

Historic hideaways

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Hidden away in a small pocket between midtown Palm Springs and the foothills of the San Jacinto Mountains are small inns richly steeped in a colorful past of elegance that dates back to the classic movie-star years of the 1920s, '30s and '40s—a time when larger-than-life personalities escaped the glare of public life to secret desert retreats.

Although they've been updated, these inns still reflect an Old World charm—and still attract prominent people in search of privacy.



Korakia Pensione



Estrella Inn

returning couples recently discovered in their room the jewelry box they had lost 22 years ago.

F Orchid Tree Inn
261 S. Belardo Road • 325-2791
Rates: \$95-\$140

Owner Bob Weithorn calls the Orchid Tree Inn "an amalgamation of what were seven mom-and-pop properties." The inn's architecture covers several decades, from a restored 1915 house to the crescent-shaped Albert Frey building of 1957-58. (The Frey building was built by Herb Foster at Belardo and Baristo roads but was dismantled and moved to the Orchid Tree grounds by Foster's son, Bill Foster, in 1972.) The property has been a favorite retreat for writers and performers, including Rosalind Russell, Troy Donahue and William Holden. Owners Weithorn and Karen Prince have run the inn since the mid-'80s, although it has been in Prince's family since the '50s.

G The Willows Historic Palm Springs Inn
412 W. Tahquitz Canyon Way
320-0771
Rates: \$200-\$500

Although The Willows does not open until April, the 1927 Mediterranean-style mansion has a rich history. As the winter home of Samuel Untermyer, former U.S. secretary of the Treasury, the premises played host to such notables as Clark Gable, Carole Lombard and Albert Einstein. When Marion Davies, one-time mistress of William Randolph Hearst, spent time there, she gutted the kitchen and turned it into a bar so she could party around the clock. (Food was sent in.) The eight-room mansion has been restored to its former grandeur by Traci Conrad and Paul Marut.



Ingleside Inn



A Casa Cody Hotel
175 S. Cahuilla Road • 320-9346
Rates: \$115-\$135

Buffalo Bill Cody's cousin, Harold, came to Palm Springs in the early 1920s because of health problems and built an adobe home where the current Casa Cody is located. When Harold died, his wife, Harriet, ran the property as an inn. Legendary cowboy-movie star Tom Mix was a guest, and there's a story from a visit by Gen. George Patton. Apparently, the septic tank overflowed during Patton's stay, and he immediately ordered a trench dug to Palm Canyon, making Casa Cody the only place to have direct access to the main sewer. The hotel is now owned and operated by Frank Tysen and Therese Hayes, who have refurbished the five early-California hacienda-style buildings in traditional Santa Fe decor.

B Estrella Inn
415 S. Belardo Road • 320-4117
Rates: \$140

This 60-year-old hotel has played host to uncountable celebrities over the years, including Bing Crosby and Ann Miller. Shortly after his

divorce from Rita Hayward, Orson Welles stayed at the Estrella with Lupe Valez. Often they got into vicious fights and Welles stormed off. In his absence, Valez wrote testaments of undying love on the walls of their bungalow in red lipstick. Rick Elliott, owner and general manager, has set out to bring back the intimate elegance of a bygone era. Towering palms, innovative floral displays and fruit trees dot the spacious grounds and courtyard.

C Ingleside Inn
200 W. Ramon Road • 325-0046
Rates: \$95-\$385

In 1925, Humphrey Birge, an heir to the Pierce Arrow automotive fortune, built on the property now widely known as the Ingleside Inn. He filled his home with antiques from all over the world, including the sienna bust of Petrauch's "Laura," which stands in the inn's lobby to this date. Lily Pons was such a frequent guest in the '30s that a special room was set aside for her and decorated to her tastes. Romantic guests included Howard Hughes courting Ava Gardner and the honeymooning couple of Carole Lombard and Clark Gable. Owner Mel Haber continues to maintain the Ingleside Inn's comfort and privacy.

D Korakia Pensione
257 S. Patencio Road • 864-6411
Rates: \$79-\$169

The Korakia Pensione, a cross between a Greek Island villa and a Moroccan courtyard, was built in 1924 by Scottish artist Gordon Coutts and was a longtime favorite haunt of local and worldwide literary and art crowds, as well as Sir Winston Churchill. Architect G. Douglas Smith bought the 12-room villa in 1989 and restored its exotic Mediterranean appeal. Last year, Mary Steenburgen and Ted Danson announced their engagement behind the Korakia's white stucco walls.

E La Serena Villas
339 S. Belardo Road • 325-3216
Rates: \$80-\$140

In 1936, horseback-riding guests at the Sequoia Bungalows/La Serena Villas could have a horse delivered to their door, according to the villa's original brochure. Current owners Sharon and Larry Kramer have other historic items Sharon discovered in a lost-and-found box during renovation. She placed many of the items as decorations in the guest rooms to give the inn a homey feeling and retain the quaint charm of the inn's history. One of La Serena's many