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santa fe

Once the capital of Southwestern style, the city that has gone from hippie chic to Zen sophistication dazzles Jackie Cooperman with contemporary art that now adorns adobe walls.

Don't be surprised, while slathered in adobe mud at the Avanyu Spa in Santa Fe, to learn that your beautician was a hippie on a Cambridge, Massachusetts commune and an art director in Milan before settling here to design high-end women's clothing. In Santa Fe, she's not unusual, just one of the many new residents drawn to this mountain city by its pristine air quality and its increasingly international community of artists, dealers and monied collectors.

Often associated with New Age nuttiness and Navajo kitsch, Santa Fe now follows only New York as the US city with the largest volume of art gallery sales (\$200m last year). It is a city from which you will return after a long, luxurious weekend sampling first-rate contemporary art galleries, restaurants and boutiques, very likely owning more beautiful things than you did on arrival.

Radiating out from the central Plaza, where Native Americans sell their pottery and silver crafts, the heart of this 62,000-person city is easily traversed on foot. While Santa Fe's adobe buildings tend to blur together (the locals joke that you can paint your home any colour, as long as it's brown), inner courtyards, arcades and atria are full of surprises. A case in point is also

the most appealing and convenient place to stay: The Inn of the Five Graces is an intimate hotel with a traditional adobe exterior and East-meets-West, rococo interiors.

Located on East De Vargas, the city's oldest street, The Inn's 22 rooms are reached through adobe courtyards. Niall Reid, the affable new general manager, used to be at The Savoy in London and the Mandarin Oriental in Hong Kong, and he's bringing that cosmopolitan sensibility to The Inn, offering treats for guests' pets, hosting nightly wine and cheese tastings, and arranging privately guided city tours. Though the outside of The Inn has a quintessentially Southwestern look, the interiors have hand-painted Mexican tile tubs and throw rugs from the Far East.

For those who prefer an even quieter location and don't mind being a 10-minute drive northeast of the town's centre, the Japanese-inspired Ten Thousand Waves is a sybaritic but low-key mountainside option. Opened in 1981 as a collection of traditional outdoor Japanese teak soaking tubs, it now offers

spa treatments – herbal wraps, salt scrubs, facials, massages – and 12 immaculate guest suites spread among juniper, crab apple and pine trees. Buddha-shaped chocolates lie on the pillows and luminous bathrooms have the spa's own yuzu fruit-based toiletries. The most attractive of the suites, Suigetsu, is decorated with antique kimonos and handmade Japanese screens. Still, the spa has not forgotten its sense of place, and even here, in Zen-heaven, the entrance is hung each season with the town's ubiquitous chain of dried red peppers, called *ristra*.

Though its increasingly international bent gives Santa Fe a dynamic and sophisticated feel (and lures part-time residents such as Gene Hackman), those characteristics have long

been ingrained in the city, which was settled by the Spanish in 1610. In the 1920s, artists and their affluent East Coast patrons such as Mabel Dodge Luhan came to Santa Fe and nearby Taos, and you can get a glimpse of their bohemian lives in the first-floor permanent collection of The Museum of Fine Arts on Palace Avenue. Note the photographs of Luhan and her circle: woodblock printmaker Gustave Baumann, painter Georgia O'Keefe and photographers Ansel Adams, Paul Strand, Edward Weston and Alfred Stieglitz.

After the museum, Café Pasqual's, named after the Mexican patron saint of the kitchen and serving breakfast until 3pm, provides leisurely refreshment. Decorated with Mexican tiles and paper cut-outs and with clay pots lining the shelves, Pasqual's is a Santa Fe institution. Locals gossip around a communal table in the centre of the room or sit at smaller tables in front of large windows looking at the brilliant red geraniums planted along Don Gaspar Street.

The restaurant uses organic eggs, beef and pork and makes its own sausage, so if you're feeling like a hearty American-sized breakfast, try the El Presidente – beef strips and smoked poblano chillis on white corn tortillas, with two eggs and

Above: Santa Fe's adobe skyline. Below: rococo style at The Inn of the Five Graces.

