

ADVENT

Home of

by David Cabela,

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A large, detailed taxidermy display of various animals, including antelope, birds, and a mammoth, set in a naturalistic environment with trees and a pond. The scene is illuminated with warm, golden light, creating a dramatic and lifelike atmosphere. The animals are arranged in a way that suggests a natural habitat, with some standing near a body of water and others on a rocky outcrop. The background features large, leafy trees and a thatched roof structure, adding to the sense of a wild, natural setting.

Dick and Mary Cabela's new home is a spectacular tribute to wildlife and hunting around the world.

A Cape buffalo with surreal drooping horns greets you with an arrogant stare. Behind it, an elephant lifts its tusks as it makes its way around a hollowed out baobab tree. A lion roars somewhere in the distance as hyenas fight with yips and laughs over a kori bustard. In the trees, lilac-breasted rollers and gray louries try to outcall one another. A sacred ibis soars toward its perch on an exposed branch. Then thunder rolls in the distance and an eerie silence gives you pause. You take a step toward the buffalo to get a better look at its long sweeping horns that give it a look of a new species. A flash of lightning and a deafening crash of thunder gives your heart a skip and for a moment you forget you're inside.

Welcome to Dick and Mary Cabela's new home.

Memories. We all come back to them in different ways. Often we try to preserve them. We take photographs. We write in journals. We videotape. We share stories most relevant to the moment. And those of us who call ourselves hunters sometimes try to capture our experiences through the preservation of hides and antlers.

A mule deer shoulder mount may remind you of a week spent hiking Montana's foothills with your brothers. A glance to your full mount turkey and you can almost hear a distant gobble. And if you are lucky enough, a bear may lurk in a corner of your room to bring back the false silence of the shadow that walked into a creek ten steps from where you sat waiting.

Most big game hunters have an image of their dream trophy room – Dick and Mary Cabela did. They envisioned a room that was more than walls lined with heads, horns and a few life-sized beasts sprinkled along the edges. They wanted to capture their experiences, to bring their memories back to life.

How?

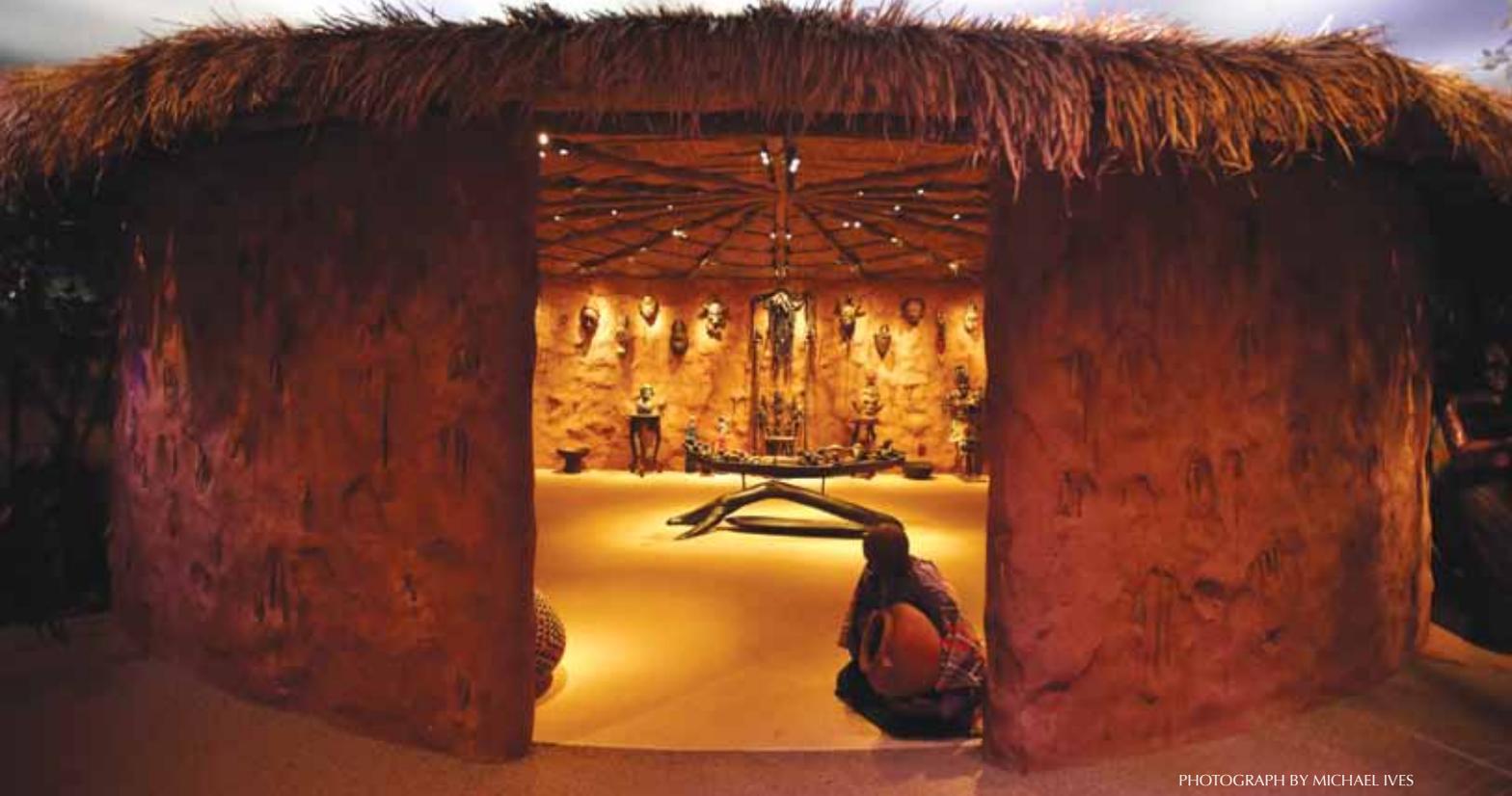
They had to find a way to bring the outdoors inside. They did that to an extent within Cabela's retail stores. But they wanted to take it further. They had visited some of the world's finest wildlife museums and though impressive, none of them captured the essence of the animals or the habitat or the mystery of what draws people to the outdoors. Those things may be impossible to replicate inside – but most museums do not even try. Dick and Mary were determined to give it their best shot. Not only to preserve their memories in the most realistic possible way, but also to share their experiences and stories.

"We have been very fortunate in our lives," Mary said. "We are lucky enough to live in a country that still champions freedom and rewards calculated risks, hard work and patience.

"We combined our passions and our career, focusing on the business for most of our lives. And then we began to follow the dreams of adventure that steer the heart of most hunters. We saw amazing places. We met extraordinary individuals. We stalked creatures we didn't even know existed when we started Cabela's. And some day, when God decides our time on earth is done, our home will become a museum. It is my hope that it will give others a small taste of the adventures that await them if they are willing to pursue their dreams."

To complete the vision in their minds, they had to find the right team – from the general contractor, to the taxidermists, to sound and lighting, to the habitat developers, to artists, even to a music composer. In the best of circumstances, that's a tall task. In Sidney, Nebraska, a town with a population of 6,000, it felt impossible. Fortunately, their business and personal lives had introduced them to





PHOTOGRAPH BY MICHAEL IVES

The Art Hut displays original carvings and other African crafts. Below: The Cabelas collected a wide variety of birds, which appear to be flying freely throughout the trophy room. Opposite: Pronghorn mounts and a large mural form the centerpiece of the Brushland Desert exhibit.



world-class talent. To begin, they hired John Wieser, a local contractor, who they knew they could trust.

“We drew up the initial contract on a hand-written eight-by-ten sheet of paper,” Wieser said. “I gave my presentation, wrote down a few details and Dick said, ‘That sounds good to me,’ and we signed it then and there. He put great trust in me. You don’t find that kind of faith too much anymore. We eventually wrote another contract, but we built the house spelled out on that first sheet of paper.”

You hear an elk bugle, its raspy scream rising from somewhere deep within its belly. You want to check it out, but you’re not sure exactly where North America is. You’re in South Africa – Kruger National Park, according to the hand-held touch panel you’ve been given – staring up at three leopards climbing

from one branch to another in a tree with buffalo weaver nests hanging like Christmas bulbs. You tap your finger on an image of the baobab and the animals represented there appear on the screen – leopard, Abyssinian roller, buffalo weaver.

You click on the leopard and hear a growl. You skim over a description of the big cat. Then you tap on a button that says PLAY VIDEO. Footage of a leopard calling from the crook of a tree gives way to a personal commentary from Dick and Mary on how leopard hunting requires strategy and time. A few yards ahead on the pebble path a bloody scene of vultures descending upon and feeding on the fresh carcass of a zebra demands a closer look.

The Cabelas interviewed a slew of taxidermists knowing a single company – even one of the premier outfits like Woodbury Taxidermy out of Texas – could not handle the entire project alone. So, with Jimmy Dieringer of Woodbury leading the team, they filtered through the most talented artists in the taxidermy field. The project included four mountains, authentic trees, more than 500 animals and 300 birds, waterfalls, a swimming pool/lagoon, a changing sky full of stars at night and billowing white clouds during the day. It included grass and tracks and lifelike scenes recreated from events Dick and Mary experienced in the field. Jimmy was up to the task. In fact, he was inspired by it.

“In thirty-five years of taxidermy this has been the project – a true monarch,” Dieringer said. “Dick and Mary’s memories of each hunt were unbelievable, and our discussions with them gave us ideas on how to approach each animal as well as the entire project. We tried to fulfill their requests and they gave us the freedom to create.

To take an animal and put it in its natural habitat instead of just a base was rewarding,” he added. “You can call it a trophy

room or a museum, but there is nothing really like it. It's one of a kind. Nothing is behind glass. You are *inside* the displays. There's a lot of freedom in that room. And leaving this for the future, for education, is inspiring. As the years go by, this collection will not be sold off or handed down to children, it will be preserved for the enjoyment and education of generations to come."

To your left a big croc clamps down on a wildebeest as the rest of the herd leaps over a river and beyond that the shadows grow deeper, mysterious. Off to your right lies North America. Past the pronghorns and the coyotes and the rattlesnakes of Brushland Desert, past the whitetails and the elk of Wapiti Pass, past the turkeys and the mountain lion pouncing on a mule deer in Pine Ridge, you see the snow-covered Arctic Tundra where wind blows by two brown bears fishing for salmon in a stream you can actually hear trickling.

In the corner you think you see wolves and caribou. Which way to go? You decide to go right, save the darkness for later. Before you reach the bears, a rocky cave causes you to detour. And true to its name, inside Mammoth Cave you find an authentic mammoth skull complete with the kind of ten-foot arching tusks that can only be found in ancient fossil beds. You study the hieroglyphics for a moment until a wolf howling from outside the cave reminds you there is more to see.

Dick and Mary wanted the room to be full without feeling crowded. By using the right trees and brush and termite mounds and wallows, enough could be hidden that after a dozen walk-throughs a perceptive visitor might still discover something new – just as you might when walking through a real forest. One of the most effective ways these secrets reveal themselves is in the trees – namely birds and cats.

Knowing a true outdoor experience indoors would not be complete without the myriad birds that hunters encounter, Dick and Mary took a few safaris specifically for avian wildlife. To ensure these birds were taken care of properly, they brought along Stefan Savides, one of the most talented bird taxidermists in the world.

"Dick and Mary knew how much birds meant to the hunting experience and it shows in their home," Savides said. "I have not been part of a trophy room production that has that many or such a variety of birds. We created the environment first and then turned the animals loose to let them wander and go where they wanted to go. The birds had to look like they were not just trapped in a display, but that they were loose in the house.

"Dick and Mary gave me total freedom," he noted. "They said they wanted a zebra kill with vultures and explained one of their memories of the moment and then refused to tie my hands beyond that. That kind of liberty allowed the rest of us to do what we know how to do."

After a pause Savides added a more personal note on the people behind the room. "One of the great things about them is that they did not come from lots of money and they have not forgotten that. When you see their trophy room, you will see they have collected a lot in their life. But their most impressive collection is their collection of friends. It is a collection that does not draw any lines anywhere. Their friends are from all walks of life. And I am honored to be in that collection."

As you once again slip by the squabbling vultures on your way to Cameroon, you glance up Kopje Mountain and see a beautiful mountain nyala. With its bulging neck muscles and regal spiral horns, the majestic antelope stands with its chest out as if the mountain, the entire country, answers to him. A few steps more and the world's largest antelope, the Lord Derby eland munches on the flowers of a gardenia bush. On the left side of the path a giant forest hog and a red river hog skirt through a line of green brush.

Adorned with various sculptures and real elephant tusks, the library is lined with cabinets handcrafted from African sapele wood by Julian & Sons.





A wooden bridge leads toward the mountain and the lagoon-like swimming pool. But before you cross, you are compelled to inspect a hidden rainforest covered in shadows and trees and shrubs. You lean in, squint your eyes, and take a peek. Is that a bongo? It is. You inch closer. A red-flanked duiker. A giant forest hog. Another bongo. A colobus monkey staring down at you from the branches overhead.

You realize then how much you must have missed during your first hour and glance at your watch wondering how much time it will take to discover all the room's secrets. The panel shows you still have to visit Kopje Mountain, Hippo Island, Panthera, Asia/South Pacific, Sheep Mountain, the Art Hut and the Lion Bar. You tap the Okavango Delta and see something titled Sinkhole. There is a glass elevator there and it seems to descend into an underwater pit full of giant crocodiles. You have to take at least one ride.

With the building, the mountains, the trees, the habitat, the animals, the birds, the murals, the scat, the southern constellations, the caves and the waterfalls in place, it was time to add the finishing touches – the final dash of magic that would allow the room to breathe with life. Dick and Mary were not sure how to do that. They knew they needed the right sounds in the right places at the right times. They knew they needed it to coincide with sunrises and sunsets and the sounds you would hear in each region during specific times of day.

Their son, Dan Cabela, founder of Music Lab out of Austin Texas, told them his company could do something that had never been done before, something that would take their vision and allow them to experience it outside

their minds. He knew them. He knew what they loved about the outdoors. He knew the animals. He had been to many of the same places. His intimate knowledge of what they wanted and his capability to follow through on his promises made him a perfect fit for the job.

“From a creative perspective, I could not have asked for a more satisfying project,” Dan said. “Dick and Mary had a grand vision that we tried to capture. But their vision was not roped in by too tight of a structure. It had wide parameters – it developed and matured as we went along.

“Dick and Mary understood that if they hired talented people and gave them the freedom to combine their own ideas into the overall theme, then the end result would surpass their expectations. They had used that philosophy to build Cabela’s, and it worked just as well on their trophy room. They allowed this room to take on a life of its own and that is the true beauty of it. It was inspired by places that defy the imagination and demand exploration.”

You end up somewhere near where you started. You know, because you can see the elephant and the rhino, but you are not quite sure if they're the same elephant and rhino you walked by in Kruger at the beginning of your tour. You are at the Lion Bar where a projector screen in sync with strategically placed, flat-panel televisions throughout the room show nature videos and slides of animals, landscapes, camps and trophies. A big male lion is licking a spilled drink from the glass-topped bar. Under the glass are old passports, hunting permits, coins from around the world and letters from professional hunters.

You think about the stories that must have been told from





PHOTOGRAPH BY MICHAEL IVES

The 15,000-foot trophy room includes many of Africa's largest game animals, some caught up in their daily life-and-death struggles to survive. Opposite: In the Lion Bar, a big male lion licks a spilled drink from the glass-topped bar.



those barstools. The people who sat there and raised their glasses to the tales they once shared around campfires – you hear their imagined voices as they point to a nearby hippo and tell of the time an aggressive bull tried to tip the small mokoro they rode in. And something about it makes you want to tell your own stories, to add the time a bull elk almost ran you over.

You also cannot help but wonder if you may someday encounter a lion on the plains of Tanzania or an argali high in the Altai Mountains of Mongolia or a brown bear on Alaska's coastal islands. You almost stare past the massive room as the sun sets over Kojje Mountain and the chattering

sounds of the day subdue themselves into something more mysterious. You know an adventure is out there waiting and you know you will do what it takes to seek it out.

Once, at the end of a day when the light filtered on an animal just right, Dick Cabela stopped and reflected upon the things he has seen. "Your memories sometimes conceal themselves in the shadows of your thoughts. But if you pause long enough, the right sound or sight rekindles the memories of a moment we promised we'd never forget." 🐾

THROUGHOUT THE HOME

The trophy room encompasses 15,000 square feet of the 42,000-square-foot Cabela home. Each of the other rooms is designed to fit into the overall theme. The bedrooms, for example, have names like The African Mask Room, The Roman Room and The Egyptian Room.

For those rooms calling for extensive woodworking, including the kitchen, library, office and the antique firearms room, the Cabelas hired the master craftsmen at Julian and Sons. In the gun room, flintlock rifles from the 18th century, Gatling guns and one-of-a-kind pistols are showcased within beautiful cabinets handcrafted from African sapele wood.

The rest of the home breathes through indigenous artwork, as well as paintings and sculptures by such world-class artists as John Banovich, Guy Coheleach and Doug Van Howd.

The Cabela home is more than a trophy room, even more than a house. It is a dedication to the outdoor traditions we hope to pass down to future generations.