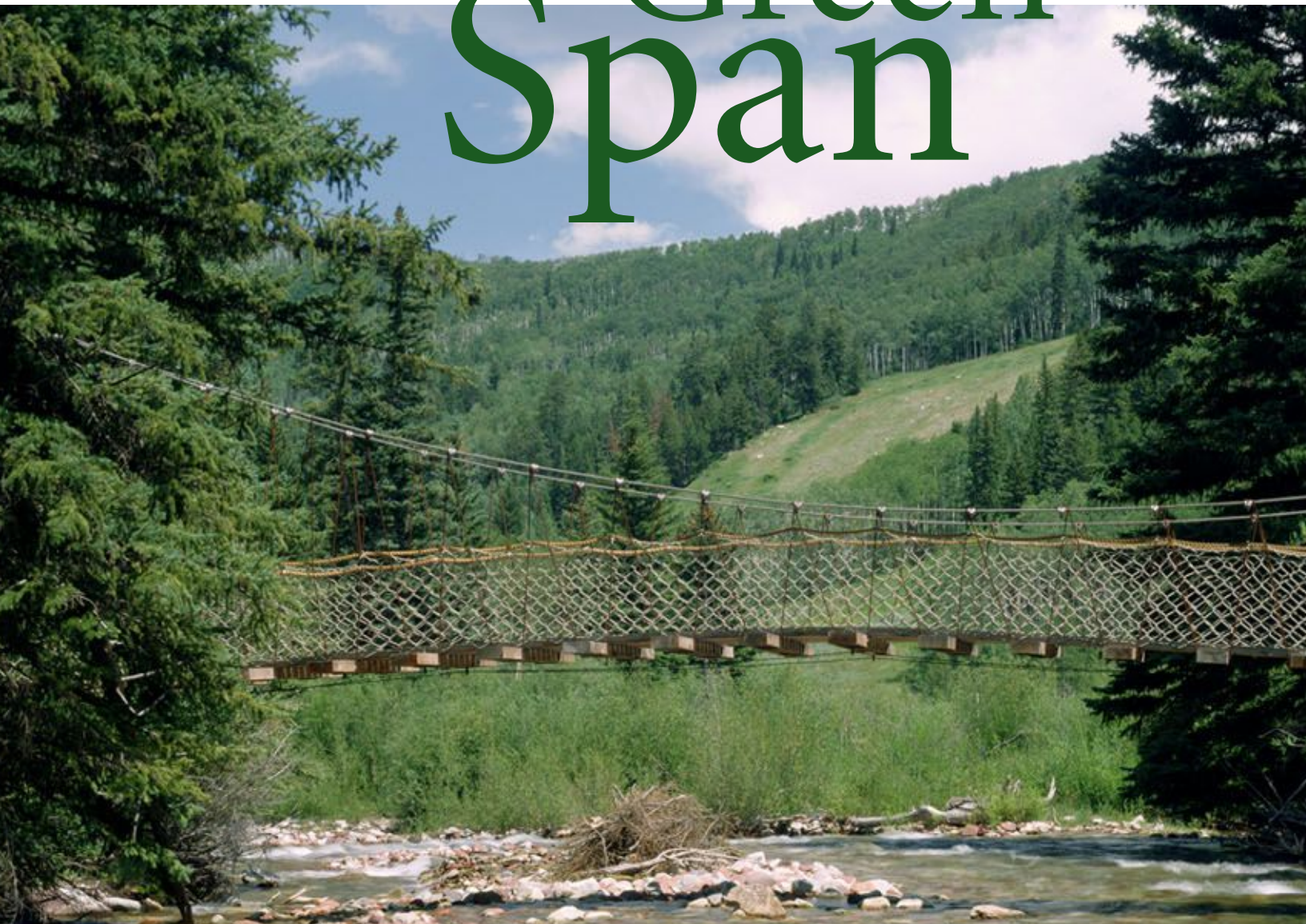


Green Span



A hand-hewn bridge
on a couple's Aspen
property fills a gap

By Jorge S. Arango

YOU DON'T HAVE TO BE EMERSON OR THOREAU to recognize the therapeutic benefits of a walk in the woods. For the owner of this vast and unspoiled acreage near Aspen, woodland strolls are life-sustaining respites from a hectic career. But because a 60-foot-wide creek runs through the property, he and his wife used to have to double back, crossing further upstream to access meadows and majestic pine stands. They needed a bridge that would enable a continuous, contemplative amble.

Yet it could not be just any bridge. "They said it should not look like an architect had designed it," recalls Huddleson, the San Francisco-based architect who, in fact, designed it for them. "It was supposed to look like a creative solution built by a rancher to get across his property." Another request: "It had to bounce and swing."

Huddleson had never built a bridge before, so he researched Asian suspension bridges and rustic crossings from the early days of the West. In the end, he devised what he describes as a "shoelace" concept. Cables were suspended from two enormous Douglas fir lodgepole towers on either bank. To secure the railroad ties that made up the bridge footing, he explains,



“a cable went down around each tie, then hooked over a fixed pint on a rope, then down to the next tie,” much like lacing up a shoe.

“The challenge and the art of it was to make it look as unimposing on the landscape as possible,” Huddleson continues. To that end, the wood parts were handmade in a log crafter’s yard and stained to a convincingly weathered finish that matched the surrounding trees. Huddleson looked into tennis netting for the side rails, but decided instead to commission a more rough-hewn knotted net that was lashed by hand to the suspension cables.



The work was phased in a natural way, as well. The bridge was designed in the summer and its cable anchors—16-by-8-by-8-foot subterranean reinforced-concrete blocks—were poured in autumn, when the creek’s water level was lowest. Construction took place in winter, when workers could walk back and forth across

the frozen creek bed. Because there was no road nearby, Huddleson had to rent a crane with an approximately 200-foot boom to lower the two towers into place. The owners took their first walk across the bridge that following spring.

It has proved resilient. At a party on the property one night, Huddleson watched apprehensively as 25 people jumped up and down on the bridge. It dipped and swung obligingly, but not dramatically. And cables were tightened after a tree fell on it once, but it has stayed solidly put. The bridge was expensive, concedes Huddleson. But, he reasons: “It was less than the cost of a similar bridge in the area that was made from a kit and looks manufactured.”

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