

Restoring a HOLLYWOOD HIDEAWAY



*Legendary La Quinta
Resort & Club unveils
new levels of bliss.*

By K.C. Hamblin

Arrival has its privileges. Shouldered by the rugged Santa Rosa Mountains and a storied Hollywood past, La Quinta Resort & Club comes into view.

The stately drive is flecked with pink bougainvillea, Italian cypress, and sweeping date palms. La Quinta Resort offers an oasis of well-being, a bespoke

escape demanding time and delivering serenity.

The first resort to debut in California's Palm Springs region, this 1926 landmark recently added another gem to its crown — a multi-million-dollar restoration befitting of the legendary classic. As destinations go, this Waldorf Astoria resort has long attracted the sports- and culinary-minded, a haven for urbanites looking to unplug and a refuge from the limelight for Hollywood's elite. One can easily decamp here to sketch out a screenplay (as Frank Capra did), drill down a handicap, or rekindle a flame. It's intimate yet grand, an oxymoron



PHOTOS BY BARBARA KRAFT (5) EXCEPT LEFT BY ROB PERRY, AND INTERIORS BY LABS JAGATAI BUNCH

I can live with for a spell.

The resort's signature casitas, clustered around 41 showcase pools, are set in a fresh earthen palette offset with citrus overtones. Designers have retained the glamour and architectural elements that anchor La Quinta Resort's Spanish-California style but given the resort a contemporary spin. My starlight casita, with an elevated patio, boasts a new alfresco fire feature, and the suites — including the coveted El Presidente with private pool and spa — are flat-out stunning. A reimagined pool experience and grounds restoration round out this ambitious retool.

Legend has it

La Quinta Resort is the original Hollywood hide-away where legends lapped up luxury — and a golden tan — without inquiring eyes. Greta Garbo called it home, Frank Capra called it the “Shangri-La of screenwriting,” and Errol Flynn, Marlene Dietrich, and Clark Gable cavorted around the pools. *It's a Wonderful Life* was born here (you can stay in Capra's Suite, complete with a typewriter), and Ginger Rogers exchanged rings by the waterfall. Today, celebrities still find solace here along with the annual spring style tribe who bed down for

Clockwise from far left: resort entrance, guestroom, a relaxing spa treatment, poolside, and Spa La Quinta entrance



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MORGAN'S IS A SHOWPIECE RESTAURANT WITH A GLITZY BAR, DUAL DINING VENUES, AND INTIMATE SEATING AROUND AN INTERIOR FIREPLACE.

an extended party during the Coachella Valley Music and Arts Festival.

As the afternoon sun shifts west over the dunes, one can easily imagine founder Walter Morgan's thoughts on creating a hideaway within two hours of Hollywood. Today, I find more accoutrements: 90 holes of championship golf including the TPC Stadium Course at PGA WEST; PGA WEST Golf Academy; the award-winning Spa La Quinta, world-class tennis; and the region's leader in field-to-fork cuisine, Morgan's in the desert.

Oasis of well-being

My first stop is the Spa La Quinta, a 23,000-square-foot oasis with 38 treatment rooms, private garden baths, and a contemporary carte of new services. I tuck in for the Signature Citrus Smash treatment; who knew an invigorating scrub, Vichy shower, and languid massage would set the stage for my visit?

Later, I return for a steam and crisp sauvignon blanc by the garden fireplace. Upon leaving, a group of golfers passes and ducks in

From top: surrounded by California beauty, and Morgan's in the desert

for a well-deserved Kinks from the Links treatment. Day one: par.

In the morning I set off through the resort's 45 acres, lush and fragrant

with grapefruit and tangerine trees, flowering petunias, and a stately cactus garden. Eager to test a new set of golf clubs, I head to the resort's signature Pete Dye-designed TPC Stadium Course. It seems the golf gods are with me, that is until I reach hole No. 17 — aptly named Alcatraz — and shelve the scorecard. Upon return, I ditch the clubs for a cocktail dress and settle in at Morgan's in the desert for dinner.

Decanting a dream

Morgan's is a showpiece restaurant complete with a glitzy bar, dual dining venues with an alfresco option, and intimate seating around an interior fireplace. Focused on seasonally and sustainably sourced ingredients, triple James Beard award-winning Executive Chef Jimmy Schmidt and Chef du Cuisine Brian Recor present a tempting lineup. Bi-weekly menus spotlight everything from Alba truffles to Santa Barbara spot prawns, paired to a *Wine Spectator* Award of Excellence 3,000-plus-bottle wine program.

As the pianist hits his stride, I focus on my perfect French 75 and an earthy starter of stuffed morel mushrooms riding on a nest of ramps and mâche. The pan-roasted breast of duck, cured in tangy apple cider, is the perfect foil to my Willamette Valley pinot noir. For dessert, I slide into the Twisted S'mores, a sinful ménage of fire-kissed marshmallow ice cream, dark chocolate, and almond graham cracker — a dramatic finale. As the restaurant fills, I amble back to my perch, sorting the stars and

my heavenly state set in a cocoon of sweet desert breezes. Yes, arrival has its privileges but departure, well that's another story. ✦

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