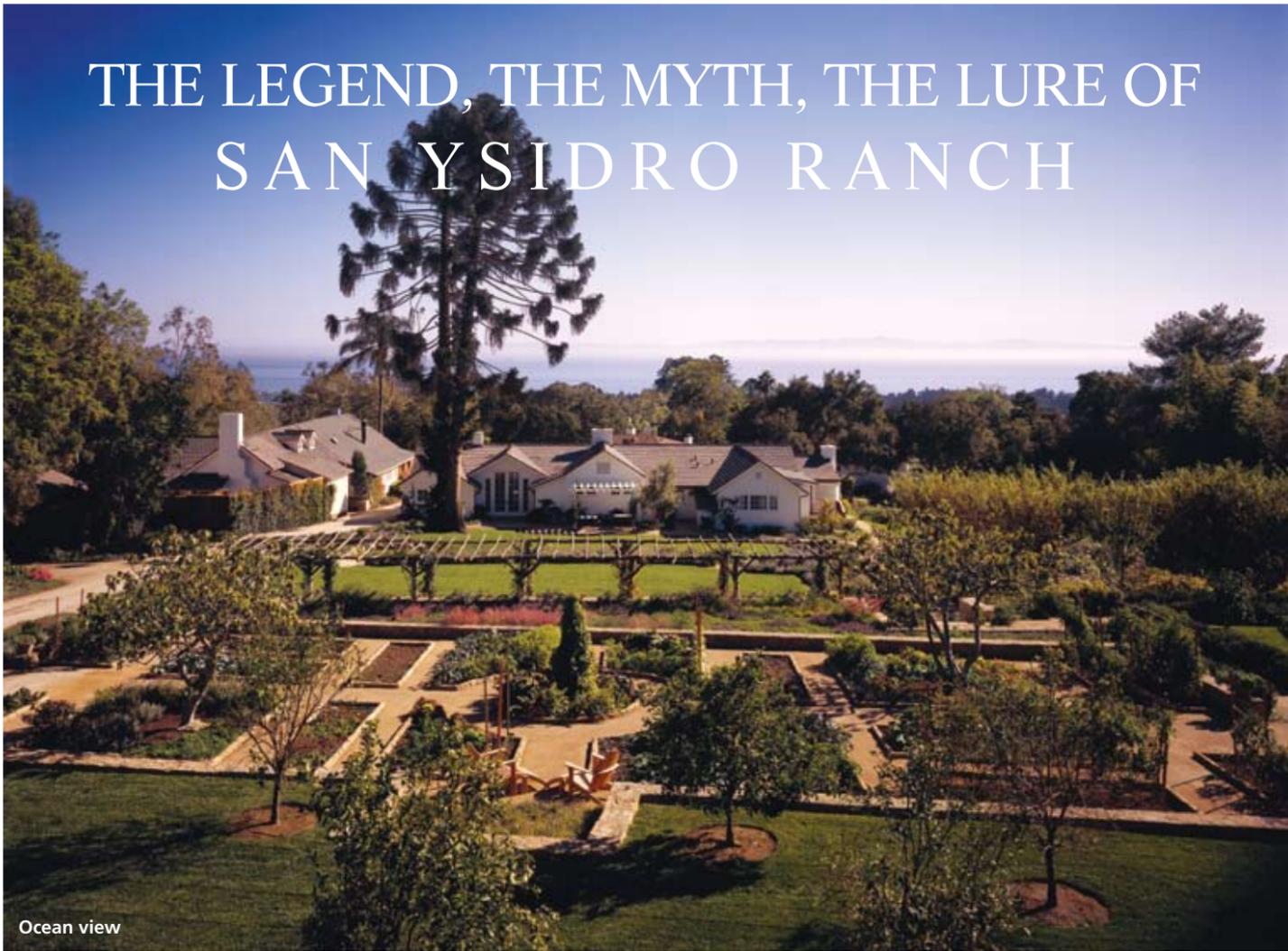


THE LEGEND, THE MYTH, THE LURE OF SAN YSIDRO RANCH



Ocean view

When asked to name my favorite travel destination (and it happens often), I always answer San Ysidro Ranch in Santa Barbara, California. Why? they ask. Well, there's the ocean, the mountains, the breathtaking views, country gardens, a 5,000 bottle wine cellar, forty suites and cottages each with its own private entrance and crackling fireplace, king-sized beds swathed in luxury linens and canopied with white gauze, flowers at every turn emanating delicious fragrances and so much more.

I'm in good company here. This hospitality haven has been sought out for its service and privacy by innumerable famous guests: Audrey Hepburn, Lucille Ball, Bing Crosby, Winston Churchill, Somerset Maugham and Sinclair Lewis to name a few. John and Jacqueline Kennedy honeymooned here. Bobby and Ethel anniversaried here. Vivien Leigh and Laurence Olivier and, more recently, Gwyneth Paltrow and Chris Martin were married in this idyllic setting. Yes, it's romantic and Forbes named it The Best Hotel in America in 2009. In spite of all these attributes, it's the intangible qualities that captivate. The French have a saying for this: the *je ne sais quoi*. Because it's the best, it's pricey and Americans have a saying for this: if you have to ask, you can't afford it.

The ranch is awash in nostalgia and history. Part of a land title by the King of Spain in 1769, it has served as a way station for Franciscan monks in the late 1700s, a citrus ranch in the next century and in the early 1900s was transformed into a hotel for celebrities by actor Ronald Coleman. Saint Isidore (San Ysidro in Spanish) was born into poverty in Madrid in 1070. Working as a farm laborer, he spent much of his time caring for the sick and needy. Legend has it that the Lord sent an angel to help him plow the fields and henceforth, he has been depicted as the patron saint of farmers, always surrounded by a plow, oxen and an angel. His statue sits beneath a jasmine arbor, watching over all who enter. St. Louisans, the Firmin V. Desloges, were one of only two families owning a home in the early '40s on the ranch, the other being the Hollywood actor, Robert Young. Their granddaughter, Lolly Desloge Hogan, recalls riding horses along the beach and having avocado fights with her brother in the orchards.

*Story and photography by Judy Crowell
Additional photography courtesy of San Ysidro Ranch*



Hacienda guest registry



Cottage guest room



St. Isadore guards the ranch



The lily pond

Ty Warner, entrepreneur and Beanie Babies tycoon, purchased the property in 2000 and with \$150 million and great élan brought the property into the twenty-first century. Locals were terrified. Fearful that they would lose the myth and ambience of their historic gem. Not to worry. The eclectic furnishings from Warner's world wide travels include the finest antiques and blend magnificently with original heirlooms, bringing in the neighboring Montecito residents nightly to enjoy sumptuous meals at one of the ranch's two cozy restaurants.



Kennedy cottage bedroom



Stonehouse sitting room



A One Bedroom suite



Jasmine covered walkway



Jasmine cottage



Plow & Angel Restaurant



Plow and Angel entry



Garden view

Chef John Trotta has fresh vegetables and herbs grown on site at his disposal and uses them with flair. The Stonehouse Restaurant is housed in the original sandstone citrus packing house and is the more formal of the two. I could be perfectly content with a glass of wine from their outstanding vintage collection and their bread basket. All dark and creamy breads made in-house and a crispy cracker kind of paper thin flatbread that isn't flat with nuggets of seeds and spices and herbs. All needing no butter or olive oil to melt in your mouth...and, for me, a butter freak, that's saying something! Of course, if I stopped there, I'd be missing their famous tortilla soup, delectable ribs, mac

'n cheese and Meyer lemon meringue pie. Plow & Angel, with Saint Isadore adorning the mantel, has a more casual feel. No reservations accepted here. Locals love to dine cozied up to the fireplace or on the ocean view deck under the Southern California stars. Guests of the feline and canine category are just as welcome as the Hollywood variety. At the Hacienda, a separate dog registry sits next to the human list on the entry desk for paw sign-ins. Amenities include Beanie Baby chewy toys, 8 oz. sirloin burgers, Scottish salmon filets and a masseuse for slow, gentle massages to soothe away fears and increase circulation. No kidding.

Bently, the ranch cat, will greet you upon arrival and you'll never want to leave. I guarantee you that the next time someone asks what your favorite travel destination is, you too will answer San Ysidro Ranch.



Bently, the ranch cat