

## Live like a star on vacation

Monica Torline • The Desert Sun • July 19, 2010

The Coachella Valley's reputation as a retreat for Hollywood's elite dates to the days of sunbathing in the 1930s at the El Mirador hotel in Palm Springs.

The desert is dotted with homes where celebrities once lived and played. Today, some property owners are cashing in on that star-studded cachet.

For a price, a tourist can relax poolside like Frank Sinatra once did, lounge in the same space where Elvis and Priscilla Presley honeymooned and puzzle over the hotplate Howard Hughes installed in his bathroom.

"I think her name does create attention," Rich Valentine says of the Lucille Ball Bungalow at the Ocotillo Lodge in Palm Springs.

He and his wife, Mary, rent the small, tidy apartment for \$2,000 a month. It's decked out with portraits and memorabilia of the comedienne and is footsteps from a pool that is so perfectly Palm Springs. And it's already booked for the first three months of next year.

"They get a great return on their investments," Jesse Garza of Homes Run Inc. said of those who own famous homes and rent them to vacationers.

His rental company's portfolio features many properties designed by mid-century modern architects or owned previously by celebrities.

Take the Frank Sinatra Twin Palms Estate, for example. Garza, portfolio and marketing director, said it is a popular rental for fans of modernism and the crooner alike.

"It captures two different demographics important to Palm Springs," he said.

### Frank Sinatra's Twin Palm Estate

1145 E. Via Colusa

History: Ol' Blue Eyes in 1947 hired mid-century modern architecture legend E. Stewart Williams to

design and build this 4,500-square-foot Palm Springs home for him, wife Nancy and their children.

It has four bedrooms and seven bathrooms. The shower off Frank Junior's room has a head situated fairly low — but appropriate for a child's height.

Sinatra later lived in the home with his second wife, Ava Gardner. The two were said to have had many fights there.

The property is named after two skinny palm trees that loom over the pool, which is shaped like a baby grand piano.

Original to the home: Capitol Records installed a recording unit for Sinatra to use while staying in the Palm Springs home. It no longer works but makes for a fun conversation piece in the lush living room.

Cost to rent: \$2,600 a night with a three-night minimum stay. It includes a concierge service offered through the rental agency, Homes Run Inc.

### Lucille Ball and Desi Arnaz's House

1194 Via Miraleste

History: This 1930s hacienda was across from the El Mirador Hotel when it was a swinging spot for Hollywood's elite. The house and guest casita boast 3,000 square feet of space. It was one of the first

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private residences in Palm Springs to have its own pool back then.

"I Love Lucy" stars Lucille Ball and Desi Arnaz frequently stayed at the house in the late 1940s to the early 1950s.

There are four bedrooms, four bathrooms, a den and an outdoor kitchen today. It's hard not to smile when seeing the lipstick smooches guests have left behind in the front powder room — in homage to the loveable Lucy.

Original to the home: Amber Willat, an owner, said the chandeliers are the oldest pieces in the home, dating back to the 1940s. The tile work around the master bedroom fireplace also would have been there when Ball and Arnaz stayed at the home.

Cost to rent: \$2,080 per week in the summer and \$3,500 during high season.

## Elvis Presley's Honeymoon Hideaway

1350 Ladera Circle

History: Elvis Presley scooped up his new bride, Priscilla, and carried her up the lily-pad-like walkway leading up to the threshold of the Alexander Estate.

Robert Alexander was one of the principals in the Alexander Construction Co. that built more than 2,000 homes in the Coachella Valley. He lived at the Ladera Circle home with the soaring pink roof with his family until he and his wife were killed in a plane crash in the Little Chocolate Mountains northwest of Indio.

Soon after, Presley signed a one-year lease for \$21,000. However, he wasn't interested in living in the home permanently because he felt it was too open, according to Dave Dashner, the house manager who gives tours at the home today.

Photos of the newlyweds enjoying honeymoon dinners and sipping drinks on a 64-foot-long couch are sprinkled throughout the first floor. More memorabilia, including a juke box with hits sung by The King, are found in other parts of the four-bedroom, five-bathroom property.

Original to the home: The interior of the 5,200-square-foot home has been restored to look like it did in the 1960s, except for one wall that was taken out in the dining room area, Dashner said.

Cone-shaped chimneys hover in the living room and over a grill in the kitchen, and a NuTone mixer/blender attached to one kitchen counter are reminders of a cooking era gone by.

Cost to rent: \$1,500 to \$1,800 a night.

The owners also host events and guided tours of the home. To mark the 33rd anniversary of Presley's death, tours and concerts will be given at the home Aug. 15-16. Information: [www.elvishoneymoon.com](http://www.elvishoneymoon.com)

## Lucille Ball's Bungalow at the Ocotillo Lodge

1111 E. Palm Canyon Drive

History: Current owners Rich and Mary Valentine say they were told when they bought their unit that the funny redhead used this personal suite while vacationing in Palm Springs in the 1950s. However, no document exists that can prove it outright.

But the Ocotillo Lodge, designed in 1956 by William Krisel and Dan Palmer, was a hotspot for celebrities who frequented Palm Springs. Gene Autry, the "singing cowboy," even bought the hotel resort in 1959.

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The Lucille Ball Suite, at 575 square feet, has one bedroom, one bathroom and a patio just steps away from the main lounge and pool.

The suite has many old photographs of Ball and husband Desi Arnaz and other memorabilia.

Original to the home: The Lucille Ball Suite has tongue-and-groove ceilings and original kitchen cabinetry. Be sure to check out the old-fashioned bottle opener fixed to the side of one cabinet.

Cost to rent: \$700 per week or \$2,000 for the month.

### Howard Hughes' Mini Estate

History: Perched on a mountainside below Bob Hope's home in Palm Springs is the mini-estate of Howard Hughes, the wealthy aviator, inventor and filmmaker from Texas.

The 2,100-square-foot home is split into different levels. It offers 220-degree views of the valley below. It has three bedrooms and three bathrooms.

Thomas Salinas of Palm Springs Rental Agency, Inc., couldn't provide details on how long Hughes lived there. But the company's write-up on the home indicates he was one of many famous owners, including "Green Acres" actress Eva Gabor and producer Paul Keyes.

Original to the home: The kitchen has been preserved and includes a porthole gas oven and matching stove. Hidden under the carpets are step-on light switches and a hotplate that Hughes installed in the downstairs bathroom.

Cost to rent: \$450 per night, with a three-night minimum stay.

### Keely Smith and Bobby Milano's Villa

1350 E. Murray Canyon Drive

History: A former Palm Springs residence of jazz singer Keely Smith and her longtime partner, the late Bobby Milano, an entertainer and producer, is on the 10th and 11th fairways of Canyon Country Club.

They were the first to live in the 4,400-square-foot-home, said Jesse Garza, portfolio and marketing director for Homes Run Inc., the rental agency managing the property.

It has five bedrooms and four and a half bathrooms. The pool is situated in a private courtyard.

Original to the home: Most of the interior has been renovated since Smith and Milano lived there. But what remains the same are incredible, unobstructed views of Mount San Jacinto.

Cost to rent: \$1,050 a night with a three-night minimum stay.

### Howard Hawk's Casa de Plata Estate

History: According to Palm Springs Rental Agency, Inc., this Palm Springs property was designed by Howard Hughes, who sold it to his friend, Howard Hawks.

A writer, director and producer of Hollywood films, Hawks' career spanned 60 years and films from "His Girl Friday" to "Scarface."

He named the 5,600-square-foot home in the Old Las Palmas neighborhood "Casa de Plata" (House of Silver). It has five bedrooms, five bathrooms and gardens hidden behind the walls of the estate.

Original to the home: Small Mexican hacienda-style fireplaces in every bedroom were there when Hawks

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lived at the home, Salinas said. The layout of the home, including separate wings for bedrooms, has remained untouched.

Cost to rent: \$1,200 per night with a four-night minimum stay.



The Lucille Ball Bungalow at the Ocotillo Lodge in Palm Springs. (Jay Calderon The Desert Sun)



The living room of Frank Sinatra's house in Palm Springs. The house is available for rent at \$2,600 per night. (Richard Lui The Desert Sun)

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