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The Willows

HISTORIC PALM SPRINGS INN

*A*t the westernmost end of Tahquitz Canyon Way the 70-year-old Willows Inn in Palm Springs has opened its french doors to greet guests with discriminating taste and a fondness for history.

Built in 1926 as the winter home of former U.S. Secretary of the Treasury Samuel Untermyer, the Willows Inn has undergone a \$1 million major renovation project. The mission: to

restore the home and eight guest suites back to the original opulence guests enjoyed so many decades ago.

And what a guest list.

Imagine sleeping in the same room as the great 19th Century mathematician Albert Einstein. Or slumbering in a room once visited by Marion Davies. Other guests include Clark Gable and Carole Lombard, and former Mayor of New York Jimmy Walker.

PHOTOGRAPHY BY BRIAN MAURER



Does an afternoon siesta in the Marion Davies room sound like heaven to you? A cool breeze flows through the opened patio door as you relax in a king-size bed under a fluffy, ivory-colored duvet. This room overlooks the swimming pool and jacuzzi one story below.

To bring back the charm of the historic lodge, molecular biologist Andrew Conrad of Los Angeles and emergency physicians Tracy Conrad, his sister, and Paul Marut, both of Palm Springs, bought the property in 1994.

"It's a magical place," said Tracy. "It's not only a restoration of the building. It's a restoration of the spirit."

During the years, previous owners of the Willows covered its frescoed ceilings and ornate natural wood doors and trim with gobs of paint.

Walls inside the home were painted black, creating an atmosphere of doom and gloom. Red carpet suffocated the natural dark wood floors yearning to breathe underneath. And the mahogany doors, so bold and masculine, were covered in pink paint. Pink paint! Brilliant crystal chandeliers were left uncared for, allowing their shine to dull and fade gradually over time.

"People had done horrible, horrible things to this place. It had been badly neglected. When we bought the house we wanted to save it from these horrible things," said Tracy.

After researching what the property looked like in the late 1920s and 1930s, consulting with architects and a lot of creativity and soul searching, the new owners seem to have found the original Willows Inn under the macabre masquerade.

"We tried to capture the ambience of the 20s and 30s," said Marut. "I really think we have done it. I really do."

The outdoor patio—stone covered floor with wrought iron furniture—beckons the guests to enjoy a cool drink during a summer afternoon breeze. The striking architecture of the Great Hall with its mahogany beams, stone fireplace and frescoes ceilings is perhaps equal in beauty by the four-story high mountain waterfall that cascades over rocks into a pool outside the Dining Room.

Guests will receive daily gourmet breakfasts which will include freshly squeezed juices, eggs made anyway you like, thin filet of beef steak, tomatoes, sausages, fresh fruit and melons.

Weekend visitors will be offered a lavish five-course dinner served Saturday or Sunday. Costs for dinner will average between \$50 to \$75 per person. Dinner will be served once a week for starters and may expand to more days depending on the demand.

"Anticipating the guests' needs and desires before they need them is rule number one," said Chef Vincent Guccione.

In addition, guests will receive breakfast and dinner menus with their name for that personal touch.

Each of the eight guest rooms has its own private entrance and personality. The Albert Einstein Room has been restored to the almost identical original suite where he slept years ago. A photo of Einstein and his wife dating back to the 30s was found in the attic. It hangs in the hall



outside his room.

Heavy dark wood bedroom furniture, a delicately carved wooden mantle over the fireplace, a french hunting desk and book shelves of the classics are featured in The Library Room.

Up a flight of narrow stairs, you'll be treated to The Chauffeur Room, where years ago the driver to the homeowners lived. Outside this room,

the soothing fall of water can be heard from outside the patio.

"This house has taken a new direction," said Marut. "All the hotels in Palm Springs are very generic. We wanted to offer our guests something different. Something new and unique."

Room rates average between \$250-\$600 a night. Each room has its own climate temperature control.

Outdoor gardens planted around the inn showcase the native desert plants: palo verde, mesquite, salvia greggi with red flowers and salvia leucanths with purple bud.

The views from the Willows Inn are spectacular, including the beautiful Tahquitz Canyon.

The Willows Inn is available for family gatherings, weddings and corporate functions as well as for the visitor who just wants to escape.

Located within minutes from downtown Palm Springs, the Willows Inn is close to excellent shopping and restaurants, yet far enough removed from time to offer each guest a memorable, relaxing experience.

The Willows Historic Palm Springs Inn

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