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HISTORICAL BACKGROUNDER

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LA QUINTA RESORT & CLUB: A LONGTIME DESERT OASIS AGES WITH GRACE AND DIGNITY

Colorful Stories Abound About Iconic Retreat and Its Many Legendary Guests

LA QUINTA, Calif. – For nearly 85 years, La Quinta Resort & Club has captivated visitors as both a source of inspiration – and a haven for seclusion.

With a colorful, star-studded past, this fabled resort has its roots in the Golden Age of Hollywood. In fact, a roster of glittering luminaries has visited this storied property over the decades, among them Hollywood elite such as Clark Gable, Carole Lombard, Bette Davis, Joan Crawford, William Powell and Errol Flynn.

Stories about the resort’s rich Hollywood legacy abound. Legendary filmmaker Frank Capra penned many classics here, including the Oscar-winning 1934 romantic comedy *It Happened One Night*. And, the reclusive Greta Garbo is said to have sought refuge from her hordes of fans at the intimate, hacienda-style retreat. In addition to Capra, Diego Rivera is alleged to have gleaned creative inspiration here. Nine striking paint and charcoal artworks that hang adjacent to the lobby are attributed to the famed Mexican muralist, and were reportedly created by him on site during the 1930s and 40s.

As its vibrant history has unfolded, the hotel has grown steadily as well, expanding its accommodations, amenities and services. Over time and under the direction of various owners/operators, the hotel has grown from an intimate 20-room retreat to an expansive resort destination with 796 guestrooms, 41 swimming pools, 53 hot spas and championship-caliber golf and tennis facilities.

But La Quinta Resort would never have come to be if it were not for the perseverance of a visionary California entrepreneur.

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Morgan Comes to Town

When prominent San Francisco businessman Walter Morgan purchased 1,400 acres between Palm Springs and Indio in 1921, his goal was simple: to create a private sanctuary for guests to escape to for rest and relaxation. The land that he bought was originally named “Happy Hollow” by the Cahuilla people, the indigenous inhabitants of the area.

In 1925, Morgan tapped up-and-coming Pasadena-based architect Gordon Kaufman to help mastermind his grand plan. While Kaufman later became famous for projects that included the Los Angeles Times Building, the Athenaeum at the California Institute of Technology and the Santa Anita Raceway, the architect was relatively unknown when Morgan hired him.

Morgan and Kaufman set about to create a one-of-a-kind retreat for the rich and famous, nestled against the striking Santa Rosa Mountain range – planning the buildings and grounds, designing the furniture and lights, and supervising all the construction, including the firing of the bricks used on the premises. Two kilns were built in the back of the hotel where workers crafted more than 100,000 adobe bricks, 60,000 roof tiles and 5,000 floor tiles. The total construction cost for the hotel was estimated to be \$150,000.

Kaufman also designed several private residences surrounding the resort, including a beautiful villa known as La Casa – now used for special outdoor functions at La Quinta Resort. Located next to the former home of Hollywood’s first female director, Dorothy Arzner, La Casa is said to have been frequented by Greta Garbo. King Edward VIII also reputedly stayed at this exquisite home with his future bride, Wallis Simpson.

The design of the original accommodations was completely unique in concept – guests were housed in cozy rows of cottages separate from the main building. The hotel was situated around three intimate courtyards that remain to this day: the hotel entryway, an area to the northwest of the lobby and interior oval areas anchoring the guest casitas. Painted a crisp white with bright blue trim, the original 20 casitas were built around this courtyard and all were named for saints. The color blue is a key part of the resort’s history, as the local Native Americans believed that it warded off evil spirits. An additional symbol of protection dating back to the hotel’s early days: two six-foot-tall wooden sculptures of Spanish conquistadors flanking the front entrance.

Another first instituted by Morgan was a \$50,000 nine-hole golf course, which opened in 1926 and was the first golf course built in the valley.

Hollywood Heyday

In December 1926, there was an exclusive opening just to a group of Morgan's well-heeled friends and colleagues, among them prominent banker William Crocker and President Taft's son, Charles. The resort's official grand opening to the public followed in January 1927; and after a hugely successful first season, Morgan announced the addition of 14 more casitas.

A savvy promoter, Morgan was also very well-connected, and word soon got out about the privacy, mystique and beauty of La Quinta. Traversing the then rough desert roads in chauffeured vehicles, now legendary stars such as Charles Boyer, William Powell, Ronald Coleman, Marlene Dietrich and Ginger Rogers regularly visited La Quinta. Hollywood stars were not the only high-profile La Quinta guests, though. Tycoons from families such as the DuPonts, Gianninis and Vanderbilts frequently made the hotel their vacation spot.

In 1931, Morgan, who had been diagnosed with tuberculosis, died of self-inflicted carbon monoxide poisoning amidst rumors that his family's fortune had dwindled during the Great Depression. Morgan's body was cremated, his ashes were spread over La Quinta's date groves and flower gardens; and La Quinta Hotel closed its fifth season on financially shaky ground.

Despite financial turmoil, in 1937 the hotel added a swimming pool as well as six tennis courts and a pro shop. The resort's first tennis pro was Fred Renker, for whom one of the swimming pools is now named.

Hotel Winds Down During War Era

With the advent of World War II, the hotel continued to suffer financially, and its reputation as a sought-after refuge for Hollywood stars and business tycoons gradually faded. Gasoline and auto tire rationing made travel difficult and expensive, so the hotel was forced to close from 1942 to 1945. The casitas were padlocked; the pool was drained; the once vibrant flower gardens wilted and died; and the original golf course went to seed. During the war era, the United Army requisitioned the property. Although troops were never officially stationed at the hotel, General George Patton's officers did utilize the hotel, and signs were prominently posted at the entrance forbidding unauthorized entry.

Mid-Century Highlights

In 1945, the property was purchased by John Balaban, a Chicago investor with Hollywood connections. With his influence, La Quinta once again emerged as a mecca for high-profile members of the entertainment industry. Also, airplanes became a popular means of travel, and the resort began to draw wealthy visitors from the Midwest and East Coast. To accommodate air travel, a private airstrip was constructed, attracting increasing numbers of affluent “snowbirds” who flocked to the desert to escape chilly winters elsewhere.

In 1955, Chicago attorney Leonard Ettleson acquired the property. Ettleson and a group of investors also purchased property across the street from La Quinta, which they developed into La Quinta Country Club in 1958 – reintroducing golf to the area. Designed by Frank and Lawrence Hughes, the Club, later sold to its members, became hugely popular with celebrities and golfers alike. In 1964, it hosted the Bob Hope Chrysler Classic. During the Ettleson era, the look of the hotel was altered. Cypress trees were planted in the front; the gate from the front entrance was removed; and a long entry driveway was installed. Ceilings were lowered in the Santa Rosa Room – a lovely room adjacent to the lobby that was transformed for a time into Mrs. Ettleson’s private parlor.

It was during this time period that President Dwight D. Eisenhower, an avid golfer, frequented La Quinta. Many other prominent guests – among them Charlton Heston and former California Governors Edmund G. Brown, Jr. and Sr. visited the resort to play golf and unwind.

The increasing popularity of golf through the 1960s prompted Ettleson to contract with golf pros Ernie Vossler and Joe Walser, Jr. to create another course behind the hotel. Landmark Land Company, Inc. eventually partnered with Ettleson in the development of this course as well as the surrounding property.

The 1970s and Beyond

In 1977, Landmark purchased La Quinta and the surrounding development from Ettleson. A tennis program got underway in 1978 when a consortium of famed former players – led by Charlie Pasarell, along with Tom Gorman, Arthur Ashe, Stan Smith, Bob Lutz, Marty Riessen, Roscoe Tanner and Dennis Ralston – joined forces to create one of the premier tennis facilities in the country. Pasarell and his team helped the resort gain national attention by staging a high-

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profile professional tournament sponsored by Grand Marnier, now known as the BNP Paribas Open, which eventually resulted in the resort's sunken tournament-style Clubhouse Court.

The renamed La Quinta Hotel Golf Club officially opened in 1980, complete with two new 18-hole championship courses designed by Pete Dye: La Quinta Resort Mountain Course and La Quinta Resort Dunes Course. Six years later, PGA West, a 2,200-acre master-planned golf community opened, and La Quinta offered its guests access to the Stadium and Tournament courses there.

With guests including Harrison Ford, Elizabeth Taylor and Jessica Lange, Hollywood continued to play an important role here throughout the 1980s. One of La Quinta's most famous and loyal guests, Frank Capra, even lived at the resort with his wife from 1981 to 1987 in rooms 136, 137 and 138. In fact, while residing at the resort, Capra often sat on the front bench, cheerily greeting guests as they entered the property. In 1982, fifty-two years after the budding filmmaker first visited the hotel, the La Quinta Hotel named the Frank Capra Dining Room for its famous resident – throwing him a grand dinner reception to pay tribute. This restaurant has since closed, but La Quinta still has a large meeting room named after Capra. Capra and his wife are both buried in the Coachella Cemetery.

Throughout the 1980s and 90s, the resort added more rooms and suites – yet remained true to the resort's original Early California-style architecture, and continued to honor Walter Morgan's tradition of naming the casitas for saints. Other additions have included the 17,000-square-foot Fiesta and Flores Ballrooms, several restaurants, a lovely outdoor plaza lined with retail boutiques and the 23,000-square-foot Spa.

Almost 85 years after its official opening, Walter Morgan would certainly marvel at what he helped create. La Quinta Resort & Club now encompasses 796 guestrooms, 23 tennis courts, 41 pools, 53 hot tubs, nine restaurants and cafes, and 90 holes of championship golf on five world-class courses designed by PGA legends Pete Dye, Jack Nicklaus and Greg Norman. Despite its size and scope of services, the resort still features the same intimate, tranquil experience and ambiance that its founder sought so hard to attain.

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