



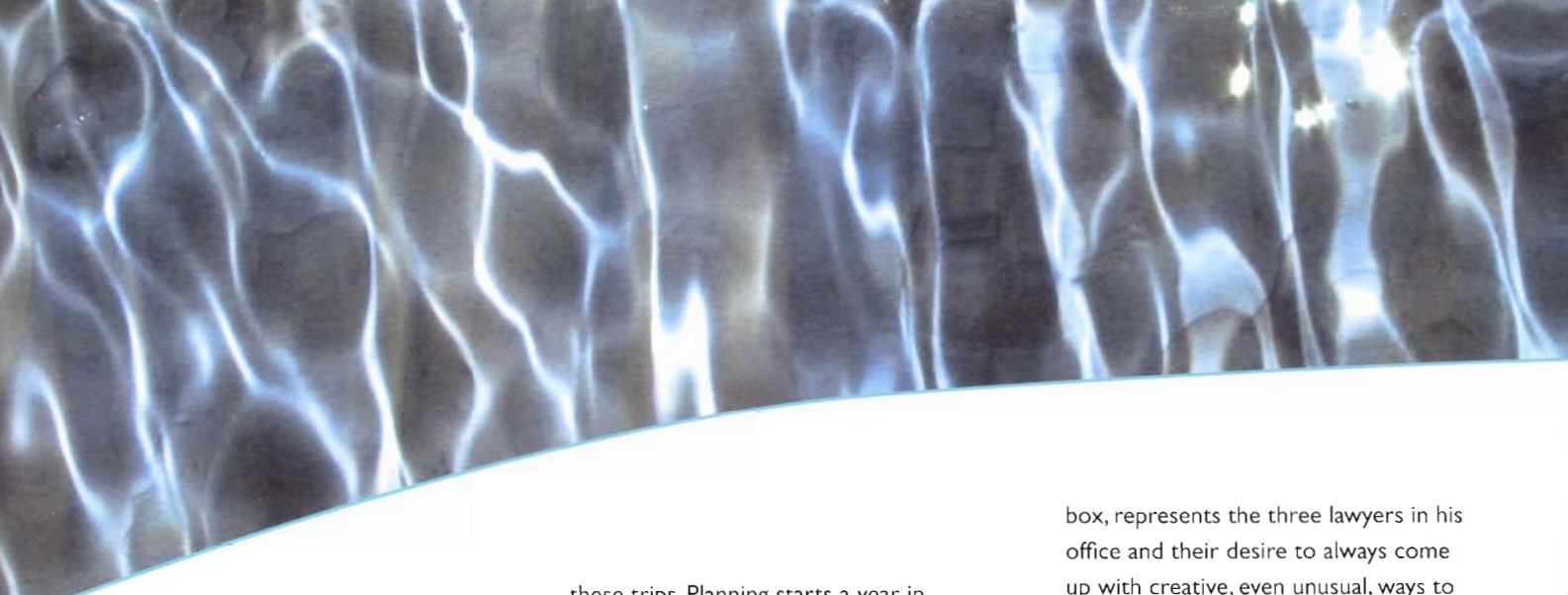
The Lure of the River

The Business of Trout

“Clients are friends I go fishing with.”

-Ron Clausen '71

They say Rock Creek is an angler's dream. One of many tributaries to the Clark Fork River in western Montana, its glacial waters tumble out of the Anaconda-Pintlar Wilderness, flow past rocky bluffs and lush-green valleys, then narrow through the steep, forested canyons of the Sapphire Mountain Range, until joining the confluence of the larger river 20 miles east of Missoula.



The water runs cold and clear, and the trout—rainbow, cutthroat, brown, and bull—are abundant. Boulders, log falls, sharp bends, and side channels provide pool character, while the fish feed on abundant hatches of salmonflies, golden stones, drakes, PMDs, caddis, and hoppers. Here, in “God’s backcountry,” as Ron Clausen calls it, both seasoned and novice anglers match wits with these wild and clever fish that wait for the insect hatch along the seams of the nearly continuous riffles.

A Day on the Water

Ron has a mountain retreat near Rock Creek, and every year since 2002, he and his wife, Kathy, have hosted fishing expeditions for his clients. These events are called Extravaganzas, and that is exactly what they have become. Originally, only a few clients were invited, then 27, 30, 40. This year, over 65 clients will fly into the Missoula Airport for the experience of a lifetime.

A client who attended last year says, “For us city dwellers, who have never set foot in a boat, let alone handled a fly rod, Ron has provided vast opportunities to explore new vistas and, certainly, to tap into an aspect of our personalities we might not have known existed.”

Ron takes great care in organizing

these trips. Planning starts a year in advance. With the skill of a master facilitator, he provides a structure, a purpose, and a process so that each individual within this large, diverse group will come away renewed and energized, which in turn, benefits the synergistic relationship he values with his clients.

He deals with all the little details, one of which is to book the river guides and drift boats. Grizzly Hackle is the outfit of choice, and Ron spends countless hours handcrafting each group so that clients are matched with others who may personally and even professionally open doors to new ways of seeing the world. The boats, when launched, fan out across three or four rivers in the area, oared by Grizzly Hackle’s famed water readers.

A newcomer introduced to the sport of fly fishing on a previous Extravaganza says, “I’ve seen fish rise, made countless bad casts and a couple of good ones, hooked a fish that had to be almost two-feet long, and enjoyed the rush of trying to land a mayfly in just the right place with just the right drift in an effort to fool one of those wily fish.” She now realizes that this is all part of Ron’s plan. “He envisioned me fly fishing before I could envision it myself.”

Working with the River

Ron’s law firm is the Clausen Law Group, based in Point Richmond, California. His business logo, a line drawing of three birds flying out of a

box, represents the three lawyers in his office and their desire to always come up with creative, even unusual, ways to craft good deals. The three birds also represent a trinity of sorts, in both a religious and nonreligious way. Ron says he lives by the Golden Rule. “We do unto our clients as we would have them do unto us,” he says. “We are very committed to supporting the people in our community.”

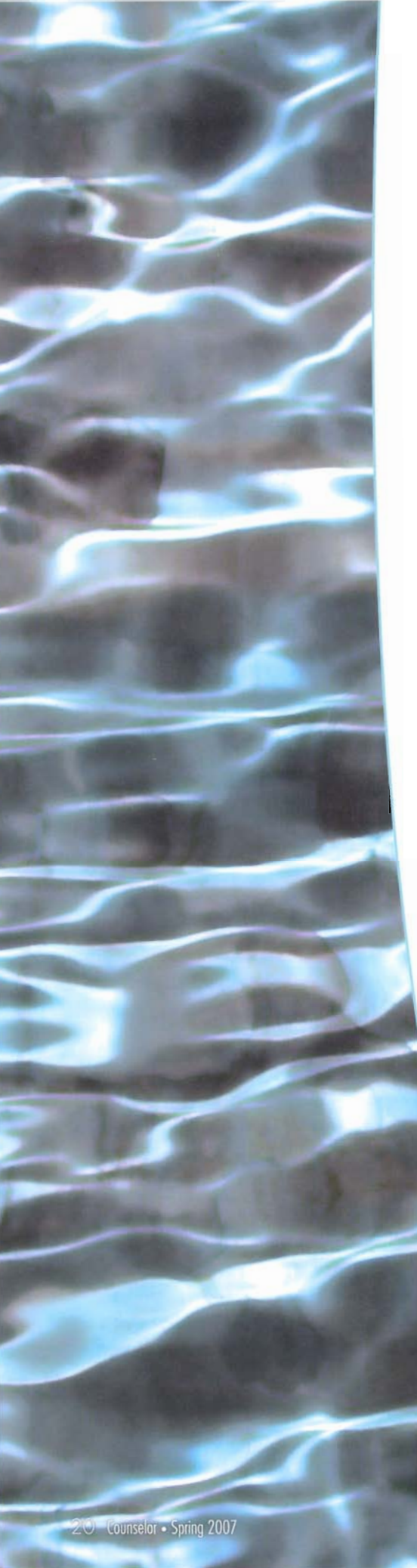
His practice focuses on corporate law, with an emphasis on emerging growth companies, venture capital financing, and mergers and acquisitions. He takes an entrepreneurial approach to the practice of law, always looking for creative solutions to maximize his clients’ business opportunities.

He is a deal maker in the world of high-stakes business. A client calls him a genuine, natural force of nature—“smart as a whip”—who has solved problems that seemed insolvable. “I met Ron, and he changed my life.”

Story after story testifies to this man’s keen business sense. CEOs of large, international companies, as well as family-owned boutique businesses have benefited from the “Clausen Way.”

He’s developed innovative strategies for acquisitions and buyouts that involve little up-front monies or huge taxable income called “The Popeye Plan.” He developed a key business strategy for a client, jotted down on a cocktail napkin, which resulted in a real estate deal that has appreciated in value more than five times without any down payment.

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Another client, previously a construction superintendent with very limited assets, now owns all the stock of three corporations that last year grossed over 10 million.

“Great deals for great people,” is Ron’s motto. And he truly enjoys making deals for his clients because he considers them friends—and they him.

“Ron doesn’t just make clients or business associations,” a client said. “He makes dear friends of just about everyone.”

So how does Ron manage to surround himself with grateful clients, wonderful friends, and a whirling dervish of positive feelings?

He releases 10 percent of his clients every year.

Ron says, if you’re a pain in the neck, demanding, decide not to pay, rude to his employees, or dishonest in any way, he’ll fire you. It doesn’t matter if you’re the head of a Fortune 500 company or even a relative. You’ll get a call from Ron.

And that’s not all. He cut his rates. In 2001, he was at a large law firm in a high-rise in the Bay Area collecting \$500 an hour and billing out well over a million dollars a year. He had too many demanding clients who were eating up his time. He knew that when a call came in from one of them, it would mean more money, more billable hours, but his life would be hell. Then 9/11 happened. “It was a watershed day,” he says. “The business world came to an abrupt halt and all the money changing stopped.” Business law firms raised fees on their struggling business clients to recoup losses. That was Ron’s epiphany.

He gave notice at the large law firm above the skyline in San Francisco. He sunk what money he had into a Rocky Mountain retreat in Montana and started his own law firm back in California with his remaining liquid assets. “It felt like I jumped off a cliff without a parachute,” he says.

Trout Rising

Today, Ron’s office is on the second floor of his family-owned office building that overlooks Brickyard Cove in Point Richmond. He charges \$324 an hour—prepaid or \$425—if you want to be billed.

Most, if not all, gladly prepay. Ron’s never been happier. Neither have his clients.

“I don’t like billable paperwork,” he says. He likens this innovative business law practice to filling up at the gas station. “You prepay for your gas or services, drive around a bit, refill, drive some more, but you never drive on empty,” he says. “It’s a win-win situation.” Not burdened by enormous overhead, he now has the time to focus on what he truly enjoys—looking for solutions to complex problems for his many friends.

His revolutionary billing process allows him more time in Montana. He has an office in his log-crafted home that is nestled in the fir trees on the banks of Rock Creek. When not on the water fishing, he spends mornings on the deck with his wife, Kathy, listening to the osprey call overhead and the creek wind. As the sun rises, the hazy sky turns luminous in Montana, and the scent of water rises with the air.

Friends say Ron has a heart as big and wide as all of Montana.

Ron just wants to share a secret: listen to the river, and you will learn all you need to know from the trout. ■