

HISTORICAL BACKGROUNDER

Like Hollywood itself, the history of The Beverly Hills Hotel is a 20th-century tale of glamour, riches and romance. The hotel was built in 1912, before there was even a city called Beverly Hills. Hoping to ignite a land rush, developer Burton Green, President of the Rodeo Land and Water Company, bought land once owned by the Mexican government in the foothills of the Santa Monica Mountains. He hired Margaret J. Anderson to build a sprawling hotel in Mission Revival style on 12 acres, with white stucco exterior and terra cotta-colored roof tiles, and named it after Beverly Farms, his home in Massachusetts. Investing \$500,000, then a staggering sum, Green hoped to lure wealthy Easterners to retire in what were then open fields north of Los Angeles. On opening invitations, Anderson described the property as situated “halfway between Los Angeles and the sea.”

By 1914, Beverly Hills had attracted enough residents to incorporate as a city. Then, in 1920, Mary Pickford and Douglas Fairbanks built their county home, Pickfair, in the nearby hills. Beverly Hills soon became one of the world’s smartest addresses. More stars followed, including Charlie Chaplin, Gloria Swanson, Buster Keaton, Rudolph, Valentino, Tom Mix, and Will Rogers, transforming the bean fields surrounding The Beverly Hills Hotel into prime real estate.

The 1940s were a captivating time for The Beverly Hills Hotel, thanks to new owner Hernando Courtright, a vice president of Bank of America, who purchased it in 1941 with friends including Loretta Young, Irene Dunne and Harry Warner. It was Courtright who renamed El Jardin Restaurant the Polo Lounge in honor of a celebrity band of polo players who toasted victories at the restaurant after matches in the bean fields. Toward the end of the decade the hotel had its first major facelift, and in 1947 it opened the Crystal Room and the Lanai Restaurant (later renamed The Coterie). The exterior was first painted distinctive pink in 1948 to compliment the sunset colors and the country club style of that time. In 1949, architect Paul Revere Williams designed the new Crescent Wing, as well as re-imagined the Polo Lounge, Fountain Coffee Shop and lobby in their still-stylish pink-and-green motif.

In the early 1950s, Detroit real-estate magnate Ben Silberstein purchased the hotel for \$5.5 million. Meanwhile, the hotel’s popularity with royalty and celebrities continued to escalate. Guests included the Duke and Duchess of Windsor, Princess Margaret and Lord Snowdon, King Albert of Belgium, the Crown Prince of Monaco, John Wayne and Henry Fonda. Elizabeth Taylor’s father had an art gallery in the hotel’s lower level, and Liz began a tradition of frequenting bungalows with six of her eight husbands.

In 1956, the hotel’s pool and cabana club were backdrops for Gregory Peck and Lauren Bacall in *Designing Women*. Frank Sinatra, Dean Martin and the rest of the Rat Pack engaged in prodigious drinking bouts in the Polo Lounge. Towards the end of the decade, Marilyn Monroe and Yves Montand checked into bungalows 20 and 21 while filming *Let’s Make Love*.

The Beverly Hills Hotel

Beverly Hills

Dorchester Collection

In the 1970s, John Lennon and Yoko Ono hid out in a bungalow for a week. Charlie Chaplin, a frequent guest in the 1920s, returned in 1972 to accept an honorary Oscar. Faye Dunaway stayed there after receiving her Academy Award for *Network* in 1977. The hotel made another film appearance in 1978 when Broadway playwright Neil Simon, a frequent guest, filmed *California Suite* at the property. With Ben Silberstein's death in 1979, ownership passed to his two daughters, Muriel Slatkin and Seema Boesky, wife of Ivan Boesky, the Wall Street arbitrageur.

The Beverly Hills Hotel went through several ownership changes in the 1980s. The Boeskys gained control in 1986 for \$100 million, and later that year, the hotel was sold for \$136 million to Denver oilman Marvin Davis. In 1987, Davis sold the hotel to its present owner.

On December 30, 1992, the hotel closed for a complete restoration. The project lasted two and a half years and the hotel reopened on June 3, 1995 with upgrades and custom-designed furniture and fittings. Among many apt descriptions, “better than glossy but not glitzy” summed it up best.

In 2012, the hotel's centennial celebration gained national attention and included year-long activities and events to mark the milestone occasion. This included a weekend fundraising event to benefit the Motion Picture Television Fund with participation and performances by Warren Beatty, Mary J Blige, Brett Ratner and Jeffrey Katzenberg. The hotel was also named the first historic landmark in Beverly Hills by the City Council's Cultural Commission, and the plaque denoting this recognition is on display at the signature red carpet entrance. At the landmark designation ceremony, the time capsule that planted at the hotel's entrance in 1993 was dug up and its contents were revealed. They included Milton Berle's cigar, a sketch by Tony Curtis' on a Polo Lounge cocktail napkin, and a Dionne Warwick cassette. Ms. Warwick was present at the event to place something in the new time capsule that is currently planted in front of the hotel and scheduled to be opened in 2037.

During the same centennial year, a thoughtful three-year restoration program to enhance the vibrancy of the hotel began with the unveiling of the new lobby. The four-phase program went on to include a refresh of the Polo Lounge, cabanas and Cabana Café, and all guestrooms and suites.

In 2016, the hotel began a restoration of its historic bungalows, with work being conducted on 21 bungalows in phases through 2018.

Today, The Beverly Hills Hotel is better than real life; it's a fantasy fit for a movie.

###