



HACIENDA DEL SOL GUEST RANCH RESORT TUCSON, ARIZONA

by Stephanie Ager Kirz
photography by Howard L. Kirz

With the lure of having the most sunny days and one of the healthiest climates in the United States, Tucson became a warm winter destination starting during what local historians call the “Gold-Plated Decade.” Way back in the fall of 1922, a group of entrepreneurial visionaries dreamed up the Tucson Sunshine Climate Club to promote tourism to the area. Fortunately, some of that history can be

experienced today at the Hacienda del Sol Guest Ranch Resort, with a total of 30 private casitas, guestrooms and suites, situated on 34 desert acres under the curvaceous silhouette of the Catalina Mountains.

It began, interestingly enough, not as an inn but as a girls’ finishing school in the 1920s. According to historian C. L. Sonnichsen in his book *Tucson*, “a





sort of spin-off from the guest-ranch business that proliferated in Tucson was the ranch school, in which the sons and daughters of well-to-do Easterners studied hard, lived as close to nature as possible, and learned first-hand about the West.”

The private girls’ ranch school operated until 1942. The original owners, Helen and John Murphey, lent their personal touches to the construction of the ranch. Giant logs were dragged down from the top of nearby Mt. Lemmon for the ceiling beams, intricately carved by Helen herself.

“If you build it, they will come,” and so it was with The Hacienda del Sol Ranch School for Girls. Nationally acclaimed, it attracted the offspring of the Pillsbury, Vanderbilt, Kellogg, Maxwell, Campbell and Westinghouse families. Privacy and seclusion was the magic drawing card for the rich and famous who wanted to avoid the limelight. The Hacienda accepted girls as young as fifth grade to offer a strict academic curriculum, including college preparation, classes in social graces and, of course, western outdoor activities. Stables were and still are located on the grounds. The heated pool was built later for guests of the inn.

You can almost hear the chattering of young voices as you view the historical photos hanging throughout the Hacienda that capture the colorful lifestyle of cookouts and trail rides in the cactus-covered foothills of the Catalina Mountains.

In the 1930s, areas of the inn damaged by fire were rebuilt by the famous Swiss-born Tucsonian architect Josias Joesler and his protégé, Lewis Hall. Their work continued up until 1942 when the girls’ school was transformed into a guest ranch resort.

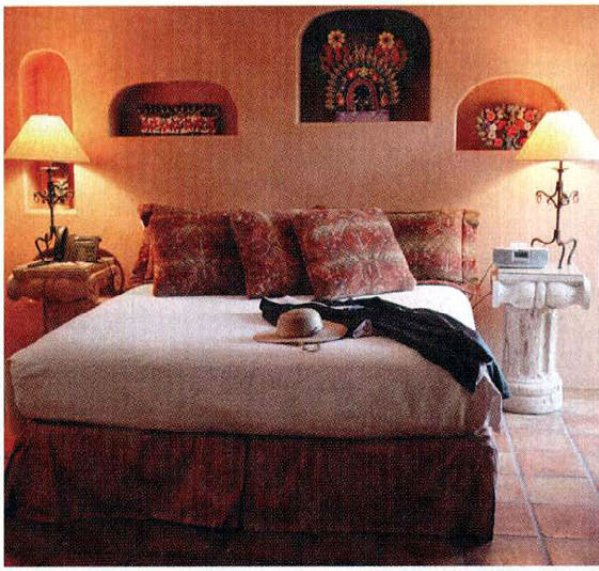
Due to the reputation of the inn, many celebrities such as John Wayne, Spencer Tracy, Katherine Hepburn, Clark Gable and Howard Hughes were known to have found this the perfect well-to-do hideaway in the desert.

Over the years, the inn changed hands many times and fell onto hard times until, in 1995, a group of investors with Tucson connections once again had the vision to return the Hacienda to its original splendor.

“First, we restored all 30 rooms and casitas and found an Argentinean furniture maker to custom-make some of the furniture in the Hacienda along with local artisans,” said managing partner Rick Fink, as he ran his hand over the four-inch-thick library table weighing over 1,000 pounds.

Spanish Colonial in style, the Hacienda was inspired by the Moorish architecture of the 18th and 19th centuries and is authentically dressed in soft-white adobe walls, hand-painted decorative wall and countertop tiles, hammered light fixtures, hand-carved wood beam ceilings, whimsically painted murals by local artists, weathered “Ecapali” leather furniture and Saltillo floor tiles from Mexico with decades of patina.

The manicured gardens, fountains and cactus gardens, under the direction and green thumb of partner Jeff Timan, are popular





places for weddings and receptions. The Hacienda's other managing partners are: Tom Firth, Paul Ginsburg and Mike McGrath.

"We try to make all the colors and textures appeal to the senses," Rick says, as he walks by one of the gardens overflowing with jasmine and snapdragons. "It's just one component of our 'Southwestern style of hospitality.'"

No two rooms of the Hacienda are alike. They are awash in a Southwestern, sunset palette ranging from poppy yellows to bright bougainvillea pinks and magentas, to cactus greens and beyond. Some rooms sport whimsical printed fabrics with Western themes, hand-woven old Mexican rugs, hand-hammered tin mirrors, decorative tin and copper switch plates and deeply carved, handmade side tables, armoires and desks. Eclectic Southwestern touches show up everywhere: antique wrought iron hardware, hammered tabletops, rustic pottery lamps, hand-forged iron and copper headboards and original artwork.

Coffee pots and CD players are in each room, "because people like to bring their own music with them," Rick says, "and we provide CDs of regional selections." All suites and casitas have queen-sized sleeper sofa beds for large families.

"By 1997 the rooms were finally in full swing and the restaurant was born," Rick says. "Continuously voted one of Tucson's top five restaurants, The Grill was created in one of the original buildings of the inn reflecting the character and flavor of Southwestern hospitality."

The cozy bar, restaurant view and outdoor heated patio attract locals for award-winning cuisine under the direction of Executive Chef Jason Jonilonis, who presents dinners daily and a Sunday brunch, which was voted "Best Sunday Brunch" by the readers of the local lifestyle magazine. Rick says that The Grill cooks its creations over pecan wood that comes from local orchards.

Guests of the Hacienda can choose a sumptuous breakfast buffet in the dining room or poolside food and beverage service. Boxed lunches are available for busy guests on the go.

As a proud co-owner of a rare property, Rick summed up the inn's quintessence in these parting words, "Now celebrating its 75th anniversary, we like to say that the Hacienda del Sol brings the desert to your door with a unique experience for the traveler who looks for something out of the ordinary in a special place like Tucson." ■

Hacienda del Sol Guest Ranch Resort
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