

## Pop-Up Tents No S'more: Glamping Is the New Backyard Camping

*Homeowners are putting up tricked-out tents on their properties to help them unplug or to use as glorified guesthouses*

By [Amy Gamerman](#)



*Alanna Hale for The Wall Street Journal*

The Hemingway, one of two luxury tents on the 80-acre Durham Ranch of Ken Fulk and husband Kurt Wootton in Napa, Calif., features a queen-size Ralph Lauren bed.

When designer Ken Fulk wants to get away from it all, he doesn't have to go far. He heads for a canvas platform tent set on a hillside at his Durham Ranch in Napa, Calif., outfitted with the bare essentials: queen-size bed with zebra-pattern throw pillows, antique leather stools and a whiskey bar.

"It's my version of camping—it's the most special spot to sneak away to, whether it's for a nap or a cocktail or a bonfire," Mr. Fulk said of the 12-by-14-foot tent he calls "the Hemingway" for its macho décor.

When he is more in the mood for "granny chic," he stays at a second tent just a few feet away that is furnished with colorful lanterns, old steamer trunks and a painted metal bed piled with Ralph Lauren lace-trimmed bedding.

Glamping—communing with nature while luxuriating in a tent loaded with creature comforts—was once the pastime of kings and sultans. Now some homeowners are acquiring costly tricked-up tents so they can get away from it all without leaving their own property—or their high-thread-count sheets.

"Glamping is very much about an elevated experience—not a sleeping bag, but real beds and plush bed linens, with patio chairs to sit out on your porch and look at the stars and

enjoy a glass of wine,” said Sarah Dusek, co-founder of the American Glamping Association, a trade group formed last year, and co-founder and CEO of Under Canvas, a consortium of tented resorts at eight national parks that feature wood-burning stoves, king-size beds and en-suite bathrooms with organic toiletries.



*Alanna Hale for The Wall Street Journal*

Ken Fulk, left, and his husband, Kurt Wootton, spent some \$30,000 on each of the two tents.



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Good wine...some high-quality chocolate, are always on hand, said Mr. Fulk.

Ms. Dusek said that demand for upscale tent accommodations has grown exponentially in recent years. Glamping Hub, an Airbnb-style vacation-stay website established in 2014, now has more than 21,000 member-hosts in the U.S., offering overnight stays in everything from safari tents to yurts to converted grain silos.

“We’ve always done glamping, but the word didn’t exist; in the last five years we’ve seen the largest growth,” said Ivy Fife, marketing manager for the Colorado Yurt Co., which sells custom yurts and tents to campgrounds, resorts and private clients.

“Glamping” first appeared in the Oxford English Dictionary in 2016, but the activity itself dates back centuries. In 1520, King Henry VIII and France’s King Francis I camped out with their retinues in tents woven with silk and gold thread during a two-week jousting tournament known as the Field of the Cloth of Gold. Sultans in the Ottoman Empire used richly embroidered tents for ceremonies and excursions, as well as during military campaigns.

Mr. Fulk and his husband, Kurt Wootton, a musician, both 53, also have homes in San Francisco, New York City and Provincetown, Mass. They put up the two tents after acquiring the 80-acre Napa property in 2005, initially staying in them while they remodeled their circa-1940s house. Since then, they also have built a steel-framed party barn and a rustic dune shack modeled after the artist studios once found in Provincetown.



*Jimena Peck for The Wall Street Journal*

Jane Maren, 8 years old, peeks out of her family’s 16-foot yurt in Evergreen, Colo.

Manufactured by Sweetwater Bungalows, a California-based company, the wood-frame tents are simple but built to withstand the elements. Vinyl fabric walls and a canvas ceiling allow light and sound to filter through, while wooden doors and framed glass windows create a sense of solidity. A rain cover—called a fly—protects the tent from debris and moisture.

“You don’t feel like you’re in a ‘Brady Bunch’ tent that is going to collapse—it’s more ‘Out of Africa,’” Mr. Fulk said. The tent cabins come in four basic models and three sizes, with prices ranging from \$4,900 to \$10,250. The largest model, at 14-by-20 feet, can be divided into two rooms.

“The majority of our customers are people with second properties who use our tents as an extra guest room or an office or art studio, or as a chill space,” said Blair Paterson, the company’s founder.

Unlike bricks-and-mortar guesthouses and studios, tents tend to be classed as temporary structures—a plus when dealing with local zoning issues. Although regulations vary with each municipality, tents that average 200 square feet or less generally don’t require building permits.



*Jimena Peck for The Wall Street Journal*

Dave Maren cooks dinner on the campsite, which cost more than \$46,000 to develop.



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A smoked-salmon dinner prepared in the \$1,250 Pyro Tower outdoor fireplace, which also serves as a grill and pizza oven.

Mr. Fulk spent about \$30,000 on each of his tents—including building an elevated deck and porch, and furnishings. “I probably spent more on bedding than I did on the tent,” he said.

The campsite has a fire pit, a grill and an outdoor shower; a chemical toilet is hidden in the woods, but there is no electricity or internet connection. Although it is a short walk up a hill from his house, Mr. Fulk prefers to load up his 1965 Land Rover Defender with provisions—“good wine...some high-quality chocolate”—for trips to the campsite.

“It’s like a mini-vacation within a vacation,” Mr. Fulk said. “The most amazing thing about those tents is we put them up 15 years ago, and we literally have done nothing to them other than sweep them. Somehow, through the wind and rain they survive.”

For those who want to glamp year-round in severe climates, yurts—sturdy, dome-shaped tents that originated in Central Asia—may be a better option.

“Yurts are a lot easier to heat and cool,” said Ms. Fife of the Colorado Yurt Co. With added structural supports such as studs and heavier rafters, the yurts also can withstand high winds and snow loads. The company’s custom-made yurts, which range from 16 to 30 feet in diameter, are priced from \$9,000 to \$20,000.

David Maren, senior vice president at Spire Digital, a custom software-development firm based in Denver, bought a 16-foot yurt for just under \$11,000 in 2018 from the Colorado Yurt Co. for his home in Evergreen, Colo. He easily secured a permit for an accessory structure.



*Jimena Peck for The Wall Street Journal*

Jane and Shepherd Maren, age 12, reading in the yurt. The family can take ziplines from their home’s deck to the yurt.



The yurt is set on an elevated platform that is wedged in a stand of pine trees. Elk, black bears and other wildlife frequently pass by.

“I started imagining what it would be like to have family sleepovers in the yurt and hear the elk bugling and the mountain lions,” said Mr. Moran, who is 46 and the father of two young children.

Along with large windows, french doors and a tinted dome skylight, the insulated yurt has structural reinforcements that enable it to withstand 5 feet of snow on its roof.



*Jimena Peck for The Wall Street Journal*

The Marena family try to spend at least one night a week in the yurt. They put Exped MegaMat Duo sleeping pads in front of the \$4,000 Jotul gas stove.

A Norwegian Jotul natural-gas stove, which operates on a thermostat, keeps it snug, and a pair of 85-foot ziplines that run between the yurt and the deck of the Marena family's house make it accessible even in heavy snow. The total cost of the outdoor retreat—including a 500-gallon hot tub and a Pyro Tower oven for smoking salmon and baking pizzas—was more than \$46,000, Mr. Maren said.

“We set the goal of spending one night of every week in the yurt as a family—to get away from screen time,” Mr. Maren said.

The yurt, however, does have electricity, a cable-TV hookup and high-speed internet. Mr. Maren sometimes uses it as a home office.

“We just closed a \$5 million deal from the yurt,” he said.

***Tents You Can Glamp In***

THE

HEMINGWAY

**\$30,000**