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Andrew Harper's Hideaway Report®

May 2009 | Our 30th Year

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OPINIONATED REVIEWS BY A WRITER WHO TRAVELS INCOGNITO AND ALWAYS PAYS HIS OWN WAY

30 Years On: A Special 12-Page Anniversary Issue

THIRTY YEARS AGO, the world was a very different place. When the first issue of *Hideaway Report* appeared in June 1979, Longueville House, a Georgian mansion in County Cork, charged \$35 a night for a Deluxe Double room, full Irish breakfast included. Today, we still recommend the hotel, but in June 2009, a Double Premier room will set you back \$345.

Improbable room rates aside, it is contemplation of the wider picture that really gives us pause. Back in 1979, half of Europe was stuck in a time warp behind the Iron Curtain; the Soviet Union was an apparently permanent fact of life; and in Leningrad hotels, every corridor had its baboushka, sullen beside her samovar, keeping an eye on arriving and departing guests. Elsewhere, restricted travel to China was just becoming possible — though you

needed a separate visa for each individual city! — three years after the death of Mao Zedong and the end of the Cultural Revolution.

Hideaway Report first appeared at precisely the moment when international travel really began to take off. The Boeing 747 played a major role in this remarkable story. Pan Am's first flight by jumbo jet was in 1970, and suddenly airlines had huge airplanes to fill, ones that could fly large numbers of people to the far side of the world relatively inexpensively. And along with the new travel opportunities came the new travel publications.

In 2009, people increasingly seek out information on the web, and *Hideaway Report* now has a colorful online sibling. But the Internet is just a new means of communication; it is still the content that matters. We began with a simple ambition: to provide trustworthy travel advice in an idiosyncratic and hopefully entertaining voice. To ensure that we lived up to our ideals and that you could believe in them, we would travel incognito, accept no advertising and pay the full rate for all accommodations and services. Thirty years on, in this respect at least, nothing whatever has changed. — Andrew Harper

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Santa Fe: Cultural Capital of the American Southwest



WE ARE OFTEN ASKED to name our favorite area of the United States, but it is a big country, and after decades of wandering, it is difficult to provide a satisfactory answer. However, one place always comes to mind: Santa Fe (and New Mexico in general). This is not to say that we don't have equal affection for dozens of other cities and states, it's just that Santa Fe persistently refuses to be ignored. Maybe it's the sense of history, the distinctive architecture, the Southwestern cuisine or just the numinous quality of the light, which has appealed to some of America's most eminent painters and photographers. Who knows? Anyway, it just so happened that a trip to New Mexico was overdue and a new property, Encantado (part of a group that includes Napa's Auberge du Soleil), had recently opened. So we found ourselves on a plane bound for Albuquerque.

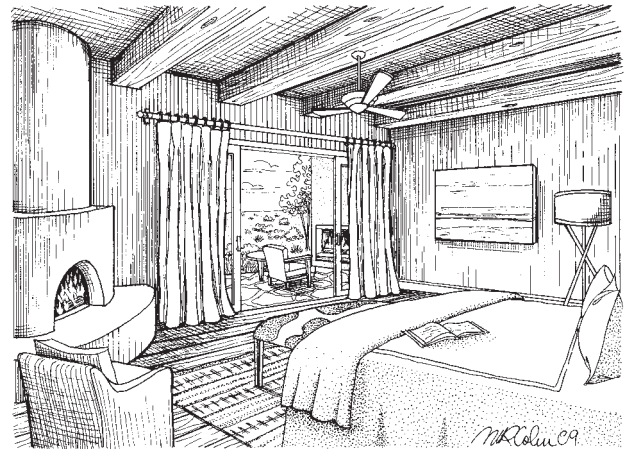
Santa Fe's roots go back nearly 1,000 years, but over the past century, the city has evolved into an extremely cosmopolitan place which, despite a population of fewer than 75,000 people, has a remarkable combination of attributes. All new buildings in historic areas must be constructed in a traditional style, and this gives the town a strong visual identity and a palpable sense of tradition.

In addition to this unmistakable personality, Santa Fe has a wealth of museums and cultural institutions. In summer, the Santa Fe Opera mounts productions in its open-air theater, with highlights this year that include the world premiere in July of Paul Moravec's *The Letter*, based on a story by Somerset Maugham. The town also has a renowned dance troupe, the Aspen Santa Fe Ballet. Museum Hill is home to four superb institutions: the Museum of Spanish Colonial Art, the Museum of Indian Arts & Culture, the Museum of International Folk Art and the Wheelwright Museum of the American Indian. On the central plaza, the historic Palace of the Governors contains the New Mexico History Museum, and two blocks away you will find the Georgia O'Keeffe Museum. Adding to the pleasure of a visit are the many shops and galleries that feature the works of local artists and Native American craftspeople.

ENCANTADO is Santa Fe's newest high-end property, located about 10 miles northwest of the city amid piñon

and juniper-flecked hills. The site was once home to a well-known resort called Rancho Encantado. This was sold in 2002 and the property redeveloped by new owners, who entered into a management agreement with Auberge Resorts. Covering 57 unspoiled acres, the property consists of a main lodge, an extensive spa and gym, and 65 casita accommodations (including nine one-bedroom suites). These are handsome adobe-style structures with spacious, bright interiors decorated in a Southwest-inflected style with beamed ceilings, light adobe-style walls, kiva woodburning fireplaces, comfortable contemporary furniture and effective lighting. Dressing rooms lead to sizeable baths with double vanities (made from a honed limestone filled with intriguing fossilized shells), separate showers and particularly deep soaking tubs. Floor-to-ceiling doors lead out to terraces in upstairs rooms, or patios in those downstairs.

The main lodge is home to a congenial bar and a first-class restaurant, *Terra*. Overseeing the kitchen is chef Charles Dale, who gained a die-hard following at his



Casita room at Encantado, Santa Fe, New Mexico

restaurant *Renaissance* in Aspen. Dale is an intelligent chef who has an unusual knack for creating food that is both conceptually appealing and full of flavor, the intellectual never trumping the pleasurable. Look for appetizers such as the rich oxtail ravioli that comes with a tangy tomato marmalade and parsley oil. Our favorite entrée was the "Three Little Pigs," a slightly precious name for a down-to-earth plate of pork served three ways. Normally, we don't care for these "variations on a theme" presentations, as there is generally one style we like better and consequently wish we could have more of. But in this case, we liked all three: a grilled tenderloin dressed in a spicy *adobo* sauce,

crisp belly on a bed of light-green edamame purée, and flaky braised jowl in a mole sauce.

The property's health and fitness facilities are superb. The pool area has sweeping views of the desert and is immediately adjacent to the gym, where the latest equipment is positioned so that you can enjoy the landscape while working out. A magnificent spa is constructed from a memorable combination of natural stone and wood, and offers a full range of regionally inspired treatments.

Despite a generally favorable impression, one aspect of Encantado left us completely baffled. For some reason, the resort has been arranged in a horseshoe shape around the parking lots and service roads, thereby ensuring that many, if not most, rooms have distinctly uninspiring outlooks. The whole place is reminiscent of a garden apartment complex. Additionally, many of the footpaths pass very close to the lower-level patios, giving occupants insufficient privacy. Some of this may well be mitigated when the immature landscaping grows in. But that will not solve the problem entirely. At times it is hard to believe that Encantado is run by Auberge Resorts, a company whose flagship property has been made famous by its magical views over the Napa vineyards. 🌿 **87** Casita, \$\$; Suite, \$\$\$\$ www.encantadoresort.com

With an ideal location just off the central Plaza, the **INN OF THE ANASAZI** has long been our preferred place to stay in Santa Fe itself. From the outside, it is a modest building of dark brown adobe, while inside, the design displays a stylish mix of Spanish, Native American and contemporary motifs.

Each of the 58 rooms echoes the area's architectural traditions with plank wood ceilings and sturdy log beams, adobe walls, Native American rugs and artifacts, and kiva-style gas fireplaces. Armoires hide flat-panel TVs, and high, extremely comfortable four-poster beds come with steps for easy access. Baths are generously sized, but many have only one sink, and the shower is combined with the tub.

During a recent stay, service was exceptional throughout the hotel, with diligent housekeeping, an efficient reception staff, and a thorough and knowledgeable concierge. *The Anasazi Restaurant* is of the first rank, with a thoroughly congenial dining room, striking murals depicting Native American motifs and low-key lighting that suffuses the space with a pleasant glow. A new chef, Oliver Ridgeway, is demonstrating fluency and confidence with the Southwest style. A starter of duck mole enchilada was delicious, the duck perfectly cooked, shredded and dressed in a rich mole sauce, all

combined with cilantro-flavored sour cream. And a beef tenderloin was presented with piñon-coffee glaze and a side of wonderful poblano-smoky gnocchi. 🌿 **92** Deluxe Room, \$\$ - \$\$\$ www.innoftheanasazi.com

Just a short walk from the Plaza, **THE INN OF THE FIVE GRACES** is a singular property housed within several restored historic buildings. Its rooms and suites are decorated with an eclectic mix of Tibetan, Central Asian and Indian carpets and artifacts. We first visited the inn four years ago, and it has been a firm favorite with Harper members since. The property has been recently refurbished, the number of rooms and suites reduced to 13 from 22 and the adjoining *Pink Adobe* restaurant, a local favorite since 1994, purchased and incorporated with the inn.

The accommodations are fantasy worlds with beamed ceilings, vibrant colors, exotic fabrics of different textures and weights, and one-of-a-kind pieces of furniture, all illuminated with theatrical skill. Baths come with kaleidoscopic mosaics. This flamboyance will not be to everyone's taste, but for many, it will seem alluringly romantic and sensual. 🌿 **90** Guest Room, \$\$\$; Suite, \$\$\$ - \$\$\$\$ www.fivegraces.com

New Mexico Sparkling Wines

FINE WINE MIGHT NOT BE HIGH ON A LIST of things you would expect to discover in New Mexico, but in fact, there are now more than three dozen wineries in the state, and much of what they produce is excellent. The two varietals that have done especially well in the challenging high-altitude climate are Pinot Noir and Chardonnay. As these are the grapes used to make Champagne, it is not altogether surprising that high-quality sparkling wine is now available.

In 1983, the Gruet family was traveling in the United States and while in New Mexico met fellow Europeans who had grown vines there. The following year, Gilbert Gruet, whose Champagne house, Gruet et Fils, had produced Champagne in France since 1952, made the decision to plant an experimental vineyard.

The first vintage was released in 1989. Skeptics were taken with the product, and Gruet now makes more than 80,000 cases a year. The line includes non-vintage Brut, Blanc de Noirs, Rosé and Demi-sec, as well as vintage Blanc de Blancs, Grand Rosé and a Grande Reserve. They are all fine wines and represent very good value. We urge you to try them! www.gruetwinery.com