

Old School Arizona:

Seven Historic Places That Have Stood the Test of Time

By Tiffany Owens



COURTESY OF HOTEL VALLEY HO, PHOENIX

Ask anyone what they find most exciting about Phoenix or Scottsdale and they're likely to cite great golfing, posh resorts, or the hottest new restaurant or nightclub of the moment. But what longtime residents soon come to understand is that despite the cities' exponential growth, many of the popular "new" spots are merely the result of another venue closing; in fact, some have been known to change hands several times within a year.

Sure, it's depressing to see your favorite places fall victim to mediocrity or changing times and tastes, especially those that were the talk of the town in their day. After all, who can forget LuluBelle's with its Wild West dancehall décor — the place to eat-and-be-seen in Scottsdale for decades? Or the once celebrity-drenched Safari, Scottsdale's original upscale resort with its glitzy jungle décor, pink-and-green pool cabanas and infamous coffee shop that served up jet-fuel coffee to bleary-eyed revelers for 40 years?

Any Phoenician worth their salt already knows about the Biltmore, Taliesin West, Wrigley Mansion and the still retro-swank, but newly refurbished Hotel Valley Ho and legendary Trader Vic's restaurant. But many may not know about the following old school establishments, whose longevity is pure testament to the fact that they've been doing things right for decades.

PHOENIX/ SCOTTSDALE

Cattle Track Arts Compound

The Cattle Track Arts Compound is a one-of-a-kind artist colony located on the historic Cattle Track property. Headed up by owner and arts maven Janie Ellis, the colony offers art exhibitions, artists' studios and work spaces, a colonial antique gallery, Women's Theater performances, as well as limited-edition fine art books beautifully crafted on an old-fashioned letter press.

Indeed, no Scottsdale arts experience is complete without a visit to Cattle Track. In recent years, new studio and exhibition space have been added to fortify the existing arts colony. But arts aficionados have long known about Cattle Track (and most likely worked alongside the late Rachael Ellis or her daughter Janie), since the Ellis family first built their house, stables and barn in the 1930s. Arizona arts luminaries Philip C. Curtis and Fritz Scholder also spent many prolific years living and painting at Cattle Track.

Looking through the lens of Cattle Track's historic architecture and preserved desert landscape, it's easy to be transported back to the early days of Scottsdale, when Rachael's greyhounds roamed the land in packs and such celebrated "creatives" as Louise Nevelson might come for a stay. Yet most locals have probably driven by this hidden gem numerous times without even knowing of its existence. And once you get there, you understand: Cattle Track is its own little universe

smack dab in the heart of Scottsdale — a true piece of living history.

Cattle Track Arts Compound is located at 105 Cattle Track Rd., between Scottsdale & Miller Roads from McDonald. Open 10 a.m.-5 p.m., Monday through Saturday. For event information, call 480-607-3658.

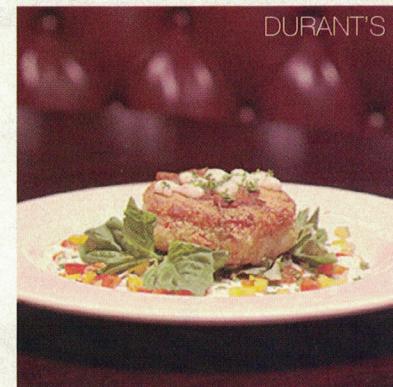
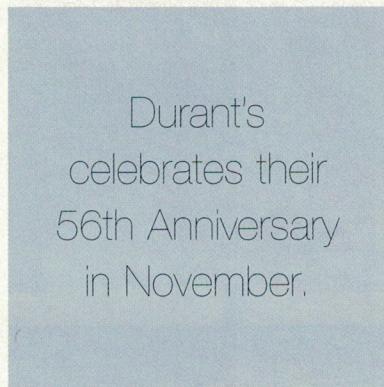
Durant's

The legendary Durant's has endured since 1950 in the same downtown location, with the same menu, served by many of the same original tuxedo-clad wait staff. To this day, it remains the kind of establishment where you can easily envision a young Frank Sinatra holding court amongst the red

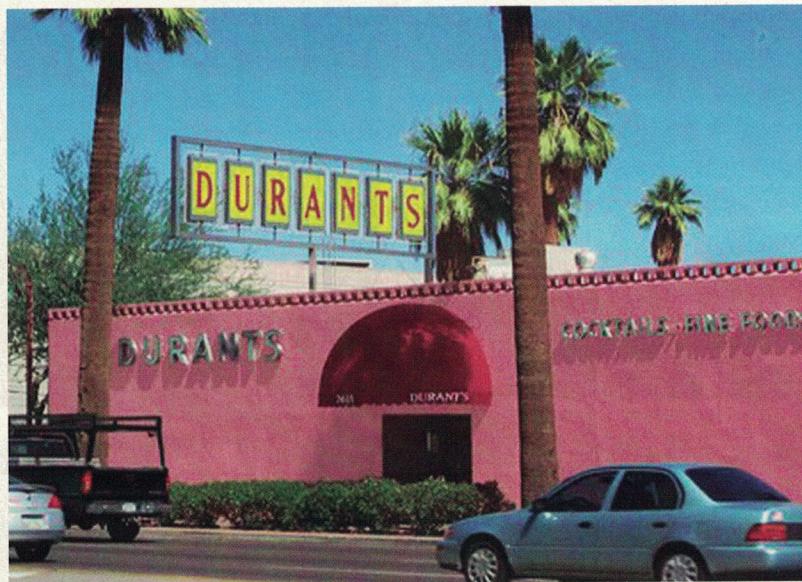
leather banquets and flocked-velvet wallpaper.

Patrons still use the famous back kitchen entrance — like any good speakeasy — and take their place at the bar for some of the Valley's best martinis, or at a cushy booth to sample some of Durant's mouthwatering seafood, Florida stone crab (in season) or mesquite-broiled steaks, like the infamous 20-ounce Delmonico.

"Durant's Debris" is a lounge area staple, rumored to be the leftovers of all the fine steaks served at Durant's. The Debris is served as two skewers of mesquite-broiled cubes of filet mignon, rib eye and New York strip, separated by scal-



COURTESY OF DURANT'S, PHOENIX

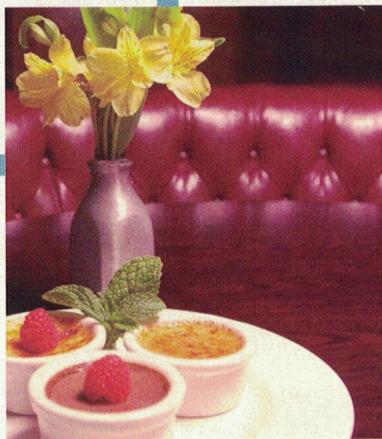


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lions, with garlic aioli for dipping.

Longtime locals still reminisce about Jack Durant, who died in 1987 and left his house and an annual allowance of \$50,000 to Humble, his English bulldog. Other colorful lore includes how he married a movie star, helped build Good Sam hospital, harangued his patrons and, for a time in the '50s, was one of the FBI's Top Ten Most Dangerous Men in Arizona.

Durant's past may have been notorious, but his favorite adage has long served as the secret to the restaurant's lasting success: "In my humble opinion, good friends, great steaks and the best booze are the necessities of life."



Durant's is at 2611 N. Central Ave., open for lunch, dinner and cocktails on weekdays; dinner and drinks only on weekends. Visit www.durantsaz.com or call 602-264-5967.

El Chorro Lodge

El Chorro Lodge was built in 1937 on fourteen acres in Paradise Valley, which used to be considered quite a distance from town. Owner Joe Miller originally started work at El Chorro as a bartender in 1953, when he was barely 21. In 1973, Miller and wife Evie bought the lodge, whose clientele at that time included Clark Gable, Zsa Zsa Gabor, Liberace, Gene Autry and

John Wayne. "It was quite a hangout," he recalls.

There haven't been many changes to El Chorro Lodge or its menu in the last sixty years; they still serve their infamous complimentary sticky buns, alongside such old school favorites as chateaubriand for two, beef Stroganoff and trout amandine.

But it isn't the food that keeps the regulars coming back for more. Instead, it's the attentive staff, the laid-back clientele, and the classic ambience. Grab a friend or two and head to the lush patio to stave off chilly evenings by the giant fireplace, or enjoy a magnificent sunset over El Charro's view of the breathtaking Phoenix Mountain Preserve.

El Chorro Lodge is located at 5550 E. Lincoln Dr. in Paradise Valley. Call 480-948-5170 for reservations and information.

Bikini Lounge

Hardcore regulars, artists, musicians and hipsters mingle easily at Phoenix's sole remaining tiki bar, the Bikini Lounge. Owners Mary Fimbres and Richard Gordon claim the old-school tiki décor hasn't changed much since the Bikini opened in 1947. Its signature grass-skirted island girl oil painting still hangs behind the bar, its bamboo walls and thatched ceiling in remarkable condition.

The Bikini is situated at the triangular convergence of Grand Avenue, 15th Avenue and Roosevelt Street. To this day, it remains the kind of taproom where you'd expect to find Charles Bukowski or Tom Waits scribbling furious, poetic odes to its legacy in the corner.

Attracted by its funky ambience, phenomenal jukebox, comfy ban-

quettes and regulation-sized pool table, Grand Avenue's underground artists and the eclectic First Friday crowd have adopted the Bikini as their chief hangout. But don't expect fruity, blended concoctions adorned with little umbrellas here; the Bikini's beverages du jour are American draught beers (including the ever-popular \$1 PBR Sunday special) and inexpensive, no-frills cocktails.

The Bikini regularly holds their own art exhibitions, plus a local DJ duo spins themed tunes from their immense record collection at "Juke La Box" on Tuesday nights. But on First Fridays, it's standing room only, so get there early if you'd like a prime seat to enjoy the post-art-walk show.

The Bikini Lounge is at 1502 Grand Ave. in Phoenix. Call 602-252-0472 for information.

Los Dos Molinos

It's always worth making a trip out South Mountain way to see the cozy Spanish hacienda-style complex formerly owned by cowboy film star Tom Mix. The restaurant resides in Mix's former horse stable, now decorated with beer signs, sombreros, and strings of chili peppers.

The New Mexican fare at Los Dos Molinos isn't nearly as fiery as it used to be, but the generous combination plates and prickly-pear margaritas are just as tasty and affordable as they've always been. Brave diners can still make a special request for the extra-hot salsa, but heed the restaurant owner's warning on the menu: "Sorry, we do not provide a mild sauce, I do not know how to make 'mild.'"

The original Los Dos Molinos is at 8646 S. Central Ave. in south

Phoenix. Call 602-243-9113 for information. No reservations accepted.

TUCSON

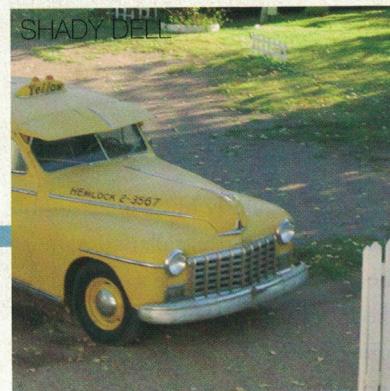
Hotel Congress

Hotel Congress has been the heart of Tucson history and nightlife for nearly a century and is Arizona's longest-running hotel in continual operation. From the old, working switchboard at the front desk to the antique amenities in guest rooms, like claw-foot tubs, iron beds, retro phones and radios, the Congress has

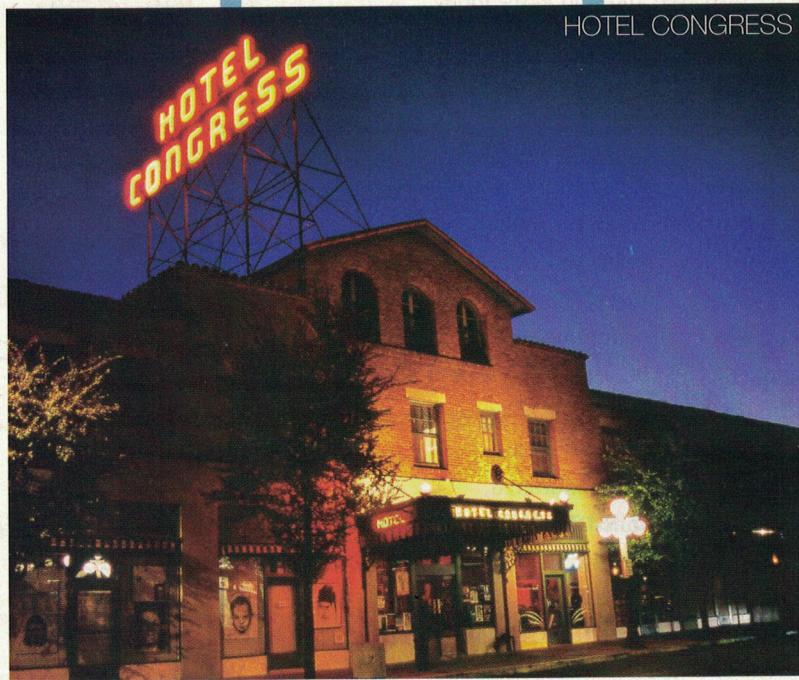
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worked hard to maintain its historic ambience over the years. While modern travelers might lament that rooms don't have TVs, others will appreciate its adherence to yesteryear.

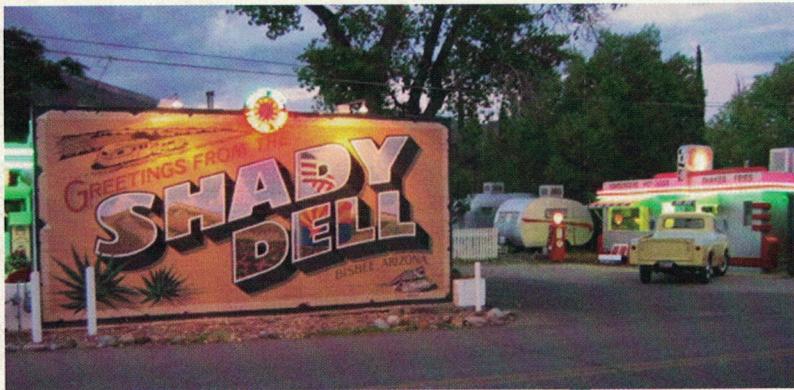
At the same time, its Tap Room (open since the '30s with the best jukebox in town) and Club Congress nightclub that showcases local and world-class entertainment have been local favorite watering holes for decades. The Cup Café is also not to be missed, serving made-from-scratch breakfasts, lunches and dinners alongside an impressive wine list and some of the best coffee drinks in town. In addition, the



HOTEL CONGRESS



PHOTOS BY TIFFANY OWENS



For fans of '50s nostalgia Shady Dell is your time-travel nirvana.

Congress regularly hosts indie film showcases and art installations. For the ultimate souvenir, be sure to check out their yearly calendars featuring beautiful señoritas, matadors and other vintage painting reproductions, displayed and sold in the lobby.

Originally built in 1919 in response to Tucson's growing cattle and railroad industry, Hotel Congress was one of the town's original and most celebrated places of lodging. However, the hotel may best be known as the site where the long-elusive, bank-robbing Dillinger gang was finally captured on January 22, 1934, after a fire started in the basement. As he was led off by police, an amazed John Dillinger purportedly muttered, "Well, I'll be damned."

Hotel Congress is at 311 East Congress Street. Call 520-622-8848 or visit www.hotelcongress.com for reservations.

BISBEE

The Shady Dell & Dot's Diner

For fans of '50s nostalgia or those who salivate at the sight of a vintage trailer (or simply wish for the perfect pink flamingo backdrop to drink Mai Tais by), The Shady Dell Trailer Park is your time-travel nirvana. Or, as the Smithsonian aptly put it, "The Shady Dell must be as fascinating for trailer historians as the National Museum of Natural History is for dinosaur buffs."

Here, guests get to stay in one of nine lovingly restored aluminum-bodied tag-along trailers: a '35 Homemade, '49 Airstream, '50 Spartanette, '50 Spartan Manor, '51 Spartan Mansion, '51 Royal Mansion, '54 Crown, '57 El Rey or '57 Airfloat Flagship. Owners Ed Smith and Rita Personett are sticklers for details: from the trailers' Formica countertops and plexiglass shades to vintage martini shakers and real record players that spin classic 45s and 78s. Some of the larger trailers have old black-and-white TVs that play films and shows of the era, like the Lucille Ball and Desi Arnaz classic, The Long, Long Trailer.

Guests can also choose to stay in a vintage dry-docked and champagne-stocked Chris Craft yacht or a '47 Airporter "Tiki Bus" — dubbed the Dell's "Polynesian Paradise" — decked out with life-size tiki carvings by Arizona artist Dennis Hamblin. Rates range from \$40 to \$125 a night. But make your reservations early, the Shady Dell has been known to be booked months in advance.

At the front of the Shady Dell property sits Dot's Diner, an authentic 1957 Valentine 10-stool diner that once ran a brisk business in the '50s and '60s as "Burger Bar No. 3" on Los Angeles' famed Ventura Boulevard. Then-owner John Hart had a simple philosophy: "[Our] diner was small and real personal. You couldn't sit at the counter without getting involved in conversation. A guy might come in for coffee, but he came back for the company."

That same inspiration carries over today. Painstakingly restored to its original art deco splendor, Dot's Diner re-opened in May 1997, with Dot Bozeman as "chief cook and bottle washer." Serving breakfast and lunch five days a week, the diner sticks to the basics of good food at good prices, serving up hearty breakfasts and burritos, burgers, sandwiches or meatloaf for lunch, plus their "workmen's specials," ranging from pasta to fish-n-chips platters.

For directions to Shady Dell or reservations, call 520-432-3567 or visit www.theshadydell.com. Dot's Diner is open Wednesday through Sunday, 7:30 a.m. to 2p.m., 520-432-1112. H

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