

ALTERNATIVE STRUCTURES

Temporary buildings can have a permanent place in your capital plan.

BY MOIRA MCCARTHY

When Tropical Storm Irene swept through Killington Resort two autumns ago, she did so with vengeance and purpose, ripping away parts of trails, many trees, and worst of all, a large portion of the popular K1 base lodge. When the skies cleared, the base's much-beloved bar area was simply gone.

But nature has nothing on the mountain resort industry. Because Killington, like many other resorts, had an ace up its sleeve: temporary structures.

Within weeks, Umbrella Bars USA was on site, erecting two side-by-side temporary structures to replace the lost bar. By Thanksgiving, the unit was not only up and running, but embraced by guests.

Two years later, it is still there. A funny thing happened on the way to survival: the "temporary structure" became part of the Killington landscape. "It has become an icon of the resort over the past two years," says spokeswoman Kelly O'Brien.

And Killington is not alone. More and more resorts have turned to temporary structures such as Umbrellabars, Sprung buildings and yurts. The resorts are finding these buildings to be not only convenient, timely and affordable, but a special experience for guests as well. There just seems to be something about the way the structures feel, from the outside and the in, that makes guests happy.

"Most resorts are getting yurts for the 'cool factor,'" says Alan Bair, founder and president of Pacific Yurts. "You know how they say, when you buy a drill you

are actually buying the hole? With a yurt, you are actually buying the experience.

"Every time I walk into a yurt, I feel a sense of peace and spaciousness. You can see the stars at night, and the light ambiance in the day is spectacular. People walk in and their jaws just drop. It's like they're going on a ride in Disneyland."

OLD IDEA, NEW LOVE

The idea of temporary buildings—"Don't ever use the 'T' word," says Jim Avery, vice president of Sprung Structures, meaning "tent"—is not a new one. In fact, Sprung was founded in the 1800s as a company dedicated to helping folks set up temporary living and working spaces on the frontier. In Europe, yurts, Umbrella Bars and more have been in place at resorts for decades.

Now, in North America, they are becoming more and more visible, and evolving not just as a price point, but as part of mountain life.

"When we started this business in the U.S. eight years ago, we had one installed (in Tahoe)," says Tom McHugh, president of Umbrella Bars USA. "Now we have 25 or so just at ski resorts. As people see the value, the ease, the quickness, more and more are coming on board."

But, he adds, it's the feel that matters. "The popularity with guests is what is really driving the success," he says. "That's what it's all about. If the guests like it, they are going to come and sit and spend money."

And they are. Killington guests love

the Umbrella Bar so much that the resort is investing in landscaping and other features around it, making it a permanent part of the resort. "Over the past two summers, we have been making additions to the area as well, including a fieldstone patio, a fire pit and an outdoor grilling area to round out the experience," says O'Brien. "The slopeside location and convenience are key. But its uniqueness attracts people as well."

WHEN TEMPORARY WORKS

Sprung structures have helped out resorts many times, too. Most famously, one was erected in the space of several weeks shortly after the Two Elk lodge was burned down by vandals. Sprung put up a 500-seat facility that pleased guests until a new permanent Two Elk lodge was built. Then Vail was able to sell that same structure to Mammoth, where it remains in use today.

According to Avery, while such emergency situations lend themselves well to Sprung structures, the structures are also suited to long-term, thought-out resort plans as well.

"Most skis areas have long-term plans and need to phase in for future expansion," he says. "Cost and time to build can make things prohibitive. With this, you can use ours first and then re-erect it in another spot down the road." Plus, he says, the ease and speed of construction are well suited to the short window of building time most resorts have each year. The structures are also



Top left: A Pacific Yurt serves as the cross-country center at Mammoth Mountain. Top right: Killington's two Umbrella Bars were originally installed after the resort lost its bar thanks to Hurricane Irene. They were so popular that the resort made them permanent. Bottom: Vail bought two Sprung structures after eco-terrorists burned down its Two Elk lodge. Once the restaurant was rebuilt, Mammoth bought the Sprungs and uses them for guest services (above).

designed and built for the mountain environment—they can endure heavy snow loads and high winds.

But the real surprise folks get, Avery says, is when they step inside one of these buildings. “They meet the needs of the sophisticated guest,” he says. Indeed, inner Sprungs can feel as luxurious—if not more—than a stick building. With Sprung structures now at more than 40 resorts, they are becoming more and

more accepted, and even preferred.

Yurts, too, can surprise from the inside. At the Inn of the Seventh Mountain near Mt. Bachelor, Ore., guests are taken on a snow cat ride at night to an outpost. There, they step into a yurt, expecting a scaled-down, tent-like feeling. But once inside they are surprised to find warm light, linen-topped tables, and waiters in tuxedos ready to serve them upscale cuisine.

All in the middle of nowhere—or so the yurt makes it seem. “Don’t tell anyone I told you this, but that yurt is actually not that far from the resort,” says Bair. “But there is something about being in it that just feels like an adventure.”

Bair sees a time when resorts will be using yurts even more than at present. With the current “glamping” trend (camping with an upscale touch), he

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foresees resorts erecting yurts for guests to stay in overnight on the mountain. "We are going to see more and more creative ways to use them," he says. "A yurt combines the elegant with the simple. It's the romantic concept of the cabin in the woods. Yurts fulfill a human longing for that, but without sacrificing the creature comforts we all love."

And nothing, he says, gives him more joy than seeing them used in ski schools and childcare spots on-mountain. "The kids going in and out of there just feel like they are going somewhere special," he says. "It's great."

Like Umbrella Bars, many yurts that were installed as a temporary solution (like an expansion to a rental operation or to serve as a warming hut) are becoming permanent fixtures because guests love them. And, he adds, they stand the test of time. "They are amazingly strong;

that's part of our success," he says. "And snow slides right off the roof."

All that romanticism is a valuable side effort for Sprung structures, Umbrella Bars and yurts. But at the end of the day, says Avery, these structures are smart business first and foremost. "Ski

resorts can solve their money issues around space needs and avoid the worry and stress of extended construction time," he says. "And when their guests get in there and feel great about the space, it all makes sense. In the end, that's what it's about: where the value is." ■

SAMMY GUEST EDITOR SAYS...

We've had a good experience with temporary structures and their versatility at Ski Apache. After the Little Bear Fire in 2012 damaged our old gondola at the top of the mountain, we had to rebuild it. At the top of the gondola (literally on top of the gondola) sat our mountaintop restaurant. The dimensions of the new gondola did not allow us to keep the existing building, so it had to be demolished. To replace it and house the ski patrol, we purchased a yurt for the winter, and it served us very successfully. The patrollers were warm, dry, and even had a fireplace and electric heat. We then used the yurt over the summer as our mountain top "outdoor grill," and the response from diners was overwhelming. We are now planning to move the ski patrol digs into a new gondola storage building we are constructing at the top of the mountain, and we'll continue to use the yurt to serve guests as part of our winter operation. The great thing is, when we decide to build a more permanent mountaintop restaurant, we can repurpose the yurt for another use on the mountain. The structure will not go to waste.

—Justin Rowland

