



Roger Marolt: Roger This

New names for Droste say more about us than the land ... unfortunately

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"There weren't any flashes of brilliance." Or so says Martha Cochran, executive director of the Aspen Valley Land Trust.

And good for her! She was absolutely right. She was referring to the many submissions collected from the public over a month-long period in which they were solicited to find a new name for the Droste Property that local governments over-bought last year.

I hope she wasn't misquoted by the papers when she said this, and I pray the words weren't taken out of context. If Ms. Cochran meant what she said and what she said was what she was quoted as saying, I say she should be the next mayor of Aspen. I mean, how refreshing is it to hear someone say what they truly think, and have what they think be true?

In the usual display of civic conceit in instances like this, Aspenites heap praises on Aspenites as if this is not only the naturally greatest place on earth, but that we citizens of it are the greatest people on the planet, too. And, I'm not talking about things we can control like being kind and generous. I think it should be automatic that those of us who live in paradise ought to be able to possess nicer demeanors than average, even if they are phony. I'm talking about natural gifts like talent, which pretty much occur randomly, here just like everywhere else.

The verses we regularly hear about public achievement could be any number of variations that sound something like this: "We just want to thank the incredible people of Aspen for putting so much of their valuable time into this process. It will be very difficult to choose only one of the ideas they came up with to be the best, because we feel they are all the best. There is no way we can thank everyone enough for the unbelievable effort here."

But, the chorus is always the same: "It is just amazing how talented and creative the people of Aspen are!"

Call me unenlightened, but I think this is counterproductive. In the case of changing the name of the Droste property, judging by the quality of entries the popular thinking was, "We are creative and talented; therefore whatever we jot down is terrific!" And that is why we are currently considering names for that beautiful piece of the planet such as: "Let It Be Ridge," "Wild Thing Mountain Park," "Open Sky Ridge," and "Pick Up a Loaf of Bread and Some Milk on Your Way Home from Work."

Another idea about naming this property that smacks of a lack of brilliance is that the process will now engage local students to decide a winner amongst these lackluster contenders. Now, I have nothing against kids. I used to be one and am now raising three of my own who are pretty cool, but having the school kids involved in this procedure is not smart.

The most obvious flaw on this page of the plan is that the vast majority of these kids have never been on the property. I doubt a handful could tell you where it is. Not that this minor detail should preclude anyone from coming up with a good name, but don't you think it would be more genuine to at least be casually familiar with what you are naming? Yes, what I am suggesting is a school districtwide field trip. For everyone who doesn't complete the hike along the ridge and casts a vote anyway, their entry will automatically be counted as a vote for, "More Scenery from a School Bus Window." Are we prepared to call it that?

A secondary worry of mine is that the kids have to look through the list of the names we have come up with. It's bad enough that they might take these as examples of good and creative work that we have set down before them and then have them follow our example into the future, but it's even scarier to give the teenagers more ammunition for arguing about how dumb we adults are.

I guess when you look at the names of our favorite trails – Ute, Rio Grande, Sunny Side, Hunter Creek, Rim and Government, for crying out loud – “brilliant” is not the description that jumps out for any of them. But, they are understatedly appropriate. They are names that were not arrived at by contest or committee. They most likely were scribbled on maps over cups of coffee by quietly normal people who we continually try to be like by acting conspicuously hip.

Nobody from our past tried really hard to name our older landmarks, and for that matter to make Aspen what it was before it was discovered. Perhaps we have tried too hard ever since. That's what separates “not brilliant, but classic from the tests of time” from just plain “not brilliant.”

Roger Marolt wonders what's wrong with the current name of “Droste.” That's what everybody calls it. Contact him at roger@maroltllp.com.

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