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The Hottest Amenity



Peter DaSilva for The New York Times

As told to AMY GUNDERSON
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WHO Kent Blackford, 44, a property manager from San Francisco

WHAT 2-bedroom house with onebedroom guesthouse

WHERE Monte Rio, Calif.

There are hot-tub people and sauna people, and I'm a sauna person. When my family bought this house eight years ago as both a retreat for all of us and as a house to rent out to vacationers, it looked nothing like it does today. The outdoor sauna is made from redwood but, oddly enough, is from a company in Texas. I'm sure the trees came from California, and the wood was sent to Texas to be milled. It came to me as a kit, which I assembled into a six-foot barrel-shaped sauna that seems appropriate for these parts.

The house, which is named Far Reaches, is in the Russian River region of Sonoma County. The outdoor living space was inspired by my trips to Bali. I built a privacy fence and imported a Balinese iron gate and a meditation pavilion with a thatched roof. There is also an outdoor shower with three heads on the large wraparound deck that juts out among the redwoods. There was an old garage on the property made from old-growth redwood that had to come down. I took that wood and made planters for the deck.

Saunas are great for a rental property because they are a lot easier to maintain than hot tubs. They just need to be wiped down. Some of my guests have left comments that they tried to use every inch of the outdoor space during their stay. I feel the same way. Every couple of months I take a trip up to the house. The sauna's heating system allows the humidity to be adjusted and you can even add oils, like eucalyptus. And I know the sauna gets plenty of use because when I open the door, it smells great.

This article, "The Hottest Amenity" appeared in the New York Times, Spring 2007, in the "Great Homes" section of the Friday edition of the paper. The paper was doing a profile on homes with saunas, and chose to highlight Far Reaches.