



*Sporting Heritage Group*  
FIELD SPORTS CONSULTANTS



6 LODGE  
ROOMS: GREAT  
& OTHERWISE

A WHITE PAPER

APRIL 2007

By DENNIS DOYLE



Copyright statement

©Copyright 2007, Sporting Heritage  
Group, LLC

No part of this document may be  
distributed, reproduced or posted without  
the express written permission of  
Sporting Heritage Group, LLC.

Sporting Heritage Group, LLC  
107 South Water Street  
Franklin, Indiana 46131

## SHG CO-FOUNDER

Jonathan Sherrill began his marketing and sales career at age 17. Within two years he had a choice to make — either take a full-ride scholarship (both Purdue and Indiana University offered) or accept a territorial management position with an international marketing firm. He chose the latter and never looked back. Within five years he was on the senior management team.

A passionate hunter and fisherman since early childhood, when a small private company in central Indiana pursued him to run their recreational properties' sales and management division, he listened.

– Continued on next page –



## INTRODUCTION/SUMMARY

*A* lodge is a compilation of experiences as much as it is an accumulation of different rooms and physical spaces. By paying attention to the details within those areas, you can insure the impression left will be both permanent and positive. That'll keep the beds full. And the cash register, too.

## LODGES I HAVE KNOWN

*Y*our lodge can't talk but it does say a whole lot about who you are, what you think, and how you are doing. With over forty years of professional and personal experience in the field sports, I have had occasion to hunt and fish in most all of the 50 states, Canada, and Mexico. In the process I have stayed at more than fifty different venues. They have ranged from one rat and rattlesnake infested "lodge" in Texas to the finest the industry has to offer. Just in the last fifteen months I have hunted, shot and fished at Crystal Creek and Talon (Alaska), Highland Hills and Flying B (Oregon and Idaho, respectively), Paul Nelson's (South Dakota), Wollaston (Saskatchewan), and Rio Piedra (Georgia) — top tier destinations all. In between those extremes I have sampled operations covering the top to bottom range of what sporting lodges have to offer. And — big surprise — I much prefer the top end (like the seven mentioned).

*I*n the following pages I will provide specifics on some of the details that can be of value for enhancing your lodge, bringing you a more affluent client, and, thereby, increasing your net. Later papers will deal with other important aspects and issues, e.g., staffs, grounds, equipment, and various other accoutrements. This one is devoted to those things, big and little, that make a statement about what and who you — and your lodge — are.

## MEET, GREET, & BEAT THE COMPETITION

*A*s a bit of background, we at Sporting Heritage Group have spent a good part of the last three years compiling information on the whole of the travel and leisure industry with emphasis on the field sports. In the course of that research we mined countless nuggets of demographic information. For instance, Stratos magazine — who, along with Elite Traveler magazine, cater to the absolutely highest demographic readership in the entire travel and leisure industry — surveyed their readers and found that more than 82% of that top end demographic hunted and/or fished. Only a bit over 71% golfed and/or skied. Surprised them. Surprised us.

In that capacity he naturally gravitated to their field sports niche where he was not only heavily involved in the real estate acquisition and sales section but also in the R & D department's burgeoning interest in the luxury leisure and travel industry.

After a time, and feeling his potential somewhat limited there, he joined the business development section of Realogy Corporation, franchisor of Southeby's International, Coldwell Banker and other prominent brands, to gain invaluable experience in mergers and acquisitions, and brand franchising.

A born entrepreneur, he and the author co-founded Sporting Heritage Group in 2006. For a look at what SHG can do for you visit [www.shgconsultants.com](http://www.shgconsultants.com).



Consequently, we undertook to compare and contrast the top level of our area of interest in the field sports industry with that part of the travel and leisure industry devoted to golf, skiing, the beach, mountain properties, etc. We became quite familiar with many top end niche groups (like The Registry Collection — [www.registrycollection.com](http://www.registrycollection.com) — with over 100 luxury properties worldwide). We also surveyed most of the destination clubs, equity and non-equity membership vehicles, fractional ownerships, and just about every other hybrid and pure play in the field. The parameters we uncovered and the suggestions we gleaned constitute the meat and potatoes of this paper.

We quickly realized that throughout the outdoor industry there is a growing demand for high end sporting experiences and facilities. That fact, coupled with diminishing accessibility to high quality lands and waters, has presented sporting venues with the opportunity to attract and successfully cater to that top drawer clientele at a level and volume not dreamed of twenty years ago. Quite simply, there are just more people with more discretionary income than ever before. And a whole lot of them hunt and fish.

## CURB APPEAL

All that being said, let's deal with some of the physical nuts and bolts of these luxury field sport properties. Try driving into your venue with the untutored eyes of a new guest. In so far as is possible there should immediately be some tangible sense of remoteness and exclusivity projected. If the location itself is remote and somewhat isolated, so much the better. If not, make use of physical barriers, e.g., fencing or plantings, to help convey that feeling. The entrance should also project exclusivity and curb appeal. The signage should be tasteful and professional while being obvious enough to give guests necessary information and directions. Likewise, lighting should be designed to complement that signage. And the landscaping should be appropriate to the setting and geographical location, well maintained, and debris free.

Your guest's initial impression should be such that a thematic thread ties the whole picture together. Ill suited and poorly maintained outbuildings have no place in this picture. Certainly not right next to the lodge. A rusty metal pole barn just doesn't cut it when it is juxtaposed with, say, a Southern plantation style lodge building.

As I address the interior of an ideal high end lodge, bear in mind that these recommendations are what we have found to be most desirable. No lodge I have visited has them all; all of the top flight ones had most of them. However, should you be building, remodeling, or just rearranging, consider any of them that can be worked in. At any rate, keep them in mind. The luxury market you are competing in certainly does.

## SEVEN LITTLE DETAILS — ONE BIG IMPRESSION

As mentioned in the text in the last year or so I visited seven of the top lodges in North America. They were all outstanding. Most impressive in any number of ways and all great places to fish and hunt. They delivered on all levels.

It occurred to me that it would be interesting to go through them one by one and, arbitrarily, pick out some “small” details to do with the lodge that made an immediate and memorable impression on me. So here they are.

- Crystal Creek Lodge (Alaska): The separate, personalized lockers for each guest and the accompanying individual wader driers were much appreciated. It also didn't hurt that the bar and lounge area, replete with a large fireplace, was adjacent to it. First class operation throughout.

— Continued on next page —



*T*he very first thing a guest sees when he opens your door should be some type of foyer or reception area. And he should know that's what it is and that's where he is because it's clearly marked and staffed. It's poor procedure to have a party come in and not be met and greeted. If you have a specific check-in desk be sure to have appropriate seating for a minimum of two guests. Also any concierge services should be handled there. As much as possible your floor plan should segregate that check-in area from the other operational features of the lodge. And a restroom (with a minimum of two fixtures) complete with mirror and vanity needs to be within easy access. It is axiomatic that all furniture and furnishings be consistent with whatever the thematic decorative scheme is.

### A GOOD GREAT ROOM

*T*he next room likely to be seen by a newcomer is the great room. The great room functions as the primary social gathering area. At many lodges it also doubles as the dining room. Some incorporate a bar and business area as additional functions. While the great room may be multi-functional dependent on time and demand, there are a few things that are “must have.” And a big one is that there should be sufficient comfortable seating to accommodate whatever the total guest capacity is.

*A*nother important area, whether incorporated into the great room or provided in its own separate room, should be a well stocked bar with top drawer products. If your guests are repeats or if they make their preferences known in advance, the brands and vintages they like should be waiting for them. Same goes for a good selection of cigars and a comfortable place to smoke them. (A good CRM — Customer Relationship Management — software package will greatly enhance that process.) And if you don't have a separate gaming room you can make part of your great room work for that, too. Within these confines, as throughout, the décor, art work, furniture and furnishings should always complement your chosen theme.

### THAT'S ENTERTAINMENT/ BUSINESS AS USUAL

*M*ost all of the top places have a “reading and relaxing” area that is relatively quiet, somewhat segregated, includes a desk, comfortable chairs and a small, “themed” library revolving around the featured activities, e.g., wingshooting and/or fly fishing. It doesn't need to be terribly expensive nor extensive. One lodge I recall had several years worth of “Field & Stream” from the 50's and 60's that seemed to include about every Robert Ruark article ever published. Another had copies of all the annual “Bird Hunting Books” and “Fly Fishing Books” “Gray's” has issued.

- Flying B Ranch (Idaho): The spacious gun room had individual lockers for each guest's gun and gear. The guns were all doubles (o/u and side-by-sides) and all very nice Weatherbys, Berettas, and Brownings. The views from the lodge were beyond impressive.
- Highland Hills Ranch (Oregon): The façade and the fenestration are as impressive in real time as they are in the ads. The whole exterior presentation (including bridges over ponds, riffles, waterways, and falls; decks and porches on different levels with magnificent views; well conceived landscaping and plantings) were flawlessly executed. The interior was equal to the exterior. The food was exquisite. And don't miss the hors d'oeuvres daily at 5.
- Paul Nelson Farm (South Dakota): The Cigar & Cognac Room alone is worth the trip. Paul knows his wines. And superb cuisine. This venue is one of the most interesting lodges I have ever visited. By the way, this is one of the places that has constructed a lavish single occupancy, stand alone building. Crystal Creek is the other.

– Continued on next page –



*E*ntertainment systems, in the form of sound systems, big screen/flat screen TVs, video and movie players, should all be of quality with simplified — as much as possible, anyway — remote controls and basic written instructions. It's really frustrating to have it and not be able to operate it. Or to even turn it on.

*F*inally, either in the great room or, preferably, in its own separate room, should be an area suitable for conducting business and holding meetings. Minimally it should include business services and facilities such as internet access, fax, telephone, and a copy machine.

## BEDS & BREAKFASTS

*T*he dining area, be it part of the great room or separate unto itself, needs to have the seating and serving capacity to handle whatever the maximum number of guests the venue will accommodate.

*T*he furniture, furnishings, and décor need to carry through with the general thematic approach. That includes good quality — and matching — china, flatware, and glassware. Paper napkins, pastel Melmac plates, Styrofoam cups, and plastic spoons should've gone by the way by about 1973. I've never seen all of those at one lodge but I have seen one or more over the years here and there. And at some otherwise exceptionally nice places where I never would have expected it. Morning coffee should not call to mind a continental breakfast at Motel 6. Little details combine to form large and lasting impressions.

*K*itchens, and what come out of them, also speak loudly and clearly about quality. If the hunting and fishing are the locomotive pulling the train, the dining and drinking are the coal car fueling it. While I have never had a good hunt wrecked by a bad meal, I've seen sorry ones salvaged by a top flight kitchen.

*C*hefs are rapidly becoming de rigeur at upscale lodges. It is not rare, or even unusual, to be served a dinner that any four star restaurant would be proud to claim. I am all in favor of it. Nonetheless, I have had meals every bit as good at lodges where the “chef” was a local farmer's wife. Point being, it doesn't matter which it is so long as it is consistently excellent. Mediocre will run off more money than it'll save — and in short order.

- Rio Piedra Plantation (Georgia): The big wrap around plantation porch coupled with the viewing and dining deck overlooking the river make this a wonderful, traditional Southern quail hunting venue. It's a great place as is and with the current renovation it's going to get nothing but better.
- Talon Lodge (Alaska): Another great place in the midst of a remodel/expansion, an outstanding feature is the indoor/outdoor pavilion with two massage rooms looking toward the Pacific with countless islands dotting the vista and the mountains of Baranof Island framing the periphery. Absolutely astounding visual impact.
- Wollaston Lake Lodge (Saskatchewan): The bar/lounge area features same-day photos of the fish caught. Then they are archived for their website. Right off that room is a great TV/video room with huge, comfortable, individual recliners and a really sharp reading/relaxing loft overlooking the dining area. Adjacent to that is a screened deck for smoking fine Cuban cigars — which are legal in Canada.



*D*on't overlook your wine selection either. You don't need to have an in house wine steward nor be a connoisseur. You just need to do a bit of research and stock accordingly. Most parts of the country have local and relatively unknown wineries, some of which produce surprisingly good stuff. Good is valuable. Good and different is invaluable and impressive. Suffice it to say that it's not sufficient to stock a jug of red and a box of white.

*T*he norm, even in better lodges and not too long ago, used to be double occupancy rooms with a bath or even two such rooms sharing one bath. That alone won't do it anymore. Two lodges I visited in the last year or so were constructing separate buildings with elegant single rooms and large, well appointed private bath/spas. Several more were doing conversions and retrofits with the same goal. They had all found that the demand — and the willingness to pay — was there. Part of that demand is status and part is practicality and comfort. Why listen to someone snore if you can afford not to? Again, something to consider if you have plans to expand or remodel.

## A GOOD FIT

*F*inally, spas and/or fitness facilities are becoming ubiquitous in even mid-tier lodges. From a treadmill in a side room and a hot tub on the deck to full blown layouts with trainers and masseuses, they are nearly as common as shotguns and fly rods. The better ones are physically segregated from the main lodge activities and provide their own restrooms, showers, and locker rooms.

*S*o there are a few of the common denominators that the astute sporting customer considers — consciously or un — when booking (and, more importantly, rebooking) a visit to hunt and fish. And, with the increasing crossover and overlap from other luxury segments of the travel and leisure industry, that customer is better “educated” and has higher expectations than ever before.

Go to [www.shgconsultants.com](http://www.shgconsultants.com) for information  
on what we do and how we can help your operation.  
Or contact Jonathan Sherrill at 317.412-4167.

