



## CLOSE-UP

### Hotel Valley Ho: Reviving A Legend

When word of the opening of Hotel Valley Ho reached Hollywood in 1956, celebrities streamed into Scottsdale's hip, luxurious resort. Yet the new hotel also played a surprising role in history. Thanks to the foresight of the original designers, the Valley Ho launched an innovative brand of guest accommodation that helped cement America's post-World War II romance with the automobile. It's a marvelous tale.

"The Valley Ho represented a complete shift in hotel direction," says Joan Fudala, a Scottsdale historian and writer who brings a unique perspective to the hotel. "In previous years, wealthy people made a grand entry by train and then stayed for the entire season."

The Hotel Valley Ho had its roots in World War II. Arizona's sunny, dry climate was perfectly suited for flying planes, so in the 1940s training bases sprang up all over the state. Thousands of soldiers were introduced to the area, and sleepy little Scottsdale, then a town of fewer than 1,000 residents, welcomed the airmen. When the war ended and the boys came home, some of them remembered Arizona and returned to raise their families.

About that time, Scottsdale began to make a name as an enclave of artistic talent. Painters and sculptors took up residence, and colorful Native American artwork drew big crowds. Shoppers could order jewelry directly from the artist; observe a bracelet, belt, or bolo being fashioned; and then stroll out wearing their art.

Robert and Evelyn Foehl, two hoteliers who took pride in meeting the needs of

guests, entered the Scottsdale scene. Robert had trained at the Los Angeles Biltmore, then bought the swanky San Marcos Hotel in Chandler, and later managed the Jokake Inn in Phoenix. Evelyn, one of the few women in the hotel business in those days, had run the Hacienda Del Sol in Tucson. They married and together exemplified gracious Southwestern hospitality; they also knew nearly everybody.

That's when the pieces came together. With the Foehls, Scottsdale had the perfect hoteliers to debut a new resort. Investors hired Edward L. Varney, a student of Frank Lloyd Wright, to design it. He and his associates took inspiration from Wright by creating long horizontal lines and a high-ceilinged lobby that fostered in guests a dramatic, thrilling sense of arrival. They focused the hotel around a central courtyard—a welcoming Southwestern touch—and put in a pool, a lounge, a nightclub, and a restaurant. Oh, and they added something else.

A parking lot.

And so the motor resort came to town, one of the few in the world at the time and the first of its kind in Scottsdale. The notion of car-oriented architecture symbolized mobility and freedom.

Traditionally, says Fudala, guests would spend 80 percent of their time on resort property, with rare excursions. The Valley Ho, with its convenient location, allowed guests to amble into Scottsdale for the evening. Its parking lot added a newer twist—a trip from lobby to lot was easy. Now visitors could drive off to watch a spring training baseball game, or



*Hollywood sweethearts Robert Wagner and Natalie Wood held their 1957 wedding reception at Hotel Valley Ho. PHOTO COURTESY HOTEL VALLEY HO*

they could enjoy touring in their own cars at their own pace, without having to wait for public transportation.

Architect critic Alan Hess writes, ▶  
“Technology had won the war, and it was now erasing seasons, time, and distance.”

Motor cars seemed a benevolent technology, one that reflected, starry-eyed hope for the future. The hotel was part of the new transportation architecture that facilitated an ever-faster pace. Many people think of the 1950s with mild disdain, as though only hula hoops and baseball cards were created, but what

scientists learned in those years redesigned the way Americans lived. No more did there have to be a central downtown area with shops all in one location. Now people could move—fast.

The Valley Ho remained open year-round, the first Scottsdale resort to do so, made possible by the pool and the advent of decent air-conditioning. The Foehls hosted meetings and parties, weddings and proms, and fashion shows on the grounds—hundreds of fashion shows that introduced visitors from around the globe to Arizona culture and style.



## HOTELS AND MOTELS

The advent of economical cars and improving road networks meant families could travel and vacation together for a week or two. No longer did vacationers spend an entire season camped on a single property.

The Foehls' famous friends found an oasis in Scottsdale, but regular families relaxed there as well. The Foehls welcomed everybody, and everybody came.

The Valley Ho was the place to see and be seen. Accommodations were comfortable, and laid-back Scottsdale residents gave celebrities a chance to be themselves—something not possible in other resort areas.

Bette Davis, Roy Rogers, and Frankie Avalon stayed at the Valley Ho. So did Humphrey Bogart, Betty Grable, Cary Grant, and Tony Curtis. Robert Wagner and Natalie Wood held their private wedding reception on the Valley Ho grounds. When Jimmy Durante couldn't sleep, he'd sometimes slip into the lobby to tickle the ivories—to the delight of other sleepless guests.

The hotel was acquired by Ramada in the early 1970s and remained fashionable for years. But time and neglect took its toll, and the Valley Ho fell into sad disrepair. Then, in 2004 Westroc Hotels and Resorts spent \$80 million restoring the landmark property.

The rebuilt hotel maintains much of the '50s flavor. The soda jerk flips burgers and prepares sodas and banana splits the old-fashioned way, and the Cafe ZuZu serves wonderful '50s-style dishes, such as the blue plate special, chicken and dumplings, and "J's" meatloaf. Dessert? Save room for Mom's apple pie (you'd better, or I'll tell). If you really want a taste of the '50s, order the all-American sampler—a platter that includes a Rice Krispy Treat, a Hostess Cupcake and . . . well, yes . . . a Twinkie.

The Hotel Valley Ho is located in downtown Scottsdale at 6850 East Main Street; (480) 248-2000. (See hotel entry for further information.)

breakfast, free coffee 24 hours a day, and a refrigerator and microwave in all rooms. The 65 rooms come with your choice of double, king-, or queen-size beds; a few rooms have been set aside as suites. Ask about golf packages.

### NORTHWEST VALLEY

**Best Western Inn of Sun City**      **\$\$**  
**11201 Grand Avenue, Sun City**  
**(623) 933-8211, (800) 253-2168**  
**www.bestwestern.com**

There are plenty of shopping, dining, and recreational opportunities in the Sun City

area for tourists of all ages. Plus, the recent expansion of the Valley freeway system makes it easier to get from Sun City to other points. Downtown Phoenix, for instance, 30 to 45 minutes away. This Best Western has 96 rooms furnished with either a king-size bed or two queen-size beds. All rooms were remodeled in 2005. The majority of rooms include a microwave, refrigerator, and coffeemaker. The inn also has a one-room kitchenette with one queen-size bed. All rooms are eligible for discounted rates for those staying seven consecutive nights or longer. The two-story motel has a swimming pool. There's also a complimentary breakfast.