

après





A pilgrimage up the Fryingpan River reveals the "hidden landscapes" of Beyul Retreat.

20



Mellow drumbeats and merry laughter fade in the alpine breeze as I stroll a dirt path along the edge of Beyul Retreat. Here beside the Fryingpan River—13 miles northeast of Aspen as the crow flies, or a hypnotic hourlong drive through Basalt past Ruedi Reservoir—a chorus of rustling blue spruce branches, cheery birdsong, and water flowing over stone surrounds the 32-acre ranch property. Despite a celebration unfolding around Beyul's main lodge and guest cabins, my inner adventurer begs for a walk through the woods.

I'm at Beyul for a friend's birthday gathering in October. A big fan of Bluegrass Sundays on Aspen Mountain and the power of music to bring people together, he's invited 150 friends and family members here to fulfill a lifelong dream: to host a music festival featuring bands and DJs, farm-to-table feasts, yoga, bonfires, and camaraderie amid the great outdoors. Surrounded by the White River National Forest, homeland to the Ute Indians and now a mecca for hiking, fly fishing, mountain biking, rock climbing, and paddling beyond reach of cell service, Beyul is an idyllic spot to gather one's tribe.

It's also a place to reflect inward. On my walk, I pass sculptures by Beyul resident artists, including *Forest Spiral*, a sparkling mosaic of 3,000 foraged fragments of blue, green, and clear mining-era glass suspended around a cluster of tall lodgepole pine. Forming a serene enclosure around the naturally occurring tree circle, it's no wonder artist Lara Whitley describes it as "a listening room in the woods."

In Tibetan, "Beyul means 'hidden landscapes,'" says cofounder Reuben Sadowsky, an Aspen native who studied Chinese and international affairs at CU Boulder before channeling his passion for art, activism, and education into a career in event marketing and production. "It dates back to the 8th century, when Padmasambhava—sorcerer supreme who wrote *The Tibetan Book of the Dead* and brought Buddhism to Tibet—placed these beyul throughout the Himalaya as refuges for mankind in their time of need."





When he and cofounder Abby Stern, a yoga teacher and former executive director of Aspen's nonprofit Lead With Love festival, discovered the plot that would become Beyul Retreat during a snowstorm in December 2019, Sadowsky immediately thought of the term and its allusions to the legends of Shangri-La, Shambhala, and the Garden of Eden. Wishing to avoid any cultural appropriation, he phoned a friend's wife, who is Nepalese. Even before he had a chance to pose the question, "She said, 'You should call it 'Beyul,'" Sadowsky recalls. "I had a dream last night, and Guru Rinpoché [Padmasambhava] said you should do it."

After building a business plan, securing investors, and raising funds to purchase the historic Diamond J Ranch in November 2020, the duo set an intention: to nurture the land and share the values behind Elizabeth and Walter Paepcke's "Aspen Idea"—that a "community of peace" can be achieved through fitness of the mind, body, and spirit in equal measure. (Soon after my friend hosted Sababa Fest on the grounds of Beyul, he was offered his dream job as Aspen community

programs coordinator at the Aspen Institute—birthplace of the Aspen Idea.)

"It sounds kind of woo-woo, but the magic of putting intention into the land is already showing up in a big way. This has been the most water-rich last couple of summers and winters in a decade," Sadowsky says. "The mushroom harvest has been out of control! This property has gotten much greener since we've gotten here."

Beyul has also evolved to encourage exploration thanks to property director James Gorman's tireless constructions—an entrance bridge, cedar sauna, and 1,500-square-foot event barn, among others—as well as robust volunteer efforts. Colorado's State Wildland Inmate Fire Team (SWIFT), composed of skilled laborers serving prison time, completed large-scale landscaping, fire mitigation, and trail building over six days. "It was a big deal that they got to stay up here," Sadowsky notes, "and they found it to be a healing experience." (Unknowingly, I had admired the squad's chainsawed wooden sculptures during my nature walk in October.)



Historically, the area has always attracted settlers. The dilapidated barn at Beyul's entrance, in fact, served as a ticket office for the first railroad to cross the Continental Divide, from Leadville through Hagerman Pass to Glenwood Springs and Grand Junction beyond. (It was decommissioned shortly after.) Located at the confluence of the Fryingpan and North Fork rivers, in the Muckewanigo ("bear crossing" in Native Ute dialect) drainage, Beyul sits on an ancient freshwater seabed rich in hematite.

"When hematite, a magnetic mineral, hits air and oxidizes, and we have the tectonic plates [shifting], that's what gives us that unique maroon formation indicative of our area, the Maroon Bells and [the scenery] when you drive up the Fryingpan," Sadowsky says. "There's a lot of charge in the mountains here."

I return to Beyul in mid-November for Ranchgiving, an end-of-season ticketed bash. My group rents the original 1920s Longbranch cabin, which sleeps eight. In the kitchen we prepare dishes for the



HIDING IN PLAIN SIGHT

The most coveted listings are often hiding. Call me, I know how to get the keys to all the hidden doors.

Thanksgiving-style potluck, followed by dancing to jazzy South African *amapiano* house music in the music tent and main lodge. Once again, I opt out of connecting to the main lodge's Wi-Fi, going dark on phone, email, and social media for a restorative 48 hours. Instead, I escape to the cedar sauna and cold plunge post-dance party and revel beneath an inky, star-dappled sky.

"I feel like beyul—places for ideas, and people to rejuvenate, regenerate, and figure out new things for the betterment of mankind—are not just places to be found, but places to be created," says Sadowsky, who lives nearby in Meredith. His morning routine is utopian: an early run (or cross-country ski, in winter) with his wolf dog, Atlas, followed by hot-cold therapy (a brisk river dip in warmer months), meditation, journaling, and

quigong before a daily team meeting over tea and coffee.

Half of Beyul's staff lives on site, lending personal touches to events—more than 110, including 30 concerts, to date. Upcoming on my radar: a silent meditation workshop, dream yoga, a gravel biking camp, guided mushroom foraging with expert mycologists, and next winter's third-annual outdoor wellness retreat, plus ceramics, weaving, and woodworking classes in Beyul's new maker space and a weekend dinner series featuring Colorado produce. "We're gonna go Francis Mallmann ... cooking over campfire," says executive chef Greg Ashbaugh, citing the Argentine chef and *Chef's Table* star as inspiration.

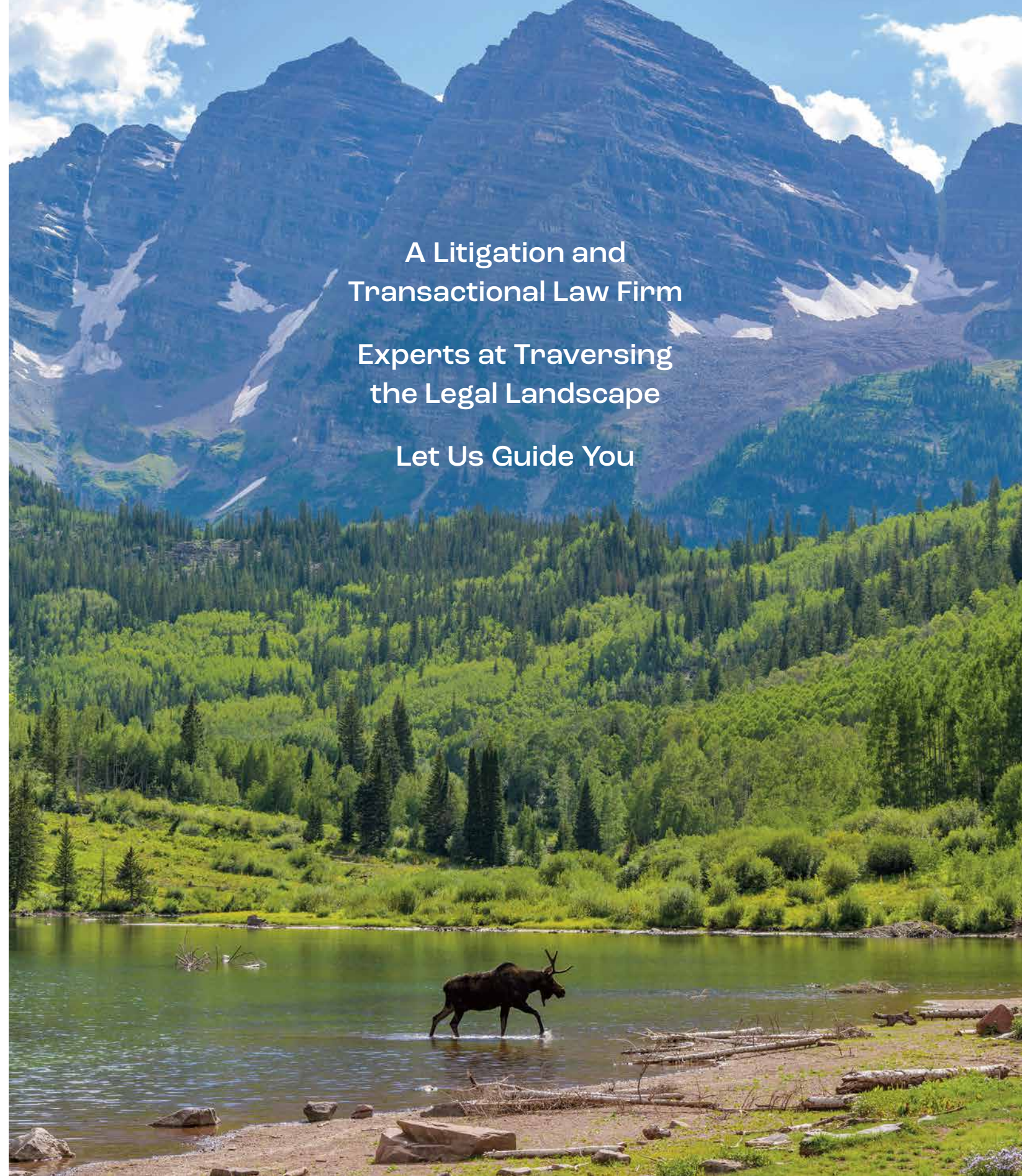
"I think we represent an older generation of Aspen: the creative, introspective,



With its wild solitude and vibrant offerings designed to enrich mind, body, and spirit, Beyul Retreat was envisioned to be, as cofounder Reuben Sadowsky puts it, "the Esalen of the Rockies."

athletic, communal archetype that's been around here a long time," Sadowsky says, adding that his grandmother and parents (Alexandra Halperin, Aspen Mountain's first female ski patroller, and Dan "Pastor Mustard" Sadowsky, a KDNK Radio host for 17 years and emcee of the Telluride Bluegrass Festival for nearly three decades) embody that standard.

"A lot of people who come to Aspen only discover what's in a six-block radius," Sadowsky continues. "Us holding down this corner and making something cool, mysterious, a little bit sexy, and fun is a hook to show the real value of this area. To have a transformational experience ... you might have to go past the roundabout."



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