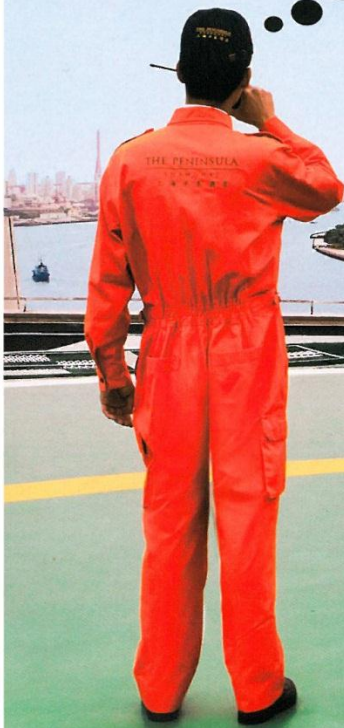


January/February 2013

# DEPARTURES

JANUARY/FEBRUARY 2013

WHERE SHOULD I EAT IN SHANGHAI TONIGHT?



...AND THE **100** (GIVE OR TAKE A FEW)  
PEOPLE, PLACES, THINGS YOU NEED TO KNOW  
**RIGHT NOW**



TO VISIT YELLOWSTONE IN winter is to experience it much the way the area's earliest eastern explorers did at the beginning of the 19th century, and the Native Americans long before them, prior to this region's 1872 establishment as the country's—and the world's—first national park.

It's the difference between sharing Yellowstone's 2.2 million acres (a landmass larger than Delaware and Rhode Island combined) in Wyoming, Idaho and Montana with the 500,000 cars, 30,000 RVs and 3,000 buses that come here in July and August and having its frozen rivers, golden canyons, snow-covered mountains and lodgepole pine forests all to yourself; the difference between craning your neck to watch Old Faithful spout off while surrounded by 2,000 strangers and savoring it with just a handful of fellow onlookers; the difference



*Porcelain Basin, which takes its name from its milky white deposits of siliceous sinter, in Norris Geyser Basin*





HAVEN'T  
YOU  
ALWAYS  
DREAMED OF  
**YELLOWSTONE**  
**IN WINTER?**

BY **ANDREW SESSA**

PHOTOGRAPHS BY  
**DIANE COOK & LEN JENSEL**



between rushing through an encounter with an elk herd so you can quickly cross it off your wildlife checklist and lingering over it so it can strike a chord deep within.

"I've been in the park in the summer, in a traffic jam, waiting for an entire herd of bison—which had slowed the already slow summer traffic to a complete halt—to go by," recalls filmmaker Ken Burns, who spent his first winter days in Yellowstone while working on his Emmy Award-winning 2009 PBS documentary, *The National Parks: America's Best Idea*. "Contrast that with winter," he says, "when you round a corner just after dawn and you think that

than 300 feet over the edge of the Grand Canyon of the Yellowstone. Just in front of it, the splashing liquid and rising mist create a soaring dome of ice, its rounded and skirted form looking like a white silk scarf laid over a fortune-teller's crystal ball.

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IT'S EASY TO MISTAKE THIS SNOW-blanketed stillness for tranquility. And, indeed, a frozen peacefulness does pervade much of the park. But this quiet calm belies the geological turbulence boiling underground. For Yellowstone is, in fact, a huge—and still active—volcano, one of the

## FROM CERTAIN VANTAGES, THE PLUMES APPEAR AS SOLID COLUMNS OF WHITE MARBLE; AT OTHERS, LIKE SMOKE CURLS BOILING OVER THE SIDE OF A CAULDRON.

you're there at the morning of creation. You have this sense of human privilege."

But it's not just the relative emptiness (less than 900 visitors a day in January and February) that makes a trip to Yellowstone in winter so special. It's also how the snow and ice so dramatically transform the park's vast and various landscapes from the familiar to the strange. At its deepest, in the higher-altitude southern parts of the park's interior, the perfectly white snow can stand five feet deep, so high that it buries all but the tops of the main road's "Reduce Speed" signs. Snowdrifts can climb even higher.

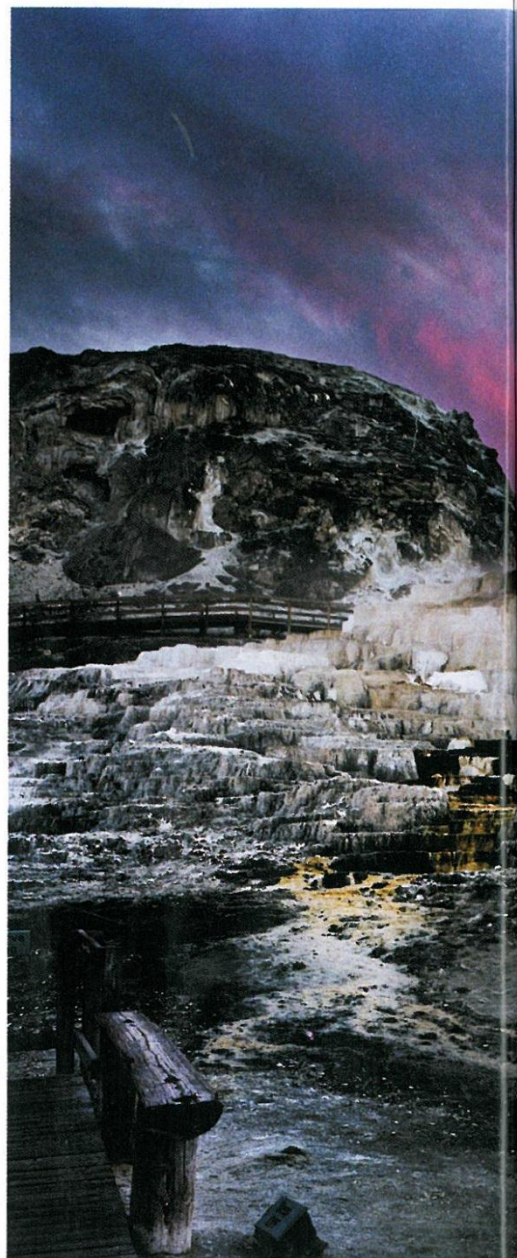
Ice enrobes every branch, every twig, every individual needle of the park's towering, old-growth lodgepole pines, turning them into sparkling, almost figurative statues of faceted crystal when the low winter sun shines through their snow-heavy limbs.

From the northwest shore of Yellowstone Lake, the views stretch long and wide over the water's firmly frozen, impossibly flat 131-square-mile surface, the sheet of ice invisible for the downy blanket of snow covering it. At the park's Lower Falls—best viewed from the aptly named Artist Point—water moving too fast to freeze drops more

largest on the planet. Its last major eruption was some 640,000 years ago, forming the 45-mile-wide caldera, or volcanic crater, at the heart of the park, and today a huge magma chamber, whose volume dwarfs that of Mount St. Helens, still lies just beneath the serene surface. At its closest, the magma comes within approximately two miles of the earth's crust. (In most places, it remains 30 to 50 miles below ground.)

"People don't really use the phrase 'If Yellowstone erupts again,'" says Kurt Johnson, resident naturalist at Spring Creek Ranch, in nearby Jackson, Wyoming. "They say, 'When.'"

An eruption is far from imminent, however. And in the meantime, this roiling underground energy is what gives Yellowstone its telltale geological features, the water-spouting geysers, gurgling hot springs, steam-gushing fumaroles and earth-boiling mud pots that contribute to its primordial, almost otherworldly aspect. The park plays host to the planet's greatest concentration of geothermal sites, including about 300 geysers—that's almost half the earth's number of these exploding spouts of water—at least 150 of which occupy just one square mile in the Upper Geyser Basin. **CONTINUED »**







*Minerva Spring, its travertine terraces covered by ice, at Mammoth Hot Springs*

## A WINTER IN WONDERLAND

While it's possible to make a day trip from Jackson Hole to the park's southern reaches or from lower Montana to the north, this makes for one very long day, and you'll be giving even the major sights short shrift. You're better advised to stay in the park for at least a night.

**Xanterra** (866-439-7375; [yellowstone.nationalparklodges.com](http://yellowstone.nationalparklodges.com)) operates the park's lodges, including the two open from mid-December to early March: the **Mammoth Hot Springs Hotel**

(from \$125), which affords easy access to the steaming travertine terraces of the springs and is the only lodge reachable by car in the coldest months; and the **Old Faithful Snow Lodge & Cabins** (from \$220), which provides perfect proximity for geyser-watching but has no vehicle access. Neither is particularly luxe, but they're plenty comfortable, and after a day in the frozen landscape, there are no greater luxuries than a roaring fire, a plate of

hearty food and a quilt-covered bed, all of which these spots provide in spades.

Xanterra also operates multiday tours, with a fleet of snow coaches, snowmobiles and the yellow snow tanks called Bombardiers as well as snowshoes and cross-country skis at the ready for a variety of packages. These range from the entry-level, two-night **Frosty Fun** (from \$135 a person) to the rigorous, weeklong **Winter in Wonderland** (\$1,385 a person).

In partnership with Xanterra, the tour company **Tauck** offers a nine-day trip co-curated by Ken Burns and based on his *National Parks* documentary that includes five nights in the park's lodges (\$3,990; 800-788-7885; [tauck.com](http://tauck.com)). And guests of Jackson's **Spring Creek Ranch** can book Yellowstone safaris led by the property's expert resident naturalist, Kurt Johnson, and including an overnight at Snow Lodge (from \$1,450; 800-443-6139; [springcreek ranch.com](http://springcreek ranch.com)).



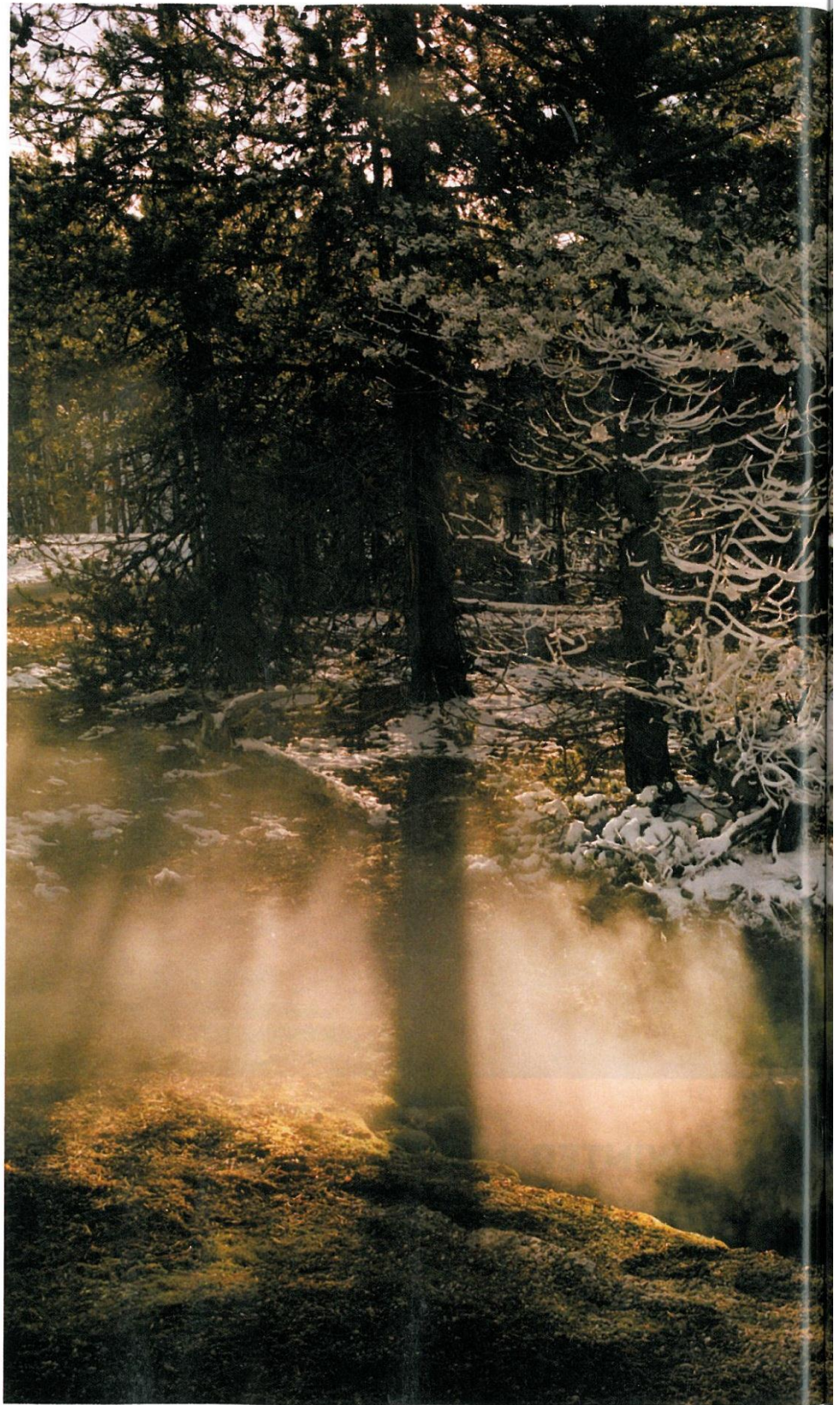
At no other time of the year do these natural marvels prove more impressive than in winter, when the difference in temperature between the cold air above ground and the hot water below creates striking plumes of steam that rise constantly from the frozen earth, making their way into the clear azure skies above. From certain vantages, the plumes appear as solid columns of white marble; at others, like smoke curls boiling over the side of a cauldron.

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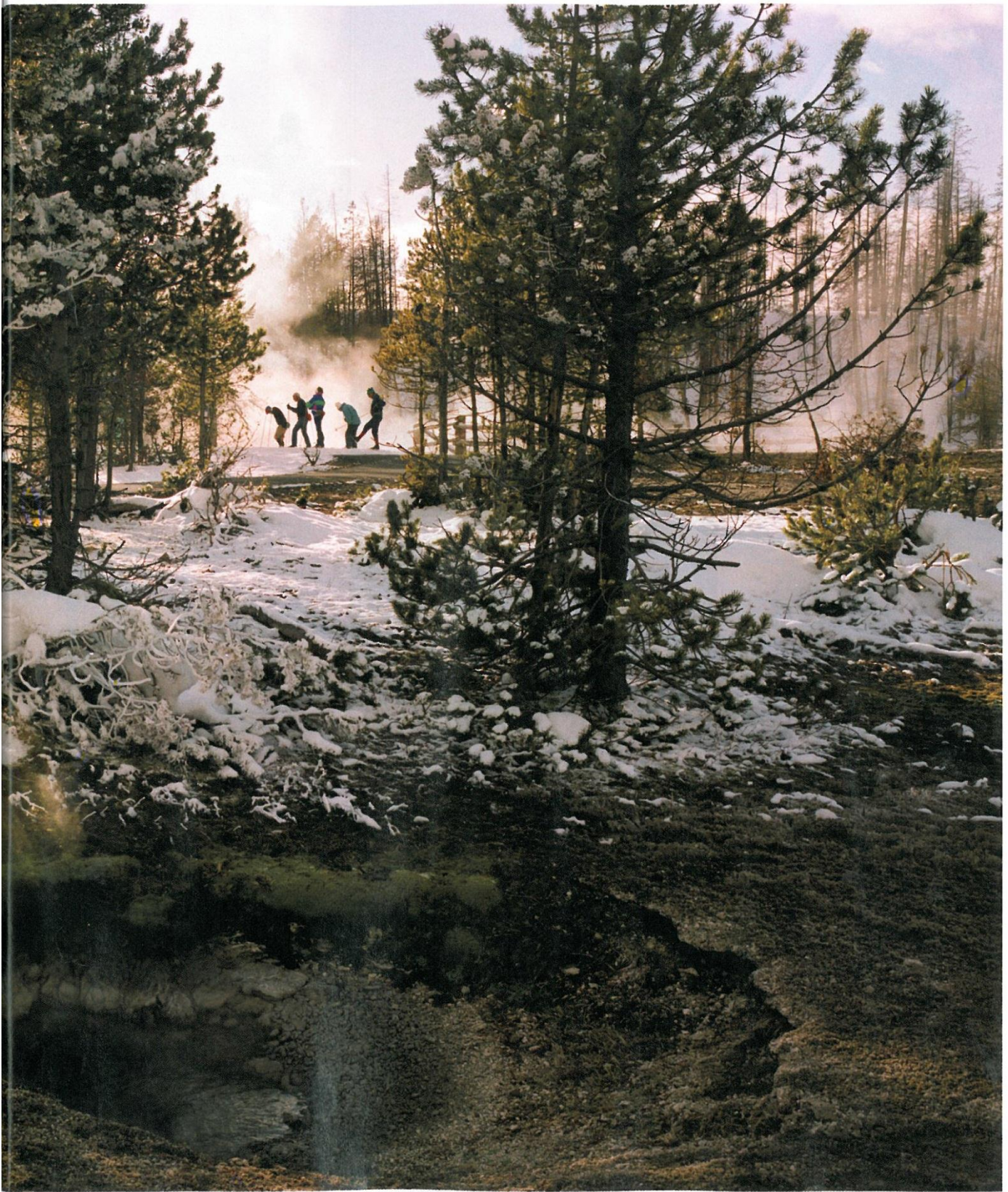
CRUISING THROUGH THE PARK ON snowshoes, cross-country skis or snowmobiles—or traveling more comfortably by snow coach or in one of the bright yellow, mid-century Canadian-made snow tanks called Bombardiers—you encounter sights that range from the sublime to the downright scary: tracts of road where the billowing steam creates whiteout conditions and destinations like the mud pots, where thick, dun-colored liquid boils up from the ground at extreme temperatures, and the Sulfur Caldron, which exhales putrid steam like dragon's breath. There are ponds with bubbling liquid as dangerous as battery acid and others, though few, that you could almost bathe in (but probably shouldn't). At various points, deep blue pools of a turquoise color that wouldn't be out of place in the Caribbean pop against the crisp white snow.

These thermal sites attract not just people but also animals, who come to warm themselves by the hot springs and search for food in the relatively clear ground nearby. The park's famous grizzly bears may be hibernating, but red foxes, easily seen across a field of white, stand tall, ears pricked, listening for rodents burrowing below. Groups of bison—hunted nearly to the point of extinction in the years after Yellowstone's founding—make their way across the snowscape, moving their great frost-dripping snouts back and forth in front of them. River otters play amid the ice floes in

CONTINUED ON PAGE 141 »







*Upper Geyser Basin near Grotto Geyser, which erupts about every eight hours*



semifrozen streams, catching fish below and eating their meals above the rushing water. And gray wolves, reintroduced in the mid-'90s and now numbering nearly 100 strong, hunt and howl across the park.

"Animals have a certain urgency to them in winter," says Doug Smith, who founded the Yellowstone Wolf Project 18 years ago and remains its leader. "They're trying to survive, and there's a stark reality about that that makes seeing them in winter that much more striking.

"Wolf-watching is better in the winter, too," Smith continues. "The elk come down to low elevation and the wolves follow, so they're closer to the roads. The winter is the wolf's time. Their coats are full and thick, and they're just gorgeous."

Like the reintroduction of wolves to the park, which thrilled environmentalists but rankled ranchers in the surrounding valleys, Yellowstone's winter operation has not always proceeded without its share of controversy. From the park's earliest days, its administrators fought to find the right balance between preservation and accessibility, and for the past 15 years or so, much of that fight has focused on the wintertime use of snowmobiles and snow coaches. For now, something of a *détente* has emerged, with a carefully enforced daily limit on the number of vehicles allowed into the park (318 snowmobiles, 78 snow coaches) and a mandate that these vehicles be both guided and, for snowmobiles, compliant with strict emissions guidelines (officials are working to establish policies for coaches)—a solution that allows public access while also attempting to mitigate environmental impact.

In this way, Yellowstone in winter may continue to live up to the ideals of the congressional act that founded it "for the benefit and enjoyment of the people," even as it seeks to protect itself from the unintended effects of those very pleasures.

But what pleasures—of absolutely epic proportions—they are, too. "Yellowstone, especially in winter because of the solitude, humbles you with its sheer size and scope and the diversity of nature," documentarian Burns suggests. "And it leaves you with the deepest of existential questions. It's a funny paradox about our national parks: They constantly remind us of our insignificance, but they make us larger at the same time. I don't know of anywhere else in the world that does that in quite the same way." ■



**TO HAVE AND TO HOLD** PAGE 126 **Devi Kroell** Gramercy in Winter Glow bag at Devi Kroell, 212-644-4499. PAGE 127 **Victoria Beckham** Harper bag at net-a-porter.com. **Hermès** Etribelt bag at hermes.com. PAGE 128 **Belstaff** Clayton hobo at Belstaff, 212-897-1880. PAGE 129 **Giorgio Armani** clutch at armani.com. **Diane von Furstenberg** Carolina Lips clutch at saks.com. **Bottega Veneta** Nero Oro clutch at Bottega Veneta, 212-371-5511. **Michael Kors** Rana clutch at Michael Kors, 866-709-5677. **Max Mara** Marca clutch at Max Mara, 212-879-6100. **Bulgari** Monete clutch at bulgari.com. **Gucci** Broadway evening bag at gucci.com. PAGE 130 **Mark Cross** Madison East West tote at markcross1845.com. **Marc Jacobs** Brighton bag at Marc Jacobs, 212-343-1490. **Tod's** leather tote at tods.com. PAGE 131 **Louis Vuitton** Milaris PM custom bag at louisvuitton.com.

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