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Ranch Life

The barn doors are soon to swing open to a new Malibu retreat boasting sublime farm fare and luxury accommodations

BY NORA ZELEVANSKY

Landscape architect Scott Shrader designed the grounds surrounding the 14 well-appointed cottages.

**K**urt Steeber is a self-proclaimed “nutritional alchemist.” He can spin simple baby artichokes into culinary gold. In more conventional terms, though, he’s the inaugural chef at a new soul-searching health retreat—The Ranch at Live Oak Malibu. Starting September 5th, on 120 canyon-adjacent acres, 14 guests will drop their designer duffles in organic-style bungalows and begin six-day, seven-night explorations into physical and mental re-calibration. This luxurious take on ashram-modeled detox hardly involves monastic mush, however. With produce plucked from local farms, Santa Monica’s famed market and onsite orchards and gardens, Steeber prepares flavorful vegetarian meals at The Ranch that don’t taste like you’re sacrificing.

While Hollywood playgrounds such as the Malibu Country Mart are just down PCH, the lush ranch feels truly secluded. As guests approach via winding mountain roads, they’re more likely to spot red-tailed hawks than cars. The main “hacienda”—now the owners’ home—once belonged to western star William Boyd (aka Hopalong Cassidy). The new proprietors prefer to stay anonymous, though, and let the land speak for itself: “You can’t really own this ranch; you become custodian of it. It’s the spirit of the place.”

Fine. But Steeber certainly owns the kitchen.

For the chef, a veteran of Big Sur’s Ventana Inn, food is essential to The Ranch’s detox experience, which aims to eliminate 5% of total body weight in fat with outdoor, low-impact exercise and mod-

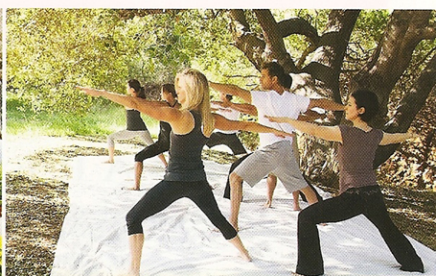
erated meals. After a 30-day at-home prep, groups—transported on Sundays from the Fairmont Miramar—settle into the cottages, named for resident animal pals. Each features a limestone bathroom, custom Alta Pampa blankets, Turkish towels and garden bouquets. “It should feel like you just arrived at someone’s chic *estancia* in Argentina,” notes one of the keepers.

The Ranch’s physical program, helmed by Malibu Ashram veteran Marc Alabanza, aims to eliminate stress through 5:30am wakeup calls, Santa Monica Mountain hikes, yoga, naptime and afternoon massages. Meanwhile, Steeber prepares 1,500 daily calories of market-driven dishes such as celery root gnocchi with chanterelle mushrooms and Brussels sprouts leaves, and “mocktails”—like a Kombucha Old-Fashioned with agave, orange peel and muddled cherries. In experiential, health-conscious cuisine, Steeber believes beautifully presented, flavorful ingredients speak for themselves: “What constitutes ‘healthy’ for me is organic, from the earth, whole fruits, vegetables and grains and limited dairy, mainly eggs. We’ll make our own vinegar and ketchup from our tomatoes.” Elective activities, for interested guests, include farm harvesting or producing artisanal products such as olive oil, cured olives, honey and goat cheese.

The proprietors earnestly hope people who visit The Ranch will return annually. “Coming to the same place each year really marks your progress,” they say.

Hey, anything to taste Kurt Steeber’s baby artichoke purée. [theranchmalibu.com](http://theranchmalibu.com).

Activities on The Ranch’s 120 canyon acres include hiking and yoga—all expertly balanced with relaxation time, massage and alfresco dining.



COTTAGES: STEPHEN BUSKEN