

MANSION

LISA CORSON FOR THE WALL STREET JOURNAL



IN THE WOODS This barn was converted into a one-bedroom lodge with high-end appliances and a helipad. Many of the property's other period details—gold mines, ore cars—remain untouched.

LIVING HISTORY

A REMOTE RANCH WITH A GOLDEN PAST

Deep in California's Sequoia National Forest, Lonesome Ranch is littered with evidence of its history as a gold-mining center.

BY LEIGH KAMPING-CARDER

When he found Lonesome Ranch, Simon T. felt he struck gold.

The roughly 190-acre property—in a remote stretch of the Sequoia National Forest about a three-hour drive from Los Angeles—was a thriving gold-mining center beginning in the 1870s. On the market for

\$2.5 million, the estate perched high among the trees includes seven cabins, half a dozen abandoned gold mines, a small cemetery and a dilapidated brothel. Ore cars, sluice boxes and piles of tailings litter the land.

Mr. T., 66, said his parents' last name was Tou-
Please turn to page M4

MANSION

A RANCH'S GOLDEN PAST

Continued from page M1

louis, but he began using the name "Simon T." as a disc jockey, and later legally changed it. A retired radio-station owner, he first encountered the property in 1980. He was in the market for a place where he could escape the gaudy entertainment industry.

An acquaintance told him about "Lonesome" Al Harris, a reclusive character who owned about 1,300 acres of land in the California mountains, and was making a living by selling off small parcels. Mr. T. visited him and found Lonesome Al to be a born salesman. "You'd want to buy property from him."

In 1981, Mr. T. paid \$60,000 for a cabin and 6-acre parcel near Lake Isabella, Calif. (population: 3,466 as of the 2010 U.S. Census). "That property was a grounding force in my life when I needed grounding," Mr. T. said.

Over the years, Lonesome Al became a father figure to Mr. T., who left home as a teenager. He got to know some of his few neighbors—rough, solitary people, some of them squatters, who lived off-the-grid in the Piute Mountains. Lonesome Al's Thanksgiving dinners often dissolved into fights. "Finally Lonesome and I made a rule—you had to check your guns and knives at the door," Mr. T. recalled.

Since then, he has purchased an additional 15 parcels of land for a total of \$500,000. He christened the property Lonesome Ranch in 1996, the year Lonesome Al died.

Mr. T., who now lives in Santa Monica with his fiancée, Carrie Odell, 67, has left many of the period details untouched. Though he restored three of the one-room cabins—adding bathrooms, filling in decrepit ceilings and floors—the ranch retains its ramshackle character. It runs off solar panels, propane tanks, water wells, and satellite Internet and telephone.

Mr. T. has made about \$2 million of improvements over the last 35 years, most notably converting a barn into a two-story, one-bedroom "lodge" with high-end appliances. He also added a helipad for private use. In the 1980s, Mr. T. visited every weekend but now goes up about one day a month.

The historical elements added to the \$2.5 million



LOOKING BACK A renovated miner's cabin, left; a detail from the lodge's living room, above.



COUNTRY LIVING Bathrooms were added to the cabins, above; Simon T. in the living room of the main cabin, right.



GHOSTS OF A MINING PAST The property, above left, is strewn with mining equipment, reflecting its past as a gold-mining center beginning in the 1870s; the kitchen in the main cabin, above right.



RUSTIC LUXURY About 15 years ago, Mr. T. converted this barn into a one-bedroom lodge. It includes satellite Internet and a spiral staircase made of logs from the grounds.

price tag, though Los Angeles-based Shamon Shamonki of Sotheby's International Realty, who is representing the property, said that the exact value they might add is difficult to quantify.

Historical cachet doesn't often boost the value of a

home unless there is a celebrity connection, said appraiser Terry Dunkin, principal of Baltimore's Dunkin Real Estate Advisors. However, a buyer who "falls in love" with Lonesome Ranch and its mining features may pay more for them, he said.

For Mr. T., the sale is part of a plan to unload his assets—including a 34-acre plot in Malibu and two Aspen, Colo., radio stations—to devote time to his future bride.

"My goal is to be flat broke when I die," he said.

LISA CORSON FOR THE WALL STREET JOURNAL (7)