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STONEWATER COVE

| Paul E. Kandarian

When I told friends my 21-year-old son and I were going to an upscale resort in the deep woods of Missouri, their reaction was uniform: “Seriously?”

How upscale can a resort be in the depths of the Missouri wilderness? When said resort is Stonewater Cove perched above picture-perfect Table Rock Lake in the Ozarks, a private, 500-acre retreat in the Mark Twain National Forest that caters to every need of every guest, the answer is “very.”

Stonewater Cove is run by the Bond family (the patriarch’s name is James, go ahead and kid him, he doesn’t mind), an outdoor haven of extreme luxury where there is no stone left unturned when it comes to guest comfort, from the amenities in the massive-yet-cozy 12,000-square-foot main lodge with vaulted ceilings, giant fireplaces and exquisite food, to the Western-style accommodations, with plank walls, stone floors and log bed frames and headboards, much of it designed by Ruth Bond, James’ wife and mother of Kristi, Randi and James Jr. – all involved in the resort.

Stonewater Cove is a member of Small Luxury Hotels of the world and was named one of the Top 10 Wilderness Lodges by Luxury Travel Magazine for 2010, and for good reason. The pampering starts the second you arrive, as you are greeted and your bags taken to your room





while you're given a tour of the core facilities. The concierge attends to your every whim, including arranging a private helicopter tour over the lake and the nearby Piney Creek Wilderness area.

The Bonds are a close-knit family and family is key here. For children, there is a walking entrance with bubble sprouts on the shallow end of the spacious pool, a cave in the middle of it, and down by the docks, a small enclosed dock that creates a mini-lake within for the smallest children to enjoy.

The lower lodge has a bar, lounge, fireplace and all manner of games for all ages, as well as a media room with giant TV. The dining experience at Stonewater is second to none, with made-to-order breakfasts. The dinner choices are dizzying and filling, from succulent ribs to fettuccini gorgonzola pasta topped with filet medallions to the occasional cherries flambé. Dining is by towering windows overlooking magnificent Missouri sunsets over the lake.

In the mood to sweat? Choose from activities as hard-core or laid-back as you like. Fee includes kayaking, canoeing, hiking, mountain

biking and dock fishing. A la carte offerings are guided ATV rides, skeet shooting, zip lining, boat rides, water sports and a low-ropes Chevron course.

We couldn't get enough of zip lining. Clipped into a supremely safe harness and screaming hundreds of feet over yawning mountain clearings is exhilaration in the extreme. We also opted for skeet shooting, stopping only when our shoulders were sore.

Stonewater Cove is a place of rustic elegance and charm, a great place to reconnect and refresh. As my son and I sat in the warm embrace of one of the resort's roaring fire pits one night, I was reminded of what the Bond father had said, that such multi-generational gatherings are quite common here in the nation's heartland where above all, family comes first.

Combining that with utmost wilderness luxury is Stonewater Cove Resort. In the deep woods of Missouri. Seriously.

Stonewater Cove Resort, 1257 Sunset Timbers Trail, Shell Knob, Missouri, 800-792-3956, www.stonewatercove.com