



Clockwise from left: Looking north at Bridger Bowl ski area; Italian-style fare at Emerson Grill; Bozeman Community Food Co-op.



Destinations //

Majka Burhardt in Bozeman



Majka Burhardt is an author, professional climber and filmmaker whose international ventures focus on issues of cultural and global significance.

I'm a professional rock climber and ice climber, but the reason I've tried to live in Bozeman (twice) has to do with the skiing. Montana is one of my favorite winter playgrounds, and when I'm not going vertical on frozen waterfalls, I head to **Bridger Bowl** for dreamy downhill skiing. I start my ski days with a homemade egg-bacon-and-cheese biscuit from the **Bozeman Community Food Co-op**. By 7:45, I've consumed my sandwich and checked the day's local snow and avalanche conditions (mtavalanche.com). Bridger's in-bound skiing is world-class, but what makes this area my favorite is its access to side-country skiing—uncontrolled high-altitude terrain that means serious potential for powder. Just make sure that you seriously know what you're getting into should you ski it.

No matter what terrain I'm in the mood to ski, I can find it at Bridger. Last December, I ripped up every green slope I could find with my niece and nephew (they're 8 and 6, respectively), and the February before, I spent a whole day in the sidecountry, dropping off the ridge to Saddle Peak and riding back up the Schlasman's lift. Bridger is one of the only community-owned and community-run non-profit ski areas in the United States, which means



Get there via Bozeman Yellowstone International Airport (BZN)



that visitors get to be part of that community. Those who work and ski at this laid-back area personify this grassroots ethos. From the moment you arrive at the parking lot and see the wide trucks, wider smiles and even wider skis, there's no mistaking that you're in Montana. The terrain is big (2,600 feet of elevation and 75 runs), the crowds are manageable and the snow is some of the finest in the Rockies.

By the end of any ski day, I'm ready to head to Bozeman's **Blackbird Kitchen** for the best of the Big Sky on a small plate. The food is simple, elegant and showcases Bozeman's commitment to honoring good eating and good living. At **The Emerson Grill**, another top eatery, you can peruse the work of local artists who exhibit and work in the renovated school rooms of the community center that houses the restaurant.

I've yet to pull off living in Bozeman, but I have close to the next best thing—my mother lives just down the road. //

PHOTOS: BEN PIERCE (EMERSON GRILL); BOZEMAN COMMUNITY FOOD CO-OP; COURTESY BRIDGER BOWL (TOP LEFT); ANNE SKIDMORE (BURHARDT); JOHN STERLING RUTH (DOTTHE I)

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