



THE REVITALIZATION

From linens to luxury lodgings,
the city is aloft with upgrades

OF LOS ANGELES

BY CAROLE DIXON

CASA DEL MAR

Meet fellow salsa lovers and learn to dance in a spectacular setting overlooking the Pacific Ocean.

Bodies spin, then glide, drop, and embrace on the dance floor. Everyone watches in awe and envy as a handsome couple takes center stage and clears the room with their sexy and seemingly effortless moves. So begins another Monday night session of "Salsa by the Sea," the new dance series at Santa Monica's historic Casa Del Mar Hotel. Renowned Hollywood salsa dancer and instructor Ken Baldwin guides the evening's festivities, accompanied by the live music of Frank Cano's "Latin Groove." An accomplished dancer and choreographer, Baldwin has worked with Reneé Zellweger and Emilio Estevez, among other celebrities. "Morgan Freeman is a great dancer, and Eriq La Salle is a salsa addict!" he says. Baldwin counts dancing with the late Celia Cruz, "the Queen of Salsa," in a Dr. Pepper commercial among his treasured memories. He says he has seen salsa save some lives while ruining others, breaking up marriages as well as bringing people together.

"Salsa is addictive," says Baldwin, who has watched people transform their appearances, both in look and dress, over the course of a year.

It all depends on the dancer. "Sometimes you need to start by teaching rhythm," he explains. "In six months you should feel comfortable, good within one year, and in three years you become a salsero." According to Baldwin, this is no trend. "With great talents from 20 to 30 years ago like Dizzy Gillespie and Tito Puente, jazz will always be here," he says. "Every night there is a salsa night somewhere in the world." The salsa scene is rising in popularity from Tennessee to Thailand. Curiously, Baldwin says some of the best dancers are found in Israel.

Whether you want to build up your confidence, improve your social life, or just perfect your "spin" in a private lesson with Baldwin, you owe it to yourself to hit the boards. Prepare for the big night out by getting a massage and a facial in one of the outdoor cabanas while watching the waves and ordering cocktails with vodka-infused elixirs during the afternoon "high tide" tea. And if you work up too much of a sweat on the dance floor, treat yourself to a spa treatment in the hotel afterwards.



BELUX

Sweet dreams are made of this.

Who wouldn't want to sleep between the same sheets as Nicole Kidman, Sela Ward, Orlando Bloom, or Tom Cruise?

The curved glass structure in West Hollywood which houses Belux is where you will find a treasure trove of couture bed linens, the world's finest mattresses, and hand-carved beds amid high-end designs and home accessories.

For just a hair under \$20,000 you can own a bed by VI-SPRING. The name reflects the six springs that are coiled together and stuffed with horsehair, lamb's wool, cashmere, and mohair. The beds are handmade in Plymouth, England, and can only be found on this side of the Atlantic in Los Angeles, New York, Miami, and Scottsdale. The mattresses and accoutrements have quickly become must-have items for L.A. boudoirs.

To accompany the bed, you can purchase the gothic-looking \$24,000 headboard, handmade to order. (One of these rare pieces of furniture can also be found in the new penthouse loft at the Hollywood Roosevelt hotel.) Don't stop there, though. The "ultimate night's sleep package" will set you back about \$60,000, though who cares when you are sleeping on the finest Italian linens - with a thread count of 840 - and Siberian down pillows. Tom Cruise apparently loves the neck roll inserts so much that he has them shipped to him on location when he is working. Other fans of the bedtime merchandise include Barbra Streisand and English singer Robbie Williams.

If you are not on the A-list, try on a pair of fluffy cashmere slippers as a consolation prize. In either case, charming owners Thomas Piscitello, Neal Wagner, and Doron Silverman will serve you champagne, chocolate truffles and dote on you to your heart's content while you browse or kick back on one of the beds. You might also want to pick up a few good fashion-shopping tips from Thomas, who takes annual treks to Belux's factory in Milan and knows his way around a good Gucci bargain. A pleasant night's sleep is all but guaranteed.

HOLLYWOOD ROOSEVELT

Hotel Reincarnate

Heavyweight Hollywood designer Dodd Mitchell has put his hardhat on for a \$25 million renovation of the landmark Hollywood Roosevelt Hotel. The larger-than-life project is so controversial that the E! Channel filmed a reality show about the daily ups and downs creative spirit Dodd faces in working things out with corporate hotel management and strict city zoning regulations. Needless to say, the parties did not always see eye to eye and that caused a few delays and budget concerns.



However, there is a happy Tinseltown ending in sight. The hotel is finally in full transformation. Dodd has redone all 300 rooms, including the cabanas and common pool area. There's a hip contemporary vibe that respects the original 1920s architecture. There are two restaurants - the upscale Dakota, featuring chops and steaks; and gourmet burger joint 25 Degrees, where you can dine on salmon and ostrich burgers. Dodd's enthusiasm for the latter concept is infectious. "This is going to be a 'Barton Fink meets hipster' style coffee shop," he says. Beginning in June, Teddy's nightclub will be right next door, complete with chipped ice vodka bar, Prada leather bar stools in deep purple alligator skin, Lucite chandeliers and ostrich feather chairs. A live DJ will spin disks while small television screens project black and white movies from local student filmmakers in the lounge. For now, guests can catch live acts most evenings at the Cinegrill Cabaret Bar, where the upgraded audio visual system can also be rented for private screenings of 100.

Since breaking ground on the project last year, the hotel has been taken over by Argentine Pablo Migoya, Thompson Hotel Group's regional director of sales and marketing. "We are so excited to be part of the growth and revitalization of Hollywood," Migoya says. "The development in this area has been incredible, like SoHo was 10 years ago. We are putting our thumbprint on one of the most historic hotels in town and bringing it back into the fold. We are shocking some life back into the property. This will be a cool place to be able to hang out, an anchor of the neighborhood, like the Chateau Marmont."

Outside feels like a resort destination of its own. The retro Tropicana Bar should draw record crowds this summer. You'll be able to sip signature cocktails by palm trees and one of 11 fire pits. "I wanted to represent heaven and hell with the fire and the clouded blue sky backdrop," Mitchell explains.

Dodd gave us Balboa Lounge, Chi, Dolce, Katana, Sushi Roku and countless other hot spots, but this could be his biggest design challenge to date. One thing is certain, though; the hotel that hosted the first-ever Academy Awards ceremony in 1929 will never look or feel the same again.