

Slice of Heaven in Palm Springs

REDESIGNING THE HORIZON HOTEL IN PALM SPRINGS WAS MORE THAN MET THE EYE



"I GUESS AS FAR AS THIS DEAL, WE PLANNED ON X AMOUNT of dollars to put into it. It ended up more than that, but, you know, it always does. So there wasn't any big, huge surprise."

Dave Scharf likes to tell it like it is. He speaks with the ease of a seasoned rancher who knows exactly what he's doing. And he knows he knows. There's more than cowboy confidence in Scharf, owner of the recently renovated Horizon Hotel in Palm Springs, CA. Scharf – who calls Oregon home – has learned to make himself at home in the desert and he's cut himself a little slice of heaven with this particular resort.

Together with his son, Scharf was looking for investment opportunities when they came across the property (originally called L'Horizon) in 2004. "It looked like a place that had been something at sometime." But, recalls Scharf, "it had been added onto and neglected for 50 years ... they'd moved all the air conditioning to the roof, so they destroyed the modern style of it ... they put pony walls up there to disguise all that stuff." And the plumbing and electrical systems were showing their age. "The maids thought there were ghosts in the residence [the three-bedroom unit] because the power would go on and off. You know, you can't have that."

Neglected? Perhaps, but it was a diamond in the rough, and Scharf knew it.

The hotel – a secluded collection of low-slung bungalows, carefully sited on two-and-a-half manicured acres – was originally designed in 1952 by renowned architect William F. Cody.

ROOM PHOTOGRAPHY BY MICHAEL CONROY



>>> resort remodel

Mid-century Modern architecture, especially an example with the Horizon's colorful history, is nothing to fool with in Palm Springs, and Scharf knew it. To ensure that the hotel's renovation respected Cody's original vision, Scharf consulted with architect and former Cody associate Frank Urrutia. Additional guidance was provided by way of the hotel's original blueprints and a cache of vintage photographs by famed photographer Julius Shulman (a miraculous find, they had been tucked away in a storage closet for 50 years).

For Scharf, doing it right meant doing it all. "We ended up bringing equipment down from Oregon to work on it," he says. "We had the whole place dug up." In some cases, up to 18 feet deep to restore the pool. "There's a quarter-acre of concrete on this place," he adds, "and we pulled up every inch of it."

Cody's architecture posed some unique challenges, too. Although each of the hotel's 22 units is distinct and carefully detailed by a master of desert modern architecture, they look an awful lot alike when they've been torn down to the studs. "It's a complicated arrangement of buildings. It's confusing, and during the remodel, it drove me crazy," says Scharf. "I could never figure out which building to go to because they all look the same."

But the beauty struck Scharf so much that, "I ended up staying down here [and] that was not according to plan," he says. He's been encouraged and inspired by the supporters of mid-century Modern architecture in Palm Springs.

Thanks to Scharf's efforts, the Horizon is, once again, a premiere hideout in the desert (just blocks from downtown, "hidden in plain sight" may be more accurate). "Architecture is art and this is a good example of modern art," he says. ■

More: Rates from about \$159. 1050 E. Palm Canyon Dr., Palm Springs, CA; 800.377.7855; www.thehorizonhotel.com

A DAY IN THE LIFE

The Horizon is arranged as Y-shaped clusters of buildings which are positioned to appear almost continuous when viewed from the central pool area. Most of the buildings hold three guest rooms, almost all with private outdoor showers. Even Standard rooms have concrete patios and floor-to-ceiling walls of glass, but we recommend booking a King Delux Suite. 3A, for instance, is mere steps away from the pool, has an *al fresco* shower, and a massive brick and copper fireplace for chilly winter nights. It's also a hop-skip from the pool bar, where Tony the bartender—a New Yorker who moved to Palm Springs to play professional poker—whips together fresh tropical drinks. You might even catch a freshly grilled prime rib lunch or other impromptu surprises during your stay. And don't miss a round on the badminton court – it's all just a day in the perfect life at The Horizon.



POOL PHOTOGRAPHY BY MICHAEL CONROY