild experience."

Natural luxury

Much of Canyon Madness Ranch is in Harding County. Teepee Lodge is about 14 miles southwest of Roy, a Harding County town of about 200 people.

Construction of the lodge and other resort facilities started three years ago and was completed a year ago, but the ranch was officially opened to paying guests just this past April.

"We delayed the opening a full year because of the pandemic," said Law, who maintains a home in Denver. "We spent all last year living here (at the lodge), hiding from the pandemic. Even now, we only have rare paid guests coming. So, we have more family and friends coming."

Initially, Law intended the lodge and the vast landscape that surrounds it to serve only as a safe haven for his family.

“But then I thought, ‘What a waste. I should share it with boutique luxury guests.’ ”

Vacation packages of three to seven nights are available at the resort for \$500 to \$700 per person per night. That includes lodging, food and beverages, outdoor activities, guides, instructors and equipment.

“We are luxurious, not in the Four Seasons kind of way, but in what we can offer in a natural setting,” Law said. “Our shooting and horse programs far exceed what most dude ranches can provide.”

Counting the purchase price of the land, Law has invested \$15 million into developing Canyon Madness Ranch, “where extreme is our passion.”



One of the handsome guestrooms in the Teepee Lodge at Canyon Madness Ranch. Resort owner Dennis Law did the interior design for each of the eight guest suites at the lodge. (Roberto E. Rosales/Albuquerque Journal)

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Canyon Madness Ranch Resort boasts a pistol range, a rifle range, extreme long-range shooting opportunities, a 12-station skeet-shooting course and trap shooting. (Roberto E. Rosales/Albuquerque Journal)

He built a pistol range, a rifle range, a 12-station skeet-shooting course, a trap-shooting course and set up targets for a long-range rifle-shooting experience.

The Canyon Madness horse program offers a variety of activities, including scenic trail rides, Western and English riding, a covered

riding arena, endurance trails, cow herding and barrel racing.

Three dozen horses – quarter horses; paints; the sturdy, but docile, Gypsy Vanner breed; and Gypsy Vanner crosses – make up the resort’s remuda.



Farrier Logan Felix leads trail riders down into Encierro Canyon on the sprawling Canton Madness Ranch. (Roberto E. Rosales/Albuquerque Journal.)

Other adventures available are hiking, mountain biking, rock climbing, touring the ruins of old homesteads, archery, and UTV and ATV rides.

Some of Law's money went into improving access roads, as well as building and upgrading other roads to parts of the resort property.

Man of many parts

Law grew up in Hong Kong. He said his father was a poor man who did not go to school and was a driver for the American military during World War II.

Despite the disadvantages facing him, Law's father found success by starting a toy company that went on to make the "Star Wars" action figures for Hasbro, the giant American company.

When he was 18, Law himself enrolled in the University of Pennsylvania School of Medicine, earned his M.D. there, did his residency training in surgery at the University of Colorado, became an American citizen and settled in Denver to practice medicine.

A man of many parts, however, Law's world has never been limited to medicine. He has produced film and is credited with creating "action-musicals," which combine martial arts and dance on the stage. He has produced and directed musicals in China, the United States and Canada; owns rental property; owned restaurants in Denver and Hong Kong; and still owns a loft hotel and restaurant in Cabo San Lucas, Mexico. He is a gifted photographer and a collector of art ranging from representational to very modern and conceptual, and of American colonial and Chinese antiques.

Law is also a talented interior decorator, something that has proved invaluable in realizing his vision for Teepee Lodge.

"I wanted the lodge to be contemporary, but not stick out like a sore thumb," he said. "I did not want the interior to be Western or Southwestern, but to be modern and compatible to nature. I picked materials that would stand up to mud."

As a restaurateur, he takes a particular interest in the food served at the lodge. Friends with experience as chefs and restaurant owners in Denver are helping him with the Canyon Madness menu.

“I’m into cuisine,” Law said. “I think cuisine is an art. We mix a lot of cuisine. I don’t want to do just cowboy steak. We’ll do Asian food, Southwest food, sometimes both. The people who will come here are adventurous, so I would expect them to have adventurous tastes in food.”

Splendid isolation

At 10 a.m. on a Monday morning, a cool breeze waltzed across the Teepee Lodge’s rear deck, which sits on a ledge above the Canadian River Canyon. The view is hypnotic, the river crawling between banks green with foliage, cliffs red and rocky standing sentinel above.

Adjusting to the natural beauty here is easy, but getting accustomed to the isolation takes time for people such as Law and his wife, Alyssa, who is from Beijing. It would be difficult for most people.

“When you spend a lot of time in Beijing and Hong Kong, this kind of wilderness is a cultural shock,” Law said. “But I have not only adapted, I like it.”

Finding people to work at the resort is a challenge, however.

“It’s not for a single person because there is no social life,” Law said. “If you are married and have kids, how are you going to get your kids to school? When we interview people, we have to be careful of their attitude. Why do they want to be in a far-away place? We want someone who can handle a lot, but wants to be in nature and enjoys nature. They have got to feel comfortable here.”



Sierra Felix, manager of the horse program at Canyon Madness Ranch, gives some love to one of the ranch’s younger residents. (Roberto E. Rosales/Albuquerque Journal)

Roping and rattlesnakes

Ranch manager Dusty Artz, 43, fits the bill when it comes to being content living and working in big and lonesome country.

Besides being a resort, Canyon Madness is a working cattle ranch, a cow/calf operation that runs a herd of Angus cattle.

Artz, who lives here with his wife, is in charge of the cow work, most of which is done on horses.

“I love to rope,” he said.

Artz calls Grady, in New Mexico’s Curry County, home.

“I love New Mexico,” he said. “This is God’s country. Here (at Canyon Madness), I can use the canyons when the weather is bad. The canyons provide protection from the wind, and the grass is good. I put the cattle up top when the weather is good.”

Other Canyon Madness Ranch employees include:

- Assistant ranch manager Morgan Armstrong, 37, who moved here from the Sheridan, Wyoming, area just a few weeks ago. He is single, but engaged.

Armstrong said he fell in love with New Mexico during a visit to Raton when he was a teenager.

“This is beautiful, beautiful country,” he said of his new home. “It’s different rock and greenery than Wyoming, and its sandier.”

- Horse program manager Sierra Felix, 33, and farrier Logan Felix, 29, are a wife-and-husband team. They are from different parts of the country, Sierra from the northwest and Logan from the northeast. Their common interest in mounted shooting competition brought them together while they were living in Kentucky, and they moved from that state to take jobs at the resort. You get the feeling they’d be happy living anywhere as long as there were horses around.

- And then there’s lodge cook and lodge supervisor Petra Huebner, who is from Chicago. Huebner preferred not to give her age, but it’s fair to say she has lots of life experience. She worked in Chicago, Austin and at a Smoky Mountains resort in the Knoxville/Gatlinburg area of Tennessee before moving to Canyon Madness Ranch a couple of months ago.

“The biggest thing (about the job) is that you are going to be by yourself,” Huebner said. “I don’t mind being by myself. I like myself. You find that out when you live alone.”

Huebner is the only resort employee who lives at the lodge. Her quarters are in a loft.

“I wake up in the morning and it’s ‘Holy Moley, I can’t believe I live here.’ I have never been this far West before. It’s gorgeous. It’s a great place to work.”

Huebner has to drive to Roy to get mail, to Las Vegas, New Mexico, for groceries and it takes 30-40 minutes to haul lodge garbage to a dumpster. She has become comfortable behind the wheel of off-road vehicles.

“I’ve run over two rattlesnakes, and I’ve seen six,” she said. There are bears up here, and mountain lions. But there are scary things in Chicago, too.”

‘They will come’

Just after lunch, Law stood on the Teepee Lodge's upper deck, an area equipped with an electronic organ, a pool table, air hockey and foosball tables, and a cornhole set.

He had just finished showing visitors one of the lodge's suites and was gazing at the road leading to the resort's horse corrals. Law, his wife and several friends were about to go on a trail ride down into Encierro Canyon. He appeared content.

"I am not heartbroken that we have no paying guests," he said. "It's too early for paying guests. When the virus is finally behind us and people find out about this place, they will come."

CANYON MADNESS RANCH

To find out more about this 14,000-acre resort in northeast New Mexico, go to canyonmadnessranch.com. **For bookings or inquiries, call 617-816-4850 or 720-919-4090.**