

Suite Dreams

One of SoCal's most celebrated hotels gets the renovation of a lifetime. **By Gillian Flynn**

When the uberprivate Rancho Valencia Resort & Spa was purchased two years ago by the San Diego scions of mobile tech giant Qualcomm, it was clear they were serious about achieving world-class resort status—as in \$30 million remodel serious.

The meticulously sophisticated refresh, unveiled this past fall, has more than upped the SoCal resort game. There's the brick-and-glass wine cave, the ball rooms lined in studded leather, a Damien Hirst centerpiece in the restaurant and a sparkling yoga pavilion. Custom-designed furniture abounds throughout the 45-acre property. It's enough to make you feel bad for the resorts *not* owned by Qualcomm's Jacobs family.

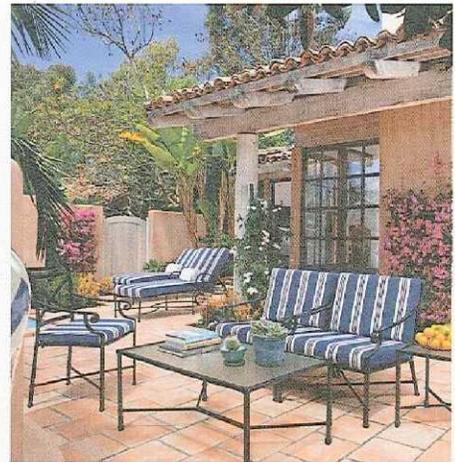
"We're laid-back and luxurious. We're understated and sophisticated, but not uptight," says co-owner Jeff Jacobs, a health fanatic and former Ironman, whose world travels were a

major influence in the property's design and feel.

Hence the airy yoga room, an indoor-outdoor ode to the downward dog. Its accordion doors opening onto an Infinity pool where the teacher is perched on a platform that appears to be floating. Talk about upping the *omm* factor. "I just took class outside today and it was beautiful," says Jacobs, who two years ago, left his marketing post at Qualcomm, which his MIT alum father founded in 1985.

The resort was first built in 1989 in a rustic-elegant style that embodies Rancho Santa Fe, whose most famous architects include Lillian J. Rice and Cliff May. The property is set on a pristine site, replete with tennis courts, horse trails, an award-winning spa and gardens sourced for the chef's Cal-Med fare.

The 49 luxury casitas boast private Jacuzzis and fireplaces. "You can enjoy the peace and serenity and not have to worry



SKY'S THE LIMIT
From top: Private patios with Jacuzzi and fireplaces are offered in every suite; private poolside cabanas; Damien Hirst's artwork takes center stage at Veladora restaurant.





NEUTRAL TERRITORY Hotel suites are an exacting mix of modern ranch living realized in soothing neutral tones with lots of natural materials.

about seeing anyone," says Jacobs.

Inside, rooms have a Southern California hacienda feel with custom furnishings crafted in Mexico City.

Throughout the resort, indoor-outdoor interplay is highlighted. Fire pits with banquette seating now line the croquet lawn; new alfresco dining areas with fire features are perfect for the many private parties and never-ending stream of nuptials that take place on the resort; and even the newly renovated spin room is open and breezy.

In fact, the resort lures international A-listers to its ambitious pro-cycling camp. On a recent weekend, both U.S. Olympian Taylor Phinney and Tour de France rider Christian Vande Veld came out for the camp's launch. (Jacobs is an avid rider who owns a cycling team in Italy.)

But the property's pièce de résistance? It's a toss-up: On the one hand there's the twinkly Veldaora restaurant with Damien Hirst's stunning centerpiece made of butterfly wings. On the other, there's the dramatically designed wine cave, which was previously a low-slung gym.

The cave, boasting red brick, a modern glass wine cellar and a huge custom dining table, was inspired by Jacobs' travels in Italy. "In Florence, I noticed all the old stone buildings had these beautiful glass-facing exteriors. It's the juxtaposition of the Old and New World that makes it so sexy." Not to mention the purple rug and va-va-voom lighting that gives seriously good glow.

Come nighttime, every inch of the resort oozes with glamour, thanks to sconces, chandeliers and flickering fire features. Locals from "The Ranch" cozy up to the chic Pony Room with its custom leather chairs and monogrammed bar stools. They sip skinny margaritas and indulge in chef Eric Bauer's menu, which includes lots of local ingredients (tenderloin with local figs) and updated faves (carnitas tacos). But beware: nabbing a dinner reservation at Veladora is difficult as regional interest is at full-throttle.

But if you're looking for full sensory indulgence at one of SoCal's most beautifully reimagined hotels? That is easy-peasy. ■

Generation Renovation

From Santa Monica to La Jolla, a spate of SoCal hotels is getting A-list facelifts via top designers.



The Fairmont Miramar Hotel & Bungalows (101 Wilshire Blvd., Santa Monica, 310.576.777) has just completed the first series of suite redesigns under the hand of interior decorator Lynda Murray. A departure for the more traditional hotel, the new look focuses on a contemporary, beachy loft approach with black-and-white photography, locally made sculpture, and relaxed, homelike furnishings. At **The Peninsula Beverly Hills**, (9882 S. Santa Monica Blvd., Beverly



Hills, 310.551.2888) all 193 guest rooms, suites and villas have been recently redesigned by Beverly Hills-based firm, Forchielli & Glynn. But one

suite in particular, a 2,100-square-foot space, was completely renovated and decorated by Nancy Corzine. Done in soothing pale blues with Venetian silvers, creams and whites, the Grand Deluxe Suite by Nancy Corzine has two bedrooms, a fully functioning kitchen, dining and living areas. And **Estancia** (9700 N. Torrey Pines Rd.,



La Jolla, 858.550.1000) is midway through a major redo. Architect A.C. Atherton is leading the project, which includes every building on property, including 211 guest rooms and the hotel's stand out spa. Working with interior designer Caroline McLean, Atherton says they're creating a look that will be both classic and contemporary. Guest rooms will be done in warm tones with pops of bold color. Next up? Atherton will redesign the restaurants and parts of the lobby starting fall 2013.

—Alexandria Abramian-Mott