Imagine traveling the world and visiting your favorite destinations, hotels and spas and then creating a hideaway with all of the best attributes of each combined into one location. That’s what the Bond family did. Jim and Ruth were in their 50s when they quit their jobs as ophthalmologists in Iowa, and then spent the next five years building and developing Stonewater Cove Resort and Spa near Shell Knob, Missouri, just west of Branson. Sited on Table Rock Lake, the grounds spread out over 500 acres and border the Mark Twain National Forest. A boutique hotel, the luxury resort has only 20 rooms.

The Inspiration “We wanted to create a place that reflected our own favorite vacation experiences,” Ruth Bond says. “We drew from lake vacations, ski trips, dude ranches, cruising, and even Disney World.”

The Timeline The Bonds bought the property in 1997, going back and forth for years trying to figure out what to do with it. They started building in 2004.

Stonewater Cove was completed with exquisite landscaping and walking paths, luxurious rooms with lakefront views, pools, a boating dock and miles of hiking trails. The resort was originally open year-round but now it only operates from mid-April through mid-November.

Who Goes There A family operation, the general manager is the owners’ son, James, and their daughter, Randi, also helps run the resort. “We see neurosurgeons and contractors, avid boaters, artists, us...,” Randi says. “[My favorite activity] is riding the ATVs, swimming, skiing, getting a massage, and hiking. We love it all. My daughter is the only grandchild so far, and she’s here a lot picking flowers for the dining tables with her Grandma.”

“Glamping” The owners describe glamorous camping at the resort as “an outdoor adventure with a personal wait staff and concierge.” The accommodations are elegant, the meals are gourmet, and the activities include helicopter and ATV tours, guided fishing trips, kayaking, wakeboarding, kneeboarding, tubing, zip lines, a low-ropes challenge course, hiking, skeet shooting, and spa services to name a few. Reservations are on the American plan and include three meals each day; cost starts at $560 a night.

How to get there: Take I-44 West past Springfield, MO, then exit 46 (for highway MO-39). Stay on MO-39 through Aurora and continue until two miles north of Shell Knob. Turn left onto Stallion Bluff Road and drive approximately 30 minutes or 12 miles before arriving at the resort. For an extended stay, consider adding a visit to The Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art to the itinerary. It’s about an hour and a half away in Bentonville, Arkansas.