



The main house



Screened-in outdoor living room



Swimming pool



The guest bath

# Ranching With a Purpose

At Home With Pebbles Wadsworth and Christian Smith

Story by Deborah Hamilton-Lynne  
Photos by Margaret Thomas-Barry

**P**EBBLES WADSWORTH, (FORMER *austinwoman* cover - March 2006) has been a major presence on the Austin arts scene since the day she assumed her role as director of the UT Performing Arts Center on January 1, 1992. Her vision and innovative programming have moved the UTPAC onto the world stage where it is acknowledged as among the best nationally and internationally. Wadsworth loves discovering artists and producing groundbreaking new performances. And, she is known for initiating collaborations among renowned artists, UT students and the community. Born to the task of arts production and management, Pebbles counts among her friends well-known performance artists such as Twyla Tharpe, Willie Nelson and Itzhak Perlman as well as many Latin American 'discoveries' - the emerging artists included in her *Artes Américas* program.

On November 6, 2007, friends and colleagues gathered at The Four Seasons Ballroom to honor Wadsworth, who in 2008 will hand the reigns of the PAC over to new leadership. The evening was supposed to be a roast and while there was some good-humored poking of fun at Wadsworth's famously rambling emails, for the most part, it was a nonstop acknowledgement of the amazing talents this "Force of Nature" possesses, whose pure belief in artists and the

arts made seemingly untenable events happen. In testament to her successful tenure, four of the five UT Presidents that she served under were in attendance.

"The driving force of my 'refocusing' was the belief that it was time for the next generation to assume leadership of the PAC. After 15 years, any organization needs fresh ideas and new leadership." Leaving the program with a \$7.5 million dollar budget and the soon-to-be-renovated Bass Concert Hall and Hogg Memorial Auditorium, it seemed, to Wadsworth, a logical time to step back and refocus her considerable energies.

So, how does a sophisticated arts aficionado end up on a ranch in Rosanky, TX? For 14 of their years in Austin, Wadsworth and her husband Christian Smith, executive manager for Budgetary and Financial Affairs of Travis County, made their home on Eck Lane on four acres overlooking the basin of Lake Travis. "When we moved to Eck Lane, there was nothing in the area...one small Randall's grocery, but none of the development you see today...no shopping centers, no theaters...and there were none of the big noisy boats on the lake." With an interest in architecture and landscaping, Smith designed the house and the grounds with David Schifflet. Needing a new project for their energies, the couple

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RANCHING WITH A PURPOSE from page 74 began to look for another ‘Texas Experience.’ Their search involved many hours and looking at approximately 70 properties before settling on 50 acres carved out of the heart of the Rosanky Cattle Company just outside of Smithville. The Rock C Ranch (a take on Wadsworth’s given name, Roxanne, and her mother’s nickname, Roxy) dedicated to rescuing horses, was purchased and began to take shape. Realizing that most of their weekend time was being spent at the ranch, Wadsworth and Smith sold the house on Eck Lane to split their time between an in town condo and Rock C until relocating permanently two years ago.

Every aspect of the house is designed for comfort and intended to welcome guests and foster relaxation. The wide front porch features a large conversation area as well as two rockers placed beside a tranquil fountain facing the guest house and an expanse of rolling pasture. The main room incorporates the living area, dining area and kitchen. It is large and open with a prominent clerestory, pecan floors, pine-beamed ceilings and a large stone fireplace. The house also includes a library/media room, an office area and a master bedroom. Smith has a unique passion for wood and all types of local wood (pecan, pine and mesquite) are prominently featured in the design. He



Pebbles Wadsworth and Christian Smith



Ranch animals at play

“You cannot imagine what this place looked like when we bought it. I wanted to tear down the houses and start over, but Chris had a vision so we went with that,” said Wadsworth. After five years of rebuilding and lots of hard work, the property is approaching Smith’s initial vision. The pastures, the barn and the riding arena have all been restored and refurbished. After restoring the decrepit ranch manager’s house, Wadsworth and Smith lived there on weekends, later moving into the guesthouse as they methodically gutted and rebuilt the main house. The couple decided early in the process to use local labor and craftsmen. “We waited a year for our contractor Kent Goude to be available. He was wonderful. It was an organic process. There was never a contract. Everything was done with a handshake and when we found wood that we wanted to use...for example in the floors or the wooden beams, he worked with us even when it seemed that what we were asking him to do was impossible.”

worked carefully with local artisans to create a stunning counter for the sink in the powder room as well as the mantle for the fireplace.

Love of entertaining outdoors led to the design and addition of a screened-in outdoor living room, complete with a fire pit and large round dining table. “We spend a lot of time out here. We love to entertain and it is so nice to sit out here and listen to the horses and the wind. What can I say? We love it here.” Complementing the porch is the swimming pool, which was also added by the couple. “We didn’t want anything fancy. We wanted the pool to look as if it had been dropped there. We wanted the pool area to flow into the ranch.” Mission accomplished. Just off the master bedroom is a covered patio with a relaxing hot tub and sitting area. A small courtyard separates the main house and Wadsworth’s getaway. Her studio is private space where she can read, think and create. “I love to draw...I use pastels and charcoal. This is where I exercise

“ Every aspect of the house is designed for comfort and intended to welcome guests and foster relaxation. ”

the creative side of my brain. I also have an idea for a line of jewelry using antique buttons. I love buttons - their design and their history.”

The house is furnished eclectically and almost exclusively with antiques inherited from both Wadsworth's and Smith's families and art collected on their many travels as well as from artist friends throughout the world.” Everything has a memory or a meaning attached to it. My parents had an extensive art collection and my two Calder's came from them. The Wegman print and the Deming sculptures of dogs re-



Calder print

flect our love for the many dogs that have been part of our life. My collection of giraffes comes from my mother's fascination with them that I came to share. When I was young, my parents came home from Africa with slides of those magnificent creatures and I was hooked. I have been to Africa four times and if I only had ten days to live I think I would say take me back to Kenya or Tanzania. My favorite place on earth is Giraffe Manors in Nairobi. The giraffes literally own the place. They will stick their heads through the windows while you sit on the porch sipping cocktails.”

On the Rock C Ranch all animals are free to run. The couple's dogs, Mason and Thor, as well as dogs belonging to the ranch manager and trainer immediately greet anyone who pulls up to the house or the barn. They also run freely with the horses. Ranch manager Jerry Lee Sewell trains rescue horses as well as the people paired with the

animals. While the number varies, there are generally around 18 to 20 horses on the property and they are allowed to graze freely. “Although I grew up in a horse family, I am not a natural rider. Now that I will have time to bond with a horse, Jerry Lee is going to work with me. I think the horse is one of God's most beautiful creations. What an expression of freedom. I love to watch them run.”

Sharing the ranch looms large in Wadsworth and Smith's plans. “The ranch must have a purpose. As part of my refocusing, we are taking a year off to travel and think. We are going to Vietnam and Cambodia in March before boarding a four-masted, 360-foot schooner that will go from Thailand to Greece via the Suez Canal. We are also planning to spend two months in Malibu and two months in Jamestown, RI, where I grew up. In between, we will be here at the ranch. I am committed to The University of Texas Autistic Program and am looking into ways to use the ranch to help autistic children. We are also thinking of using the arena area as an event center to bring in local musicians and artists, particularly to preserve the cowboy poetry and music. Of course, we will always have the rescue horses and training.”

Lest you think the arts dynamo has left the art scene behind, stay tuned. “I will always be involved in the arts. That's a given. It's in my blood. I am blinded when I see new talent and I will always work to make good art available to as many people as possible. I have been approached by so many people who want me to get involved in their causes and organizations that Chris in his wisdom has arranged for me to be so busy traveling that I will have a year to think, refocus and decide what I really want to do.”

As Wadsworth watches the sunset just beyond the guest house, it is obvious that the Rock C Ranch is one place where she feels relaxed and at peace...even while her mind churns with new possibilities. Smith returns from the ranch chores he enjoys and they plan dinner with a visiting composer. How they ended up in Rosanky, TX doesn't seem to matter...the Rock C Ranch is definitely home. ★

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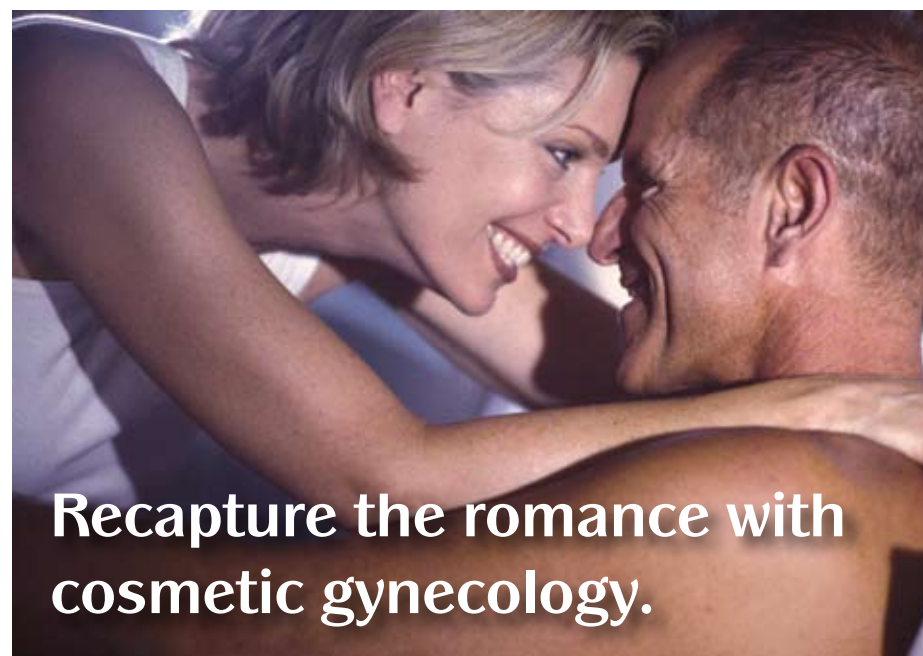
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