



A bird's-eye view of a flowery courtyard at Phoenix's five-star Biltmore Hotel.

THE JEWEL'S GLITTER

At the Arizona Biltmore, you can eat marmalade made from the fruit of the hotel's own orange trees. The list of other trees and plants used on its 200 acres is mind-boggling.

by Carl Kovac

The Arizona Biltmore, Phoenix's world-class five-star resort hotel, is a place where you can stop and smell the flowers—and pick them, if you so desire. You don't even have to be a guest.

Opened in 1929 on 200 acres of citrus orchard land in the shadow of Squaw Peak, the Biltmore bills itself as "The Jewel of the Desert; a hide-away for the famous, the wealthy and those with discerning tastes." Ronald and Nancy Reagan honeymooned at the Biltmore. So did Harpo Marx and his bride. The guest list of national political figures, stage and movie greats and other celebrities is pages long.

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The Biltmore has held a five-star rating for 27 consecutive years.

Contributing in no small part to the jewel's glitter are approximately 15 acres of carefully manicured grass, indigenous and naturalized trees and shrubs, and large, colorful flower beds.

An award-winner

Keeping all of this in award-winning shape are some 25 full-time employees under the direction of landscape manager Thomas Harrow. They obviously do their jobs well.

In 1983, the hotel was given the Environmental Quality Achievement Award by the American Hotel and Motel Association. The following year it earned a professional grounds maintenance Grand Award. In 1985, it won the Arizona Landscape Contractors' Association's Judge's Award and placed second last year in landscape and irrigation competition.

But then, this elegant oasis is no stranger to awards; the Biltmore has held a Mobil Travel Guide five-star rating for 27 consecutive years, longer than any other hotel in the United States. A petaled plaque planted in the hotel's North Patio—five purple alyssum "stars" in a square of white alyssum—extols this achievement. Flowery self-praise indeed.

Some 150,000 flowers—petunias,

pansies, snapdragons, begonias, stock dianthus and "a lot of geraniums" also are planted each October, Harrow says. "We plant flowers everywhere in the fall; under shrubs, behind the hotel—anyplace there's dirt.

"In the summer, we plant about 40,000 zinnias, vinca and portulaca. There are only a few flowers that can take 110-degree temperatures. We also like to rotate the flower beds in the summer, leaving at least one empty for six months. We treat each bed every three years with fungicides

and add new potting soil and mulch."

Summer grass

Summer grass at the Biltmore is hybrid Tifgreen; winter grass is perennial rye. "Both go dormant about October," says Harrow. "In the fall we scalp thatch and overseed with about 14,000 pounds of perennial rye. In May, the summer grass automatically comes up, but we fertilize and do some thatching."

You'd expect to see a lot of palm trees dotting the Biltmore's land-

scape, given the location and climate. You'd be right. "There are five varieties of palms on the grounds," Harrow says. "But we also have palo verde, mesquite, some cactus, olive trees, ficus, hibiscus, magnolias, evergreen pears, four varieties of pines and five different types of citrus trees. About 85 percent of the plant material on the hotel grounds is not native to the area. We're constantly getting new vegetation in the valley every year, which is why I have to keep going to school."

A tale of two gems: Gable-and-Lombard's and the Biltmore's

Frankly, Scarlett, he probably did give a damn.

When Clark Gable, who shall forever be remembered as Rhett Butler in the screen classic "Gone With The Wind," lost his wedding ring on the Arizona Biltmore's Adobe Golf Course, it's safe to assume he was at least somewhat concerned. How would he explain this to his wife, Carole Lombard? A wedding band simply doesn't fly off a finger, no matter how powerful the golf swing.

As luck would have it, however, a greenkeeper found the ring and returned it. Gable was reportedly "overjoyed."

The King was just one of hundreds of movie stars, big-name entertainers and athletes, politicians, public figures and other celebrities whose spikes have punctured the turf of what is now the Arizona Biltmore Country Club over the years.

The club consists of the 6,783-yard Adobe course, which went into operation in 1929, and the 6,397-yard Links Golf Course, which opened in 1976. Both are par 72.

Once a part of the resort hotel, the club became a separate entity in 1977. It is now owned by Phoenix businessmen Art Martori and Alan Mishkin and the Rostland Corp., headquartered in Toronto, a former owner and now supervising manager of the Biltmore.

Club membership is 350, but non-members are welcome on a tee time-available basis. Biltmore guests are offered reduced greens fees and preferred tee times over other non-members. Play averages 100,000 rounds a year, according to golf course supervisor Turner Reany.

With an annual budget of \$800,000, Reany oversees a crew of some 32 greenkeepers, equipment operators, mechanics, foremen and laborers. His equipment inventory includes seven riding mowers for maintaining greens, two hydraulically-driven reel mowers used on fairways, two rough mowers, two triplex mowers for



A guesthouse like the one in which Clark Gable and Carole Lombard may have stayed.

collars and tee banks, three trap rakes, five vacuums for manicuring and clip sweeping, and 17 carts to move his crews around.

Common bermudagrass is used on fairways and roughs and hybrid bermuda on tees and greens. The courses are overseeded every October with perennial ryegrass. "We shut down one course while we overseed the other," Reany says. "We also have underground, wall-to-wall automatic irrigation. We water the courses daily. We're dealing with temperatures up to 115 degrees in the summer and in the 60s in winter."

Reany reports few problems with pests and weeds. "We spray Dursban and diazinon as needed to kill cut worms and sod webworms on the greens and use pre-emergence sprays to control crabgrass, goosegrass and poa annua."

That Reany and his crews keep the two courses in tournament condition is attested to by the fact that the LPGA has chosen the Arizona Biltmore Country Club as the site of its annual Sandstone Turquoise Classic the past four years.

—Carl Kovac



Biltmore guests enjoy a round of desert golf—on wonderfully green grass with lush vegetation all around.

Citrus plantings include orange, lemon, lime, grapefruit and tangelo trees.

"We also have some sour orange trees," Harrow says, noting that "the fruit is picked each year and used by the hotel for marmalade."

The arsenal

All of this—grass, flowers, trees and shrubs—is watered by an auto-

mated underground irrigation system. Use of insecticides is limited "as much as possible," says Harrow, "for the safety of the guests and employees. We try not to spray. We inject the trees and use spreaders to apply granular insecticides to the flower beds. We do use 100-gallon sprayers to fertilize the grass and flowers."

Included in the Biltmore's land-

scaping inventory are two tractors, two triplex reel mowers, 18 power mowers, cord trimmers, chain saws, turf vacuums and electric carts to enable crews to get around the grounds.

"We also have our own street sweeper," Harrow says. "There are 15 acres of parking lots and streets on the property, and we clean them daily."

Unlike some posh resort hotels, the Biltmore has a policy of opening its grounds to the public. "We have one-hour Arizona Biltmore Grounds Tours twice a week. We get a lot of interest from organizations and schools," reports Harrow, who leads the tours. "We want the public as well as guests to use the grounds; to enjoy the flowers and pick them, if they want to.

"We have weddings, circuses, auto shows and even rodeos here, with as many as 1,500 people out on the grass," he adds. This makes it hard on Harrow and his crew at times, but they don't seem to mind. "After an event, it's up to us to go out the next day and restore the grounds like nothing ever happened. And we do it. These people (the landscaping crew) really enjoy their jobs." **WT&T**

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