



The Oldest Entertainment Weekly Newspaper in Southern California

Entertainment Today  
Written by Brad Schreiber  
Thursday, 24 January 2008

## PALM SPRINGS: WHEN THE OLD BECOMES NEW AGAIN

Almost twenty years of driving down in January to Palm Springs, for their top-tier film festival, has yielded not only certain memories but certain visual outposts. Taking Highway 111 past the power-generating windmills and mountains always yields a calm, a relaxed energy, and the San Jacinto Mountains and clean, clear vistas of the desert are a huge part of the gestalt of the experience.

For so many of those visits, the north end of Palm Canyon Drive, entering the downtown district of Palm Springs, revealed some of the lesser motels available. For some time, a curious little place, that had fallen into some disrepair, the Pepper Tree Inn, sat forlornly on Gran Via Valmonte, the short connection between Palm Canyon Drive and its parallel and one-way opposite, Indian Canyon.

Nothing stays the same and generally, we think of this in terms of decay. But the Pepper Tree Inn ([www.peppertreepalmsprings.com](http://www.peppertreepalmsprings.com)) has undergone a startling transformation, restoring the splendor it must have embodied when it was first constructed in the 1920s as a much smaller, Spanish colonial property. Now, I am informed by manager Brett Gibbs, the two eye-capturing, stained-glass gates in front, in the shape of green leaves upon tree branches, were commissioned to a local artist, at a cost of \$25,000 a piece. This attention to artistic detail is also found among the 32 guest rooms and suites, where hand-painted designs on the bathroom walls give a unique feel to each room. The mosaics that adorn the property outside the rooms are imported from Mexico. The wrought iron lamps recall the welcoming gates of the Pepper Tree Inn.

There are 12 types of rooms available, with varying use of fireplaces, in-room Jacuzzis and patios among the one- and two-bedroom suites. Of course, for those who do not require privacy, there is the outdoor Jacuzzi and a well-considered addition, a chlorine free, saline swimming pool, for those who enjoy keeping the current colors of their swimsuits and hair.

All the usual amenities one would desire are found in the rooms, including four-cup coffeemakers, irons and boards, fridges, which hide away nicely in wooden hutches. And there is a breakfast room, where one can fill up on muffins, Danish, cereal, juices and coffee before venturing out into the lovely desert surroundings. For those who are not early risers, the hours, until 10:30, are very desirable.

The Pepper Tree is most conveniently located, not only to catch screenings at the Palm Canyon Theatre but to stroll the same half-block on the opposite side and enjoy Koffi, the best coffee shop in town, with its lightning quick service, wide choice of java, sandwiches and pastries. (I am still kicking myself for not trying a caramel apple scone. You do it for me.) The sculpture garden in back of Koffi is a relaxed and attractive site for sampling their wares and planning the day.

Gibbs and I had a chat in the Pepper Tree's enchanting courtyard, where birds twittered and hopped around a hedgerow, a couple feet away. He has seen, since the 2004 upgrade, an influx of not only US visitors but those from Canada, the UK and Germany as well. To further the relaxed ambience, environmental sounds and soft New Age music are played through concealed speakers on the property from 10-5. Additionally, the Pepper Tree is sometimes booked for corporate meetings or weddings and without any site fees.

The two pepper trees that the original owner, Dr. Pepper (not the soda magnate) planted are gone. Two more however, have replaced them. This is fitting, considering the resurgence of one of Palm Springs oldest hideaways, one that has refurbished not only its grounds and buildings, but its former glory.