

PLAN YOUR TRIP

- Fly to Montrose, Colorado, then rent a car to drive to Telluride or Moab.
- Visit these useful websites: National Park Service, nps.gov; Telluride, visittelluride.com.

WHERE TO STAY

- Holiday Inn Express (Moab)—one of the closest hotels to the park's entrance.
- Camel's Garden Hotel (Telluride)—an upscale hotel, steps from the gondola.

WHERE TO EAT

- In Moab: The Jailhouse Café, the Broken Oar, Moab Brewery, Sunset Grill.
- In Telluride: Allred's Restaurant, The Chophouse at the New Sheridan, The Butcher & The Baker Cafe.

not a luxury but a necessity of the human spirit."

We had arrived in Moab the previous afternoon and planned to spend several days in the area before ending our eight-day Western road trip in cooler Telluride, Colorado, just two hours away in the San Juan Mountains.

In the mid-1950s, when Arches was just a national monument, it was a dusty backwater. Back then Abbey could plausibly claim to be, as he did in his classic book, *Desert Solitaire*, the "sole inhabitant, observer

1. Mesa Arch, Canyonlands National Park.

2. The Organ, Arches National Park.

3. Vista along Utah's Route 128, near Moab.

4. Historic District, Telluride.

and custodian." Barely 25,000 visitors a year made it here.

In 1971, the monument officially became a national park. Its infrastructure and roads were improved over the years. And Abbey's book inspired hordes to



CANYON COUNTRY

A SOUTHWESTERN ROAD TRIP OFFERS INSPIRATION—AND ADVENTURE

STORY AND PHOTOGRAPHY BY MARY AND CHARLES LOVE

It's dawn. We're driving slowly through Arches National Park just outside Moab, Utah. Hardly another car is in sight. Billowy lavender clouds drift overhead and turn incandescent as the sun rises.

To the west, enormous sandstone towers and pinnacles loom in the semi-darkness, their colors shifting by the minute from purple to rose—then fiery red.

To the east, silhouetted by

the rising sun, stone formations assume strange shapes—gnarly heads, hunched shoulders, twisted bodies. Sculpted over eons by wind, rain and incomprehensible geological forces, these megaliths resem-

ble extraterrestrial creatures. In this desert, the beauty is sublime, the silence absolute—and calming. Words of the late Edward Abbey, a park ranger and writer who once lived here, come to mind: "Wilderness is



visit. Today, nearly two million visitors arrive every year. Understandably, Abbey considered his book a curse as he watched his cherished solitude disappear. As he once wrote, “We need the possibility of escape as much as we need hope.” Keeping Arches wild was, for him, a matter of our “collective sanity.”

Fortunately, the dramatic natural beauty has survived. And if you visit in early morning (ideally just before dawn) and late afternoon (around sunset) when the light is best, you’ll

avoid crowds and experience the solitude and grandeur of the landscapes as Abbey once did.

Canyon Country Highlights

But the monuments are stunning no matter what time of day you view them. An excellent place to start is just inside the entrance at the site called Park Avenue. A short, easy stroll takes you to enormous sandstone towers that line both sides of a dry wash. A little farther down the road, you’ll pass two dramatic stone formations—The

Organ on the right and The Three Gossips on the left. The Gossips resemble three tall women in long skirts whispering a secret. Just over 8 miles from the entrance is the gravity-defying Balanced Rock. This boulder, more than 55 feet high, rests precariously on a 73-foot pedestal. It marks the area where park ranger Edward Abbey once lived in a small trailer.

Two miles beyond Balanced Rock is The Windows section of the park. A short walk will take you to two enormous sandstone

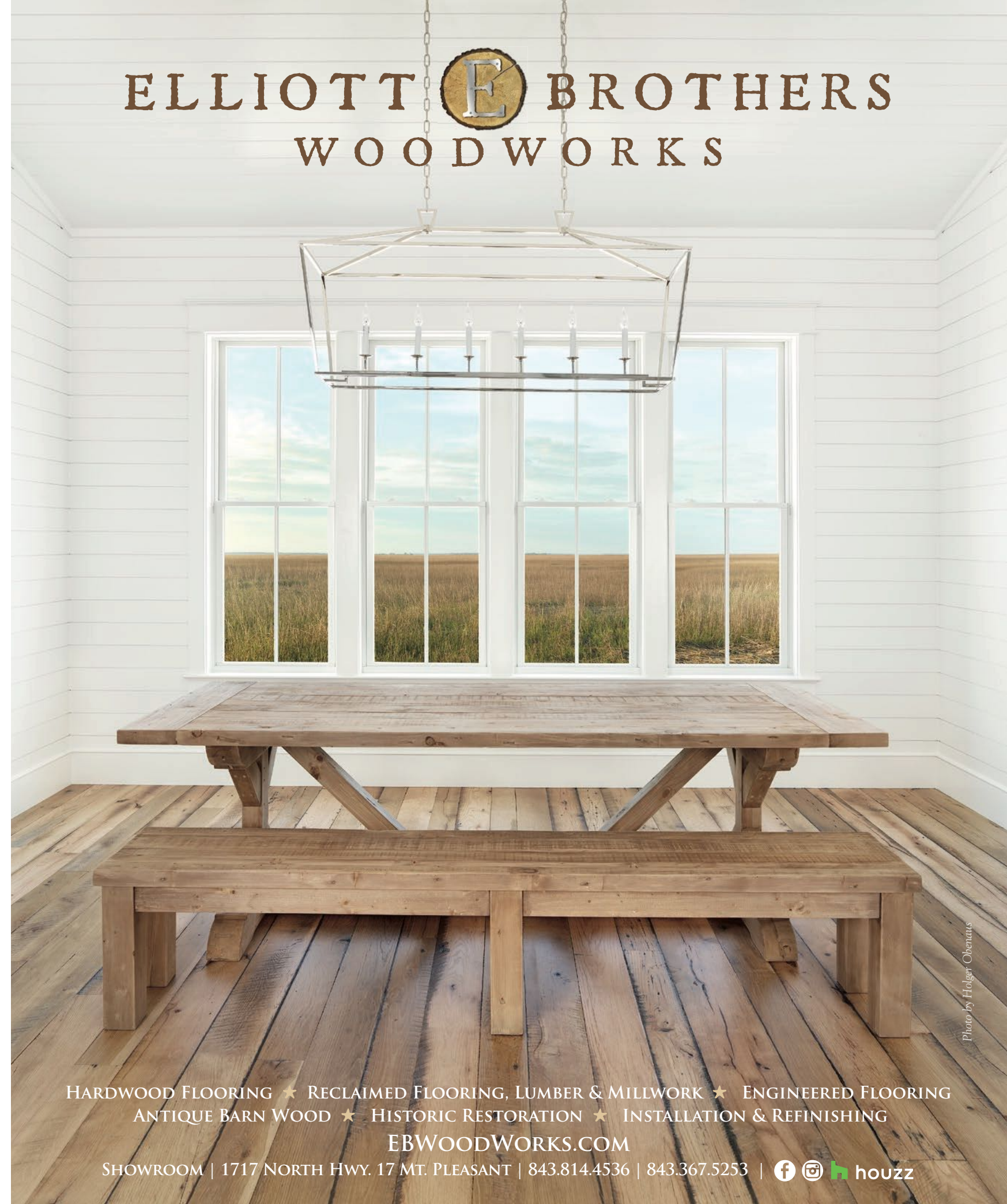
5. Double Arch, Arches National Park.

6. Blues guitarist Ally Venable performs in Telluride.

7. Concert crowd, Telluride’s Mountain Village.

openings (North and South Windows) as well as to Turret Arch, 64 feet high and 105 feet wide. Visitors arrive here just before dawn, climb up to the windows and watch the rising sun cast light on the arch. (Enterprising photographers scramble up a precarious incline to capture an iconic image: Turret Arch framed

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by the North Window.) Nearby is enormous, twisting Double Arch, a pair of adjacent arches best appreciated by walking under them and looking up. Unusual images can be captured from just about any angle.

Space doesn't allow us to describe all the sites in the park, but we'd be remiss not to mention Delicate Arch, a 60-foot-tall freestanding sandstone marvel. Called The Schoolmarm's Bloomers by local cowboys, it's the park's most widely recog-

nized landmark. If you're in good shape (it's a strenuous 3-mile hike, round trip), it's worth the effort.

Three other places are worth visiting before leaving the Moab area. Both Canyonlands National Park and the lesser known Dead Horse Point State Park feature Western panoramas as stunning and epic as Arizona's Grand Canyon. Additionally, the River Road (otherwise known as Route 128), just north of Moab, ranks among the most

scenic drives in America. The 40-mile route snakes through the Colorado River Gorge, with jaw-dropping vistas around every curve. This is Hollywood movie-making country, where director John Ford and actor John Wayne filmed many Westerns. (Don't miss the Moab Museum of Film & Western Heritage inside the Red Cliffs Lodge at mile 14.) When Wayne was asked why he made movies here, he replied, "Because this is where God put the West!"

8. Dead Horse Point State Park, Utah.

9. North Window, Arches National Park.

10. At the top of Imogene Pass, near Telluride.

On to Telluride

After several days in the canyons around Moab, we drove to Telluride to escape the desert heat. This former mining town, set in a box canyon, lies at the base of forested mountains

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Jenny and Jack, July 26,
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that tower over the main street. The historic district features 19th-century buildings and landmarks, including the still-in-use Sheridan Opera House and the must-visit Telluride Historical Museum, housed in what was once a miner's hospital that dates to 1896.

The town was a destination for hippies in the 1970s. Film stars and other celebrities followed, and the town has evolved over the years into an upscale ski and golf resort. There's so much happening here in summer, we wished we could have settled in for a couple of months to do it all: hiking, biking, white-water rafting, cultural events and festivals, and much more. Best of all, we found welcoming, unpretentious people and a laid-back, live-for-the-moment vibe—perhaps an attitudinal carryover from the hippie era.

Colorado Avenue, the town's main drag, lined with low-rise Victorian-era buildings, transported us to earlier times. It was easy to imagine scruffy miners, merchants sporting derbies and women in long skirts crisscrossing the street. A free gondola, only a few blocks from the center of town, took us up to Mountain Village (elevation 9,545 feet), a ski village built in the late '90s. Here are more restaurants, hotels and condominiums.

Our favorite experience was a guided half-day excursion to Imogene Pass—an extraordinarily scenic (albeit hair-raising) trip in a 4x4 with five other travelers. Ascending for 5 miles on a narrow, unpaved and very bumpy road with no guardrails, we passed Tomboy, an abandoned mining town from the 1890s that was once home to

some 1,000 residents. Just over 2 miles higher was the saddle of the pass, elevation 13,114 feet.

Dwarfed by the desolate panorama of undulating peaks and valleys, we felt we'd arrived on another planet. Sparse vegetation, brightened by wild-flowers, and isolated patches of snow covered the rocky terrain. The narrow stretches of road, bordered by 1,000-foot drop-offs, as well as the many hairpin curves, caused the more timid souls in our vehicle to whoop with alarm and excitement! All of us agreed, after arriving back in Telluride, it was an adventure we'd repeat.

From the arid deserts of Utah to Colorado's forested mountains, our Western drive had taken us to some of the most beautiful and fragile environments in America. It was a journey that inspired us to ponder where our next road trip might take us—and reminded us of the importance of preserving Nature's special places. ➤

TRAVEL TIPS

- Purchase an America the Beautiful annual pass (\$80) for access to all the national parks. With the pass, you can enter national parks free of charge for a year.
- Note that Arches National Park will likely transition, in 2019, to a reservation system for entry. Check on this when you plan your trip.
- Arrive at your destination in early morning or late afternoon when the light is best and crowds are not a problem.
- Pick up a free visitor's guide at the entrance to each park. The guide lists available activities in the park, from hikes to ranger programs, and the best time of day to photograph each monument.

The Loves are journalists based in the Southeast. Website: imagyn.com



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