

HISTORICAL BACKGROUNDER

Nestled in the canyons of Los Angeles, Hotel Bel-Air has been a hideaway for world travelers for well over half a century. A visionary significant in the development of the area, Alphonso E. Bell created Bel-Air Estates in 1922. Bell acquired over 600 acres west of the city of Los Angeles, naming his new purchase “Bel-Air.” Determined that the estates would become an exclusive and upscale neighborhood, he enhanced the surrounding area with new roads, utilities, a country club and lush, exotic vegetation.

What is now Hotel Bel-Air’s main mission-style building was originally built as Bell’s estate planning and sales offices. These offices were located next to the Bel-Air Stables where residents could board their horses and enjoy the miles of equestrian trails winding throughout the canyons.

For the next few decades Bell’s dream flourished. In 1946 Joseph Drown, a hotel entrepreneur from Texas, purchased 18 acres, and the land offices, and began plans to create an elegant pastoral hotel hideaway encompassing most of the land. Drown immediately hired architect Burton Schutt to convert the buildings and construct the 62 rooms of what was to become Hotel Bel-Air. Drown transformed the grounds into lush, beautiful gardens, adding Swan Lake to the picturesque front lawn. He had a vision of creating a natural California oasis, planting palms, ficus trees and perennial blooms. Drown also closed the Stone Canyon stables and built the sparkling oval-shaped pool at the site of the original riding ring. The hotel opened on August 24, 1946.

Hotel Bel-Air quickly became a favorite of the rich and famous. Hollywood celebrities and world dignitaries were frequent guests at the glamorous retreat. Hotel Bel-Air attracted privacy seeking celebrities including Grace Kelly, Jackie Gleason, Cary Grant, Elizabeth Taylor and Marilyn Monroe. Today, the hotel is still considered a legend, drawing the latest Hollywood style-makers and stars. The exclusivity and tranquility of the hotel has appealed to the likes of Julia Roberts, Oprah Winfrey, Tom Cruise, Nicole Kidman and many other Hollywood notables.

Over the years, the hotel developed into one of the most luxuriant and respected properties in the world. As the hotel and city have matured, Hotel Bel-Air’s original ambiance remained intact. Extensive modern additions were made in 1982 when Rosewood Hotels & Resorts purchased the hotel. Ongoing renovations have continued over the years to bring the latest fabrics and fresh interiors to the hotel.

Now managed by Dorchester Collection, Hotel Bel-Air closed in September 2009 for its most recent refurbishment, a two-year renovation spearheaded by revered design firms Alexandra Champalimaud and Rockwell Group. The iconic hotel reopened on October 14, 2011, welcoming old friends and new guests to experience its refreshed elegance and glamorous charm that remains reminiscent of its past and Hollywood’s Golden Age.

Historical Timeline

1920's - Alphonso E. Bell created Bel-Air Estates in 1922. Bell acquired over 600 acres west of the city of Los Angeles, naming his new purchase "Bel-Air." Determined that the estates would become an exclusive and upscale neighborhood, he enhanced the surrounding area with new roads, utilities, a country club and lush, exotic vegetation. In 1925, Mr. Alphonso Bell built the sales offices for Bell's home sites, which is now Hotel Bel-Air. When Bell began to subdivide, he installed gas and water. Expensive landscaping was also provided throughout Bel-Air. All the streets were given Italian names by Mrs. Bell.

1925 – What is now Hotel Bel-Air's main mission-style building was originally built as Bell's estate planning and sales offices. These offices were located next to the Bel-Air Stables where residents and locals, like MGM star Edward Ashley who performed in 60 films for Metro Goldwyn Mayer including *Pride and Prejudice*, could board their horses and enjoy the miles of equestrian trails winding throughout the canyons.

1946 – In 1946, Alphonso Bell sold 18 acres on Stone Canyon Road, including Bell's estate planning and sales offices, to Joseph Drown. Drown was a Texas investor that had worked his way up from a clerking job to Vice President of Hilton Hotels. He then branched out into collecting hotels of his own, invading California in 1939 and acquiring half-dozen hotels from Los Angeles to San Diego. He purchased the Bel-Air property and immediately began remodeling and adding buildings to create the rambling complex of guest rooms and suites. Drown never hired a landscape architect to develop a concept for the grounds. Wanting an informal and natural look, he directed the gardeners himself. He transformed the grounds into lush, beautiful gardens, adding Swan Lake to the picturesque front lawn. He had a vision of creating a natural California oasis, planting palms, ficus trees, peach trees, age-old sycamores and perennial blooms. Drown planted over 4,000 plants and trees on the property, making it the most beautiful, romantic, and exclusive hotel in the world. Drown also closed the Stone Canyon stables and built the sparkling oval-shaped pool at the site of the original riding ring.

Drown hired architect Burton Schutt, who happened to live in a house next to the site to carry out renovation and building plans. Existing structures were transformed into rooms and suites. Initial new construction included the restaurant, its kitchen, and the Garden and Pavilion Rooms. The paddock became the Bel-Air's signature oval pool, and the stables became cabanas. Gardens were planted, pathways wound through the grounds, and the stream was dammed to create a pond for swans.

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Hotel Bel-Air
Los Angeles
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1950 – “The Company She Keeps” is filmed at Hotel Bel-Air. The film featured Lizabeth Scott, Jane Greer, and Dennis O’Keefe. When this film was made, Howard Hughes (also a frequent guest at the hotel) owned both RKO, which produced it, and TWA, whose logo is featured prominently on the airplane in the airport sequence.

1950’s – Hotel Bel-Air attracted privacy seeking celebrities including Grace Kelly, Jackie Gleason, Cary Grant, Elizabeth Taylor and Marilyn Monroe. Marilyn Monroe lived at the hotel in her own suite when she was married to Joe DiMaggio.

1952 – Tony Curtis lived at Hotel Bel-Air. He describes it as the “best wife” he’s ever had. “If I could, I would marry the Bel-Air tomorrow,” he said. “She doesn’t ask me where I’ve been all night. She doesn’t mind if I bring a girl home. She makes my bed every day, feeds me regularly, takes my messages faithfully and puts my laundry in the little boxes tied up with ribbon.”

1953 – A party was held at Hotel Bel-Air for *Redbook* magazine in which Marilyn Monroe attended and was chosen as the best young box-office personality.

1954 – Grace Kelly was a guest at Hotel Bel-Air. Later a suite was named The Grace Kelly suite after Kelly had chosen the suite for her post-Oscar photo shoot.

1956 – “Four Girls in Town” was filmed at Hotel Bel-Air. The film was about four young starlets, from various parts of the world, who are called to Hollywood to test for the lead in a major film. This Universal International Pictures film starred George Nader, Julie Adams and Sydney Chaplin.

1957 – “Man on Fire” was filmed at Hotel Bel-Air. This MGM domestic drama was directed by Randal MacDougall and starred Bing Crosby, Inger Stevens and Mary Fickett.

1961 – Four-time Academy Award Nominee Montgomery Clift lived in a suite at Hotel Bel-Air. Entering the 1950s Clift was one of the most sought-after leading men in Hollywood, he was nominated three times for Best Actor and once for Best Supporting Actor.

1961 – “That Touch of Mink” starring Cary Grant and Doris Day was filmed at Hotel Bel-Air. This movie was a three time Oscar nominee and a Golden Globe winner for Best Motion Picture – Comedy.

1962 - Marilyn Monroe posed for photographer Bert Stern at Hotel Bel-Air, just weeks prior to her death. The shoot commissioned by *Vogue* resulted of thousands of images and a published book, *The Last Sitting*.

1965 – Dean Martin gets a shower from Stella Stevens’ bathing cap in the opening sequence of Irving Allen’s “The Silencers,” a Columbia release in color starring Martin as Matt Helm. This scene was filmed at Hotel Bel-Air’s pool.

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1967 – John D. Rockefeller IV, an German-American oil magnate and philanthropist, founder of the Standard Oil Company, which dominated the oil industry and was the first great U.S. business trust, and wife Sharon Rockefeller stayed at the Hotel Bel-Air on their honeymoon.

1970 – The hotel underwent a major restoration which took up an amount of three years. The redecoration was spearheaded by a young Cuban architect named Manuel S. Alavarez, who was famous for having built many celebrity homes in Los Angeles and Palm Springs. His objective was to bring the colors of the gardens into the rooms and he really strived for a non-hotel look.

1971 – Princess Grace of Monaco stayed at Hotel Bel-Air while vacationing from her castle in Monaco.

1975 - Richard Nixon worked on his memoirs in the Swan Lake suite.

1982 – The hotel was purchase by Dallas business woman Caroline Hunt and was therefore affiliated to her Hotel Group called Rosewood. She also bought the adjoining property and added the north wing with additional 30 rooms. She renovated the property and had five different designers work on a new design in order to refine the look.

1983 – Academy Award Nominee and glamorous femme fatale Lana Turner sipped a glass of wine on her patio at Hotel Bel-Air. The hotel was Lana’s oasis and escape from her hectic career.

1989 – The hotel was acquired by the Sazale-Bel-Air Group. They continued to keep up the legacy of the hotel by maintaining its unique qualities.

2000 – The hotel was purchased by Prince Jefri Bolkiah, the brother of the Sultan of Brunei.

2008 – The hotel is added to the prestigious portfolio of Dorchester Collection. The hotels in the collection are icons in their own right with world-wide reputations as places offering the best and most sought-after experiences of good living, charm, elegance and service. Each hotel celebrates its own original character enriched by contemporary styling and state of the art facilities.

2009 - The Hotel Bel-Air closed to begin an extensive renovation throughout all of its 91 guestrooms and various public spaces, spearheaded by revered design firms Alexandra Champalimaud and Rockwell Group.

2011 – The iconic hotel reopened, welcoming old friends and new guests to experience it’s refreshed elegance and glamorous charm that remains reminiscent of its past and Hollywood’s Golden Age.

2013 through 2018– Hotel Bel-Air earned the coveted Forbes Five Star rating