

Warm Up to the WIGWAM GOLF RESORT & SPA

BY KAREN VILLALPANDO

It's December 31, and many of you might be thinking about New Year's resolutions. "In 2010, I plan to exercise more, relax, spend more time with the family," you might ponder.

I say start the new decade at a destination where you can accomplish all of that: the Wigwam Resort in Western Phoenix. The resort has been around for eight decades, maintaining a sense of nostalgia while updating it in authentic Arizona style. The owners of the Goodyear Tire Company originally purchased 16,000 acres in the Litchfield Valley to cultivate cotton. Later, they transformed the grounds into a retreat for their executives and their families. In the early days, guests would roam the acreage on horseback, tying up outside their casitas, the lodge and the church.

Wigwam's accommodations offer such a variety, every guest will feel pampered here. Visit their website to see examples of the different accommodations available.

Need more relaxation in 2010? The Red Door Spa is the ideal place to find it. Continuing the Southwestern feel, the spa's warm and inviting décor promotes a sense of calmness. The diverse menu of treatments available may cause the only consternation of your visit- which to choose? I opted for the Red Door Signature Escape, which was a 50-minute massage, followed by a Red Door manicure and pedicure, and a make-up refresher. It was 4 hours of bliss, totally relaxing. My massage was perfectly comforting and soothing, I was in a quasi-state of sleep, yet was fully cognizant of where I was. Afterwards, I enjoyed the whirlpool and

facility is magnificent. I could almost smell the hot dogs as we stared through the fence, waiting for spring.

Our trip, however, was a "marriage booster shot" so the kids were at home.

But sometimes, that's just what a relationship needs! A dose of romance goes a long way. A long walk through the 8,000 rose bushes and other foliage on the property is therapeutic as well as beautiful. The Wigwam even has its own historian, who also serves as a full-time caretaker of the rose bushes. He is a walking encyclopedia of history and information about the resort.

Dining at the Wigwam is superb. When we arrived, we enjoyed a late afternoon lunch overlooking the golf course at The Grill at the Wigwam. We shared the delicious blackened shrimp and blue crab Louie sandwich with fried black forest ham, caramelized celery and red onion, Thousand Island dressing, lettuce and tomato. If the chef can make a sandwich taste this good, what can he do with an entrée? We ventured back that night for dinner and were delighted to see his innovation taken a step further. Matthew Steffen is at the helm here, creating dishes like Cilantro-Orange Mahi-Mahi with spinach-jalapeno couscous, mint scented squash, citrus infused buerre blanc. Matthew is a personable guy, who is itching to push the envelope even further. Perhaps we'll return on our final night to see what else the young chef can create.

Breakfast is served at the Arizona Kitchen, offering items such as cowboy hash and sweet potato waffles. The main attraction at the resort however, is Red's Steakhouse, named for the beloved golf pro, Red Allen, whose family has been at the Wigwam for three generations. Black and white photos of Red during his illustrious golf career at the Wigwam grace the walls of the contemporary restaurant, while leather booths and distressed wood round out the décor of the resort's new signature restaurant. The menu is typical steakhouse fare, with a few extra surprises. Chef de cuisine Kristen Seltzer churns out cooked-to-order steaks of course, and then



photo courtesy of the Wigwam Resort

The grounds of the Wigwam Resort are beautifully landscaped, featuring over 8,000 rose bushes, as well as hundreds of other flowering plants. One of the fairway casitas is pictured here.



photo courtesy of the Wigwam Resort

The inviting entrance to the Wigwam Resort welcomes guests to a relaxing retreat, where you can enjoy golf, a Red Door Spa, and fabulous dining.

The Wigwam Resort exudes Old West charm with a touch of Hollywood glamour. It reminds me of a place where Sinatra and Martin would hide away for a weekend watching starlets lounge by the pool. The warm and inviting atmosphere invites you to unwind, slow down and stop and smell the roses – over 8,000 of them on property. The Wigwam boasts three 18-hole championship golf courses, three award-winning restaurants, an Elizabeth Arden Red Door Spa, nine lighted tennis courts, and two swimming pools. The 331 guest rooms, including 72 luxurious suites, are decorated in authentic Arizona style, combining rustic leathers and warm, Southwestern colors.

The resort is a short 30-minute drive from Phoenix airport. Nestled in the Phoenix suburb of Litchfield, a circular driveway with hundreds of rose bushes welcomes you. Wood floors and rustic chandeliers adorn the lobby area, where a portion of the original structure and fireplace remain. The Southwestern charm carries over to the casitas, suites and guest rooms, each offering cozy yet elegant furnishings. An Adobe Fairway accommodation overlooks the Blue Course in an oversized room of 550 square feet, scenic views, privacy, and wet bar. An Adobe Casita guest room, located near the Adobe pool, is a convenient short walk to the restaurants and the Red Door Spa. The

sauna for a brief 15 minutes before moving on to my next treatment, the signature manicure and pedicure. I usually do not go for the extra paraffin wax at my regular manis and pedis, so that was a real treat. Then, I retreated to the women's lounge for a quick shower before having my make-up retouched. I left feeling like a new woman! When booking your appointment, be sure to ask for the extra 15-20 minutes between treatments so you can enjoy time in the sauna, steam room, and Jacuzzi.

I know, there was "exercise" on that resolution list. With the three 18-hole championship golf courses available, there are plenty of tee times available. Michael enjoyed two of the three courses on our three-day weekend, finding the Blue course to be challenging, yet the wide-open fairways forgiving. The courses are well established, with plenty of old-growth tress offering shade and beauty. (Read his review in the accompanying article.)

If you're looking to spend time with the kids, there's always frolicking in the two pools at the resort. However, if you're looking for a little adventure, just 10 minutes down the road is the brand new Dodger spring training facility. The Camelback Ranch facility is also home to the White Sox. Tickets go on sale January 9, with the first game against the White Sox on March 5. The

kicks it up a notch with black truffle mac-n-cheese as a side dish. The duck two ways appetizer is an interesting combination of a duck lollipop resting aside the duck confit with potato risotto, with the two textures playing nicely off one another. A dish or two on Red's New Year's Eve menu piques my fancy, namely the duck confit relleno and the Southwest poblano soup with smoked good luck bean relish. It may be a little late to get there in time for dinner tonight, but can you imagine what Chef Seltzer may be planning for Valentine's Day? Check their website shortly after New Year's Day to find out what's in store.

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For our final night at the Wigwam, we decided to check back with Chef Matthew at the Grill, and the rising star had a special surprise awaiting us: a five-course menu with wine pairings exclusively prepared for the Villalpandos. He had been hard at work in the kitchen all day. The charming maitre d', Lou Giamo, hand selected the wines and provided us with entertaining stories all night. Chef Matthew first presented us with a small bowl of chilled tomato bisque with ginger cream, asparagus tips dipped in spinach cream, and lump crab rolled in curry powder. The small bites were meant to either dip in the soup or to have separately and both ways worked wonderfully. The smoky taste of the curry paired beautifully with the crab, and the fresh, crisp asparagus balanced out the rich tasting bisque. Deliciously paired with a pinot grigio.



photo courtesy of the Wigwam Resort

The lap pool is one of the many luxurious features found at the Elizabeth Arden Red Door Spa at the Wigwam.



photo courtesy of the Wigwam Resort

At Red's Steakhouse, the signature restaurant at the Wigwam Resort, the decor combines warm and inviting colors with contemporary design. The steakhouse menu is peppered with innovative dishes.

The next course Matthew termed a "deconstructed fish fry" relying on the history of the Grill, which also serves as the clubhouse restaurant for the golf course, where many club members dine here on a weekly basis. Chef played off the idea of the "weekly fish fry" by poaching cod in butter, rolling it in Savoy cabbage and topping it with fried capers and a saffron aioli sauce. The fish sat upon a tempura cake, resembling the "batter", and a picked onion accompaniment added a bit of zest. Edna Valley chardonnay was well matched with this delicate "deconstructed" fish.

I needed a rest after the rich second course, and somehow, Matthew knew that, and sent out his digestif: a shot glass of watermelon and orange juice with a touch of Chambord, next to a watermelon gelée with fresh mint and mint foam. It was a perfect palate cleanser and marvelously refresh-

ing! I was ready to move on to my next course.

The star creation of the night: a rib eye steak crusted in Portobello mushrooms, with carrot puree, plated with potato gnocchi with a red wine Portobello mushroom reduction. The two sauces provided a ying and yang flavor, and the "King of Sangiovese" wine selected by Lou was the perfect pairing.

I am not a big dessert eater, but I had to give this frozen creation a taste: a peanut butter and jelly martini with homemade peanut butter and chocolate ice cream. First, Matt froze jelly swirled in a martini glass. Then he mixed vodka, Frangelico and peanut butter with ice in a shaker and poured it into the jellied glass. He presented it on the plate next to the riches homemade peanut butter and chocolate ice cream. It was delicious and oh-so rich. Just a few bites for me, please. And careful on the martini, yummy

but dangerous!

This dinner was one of the most enjoyable I've had in a long time. Young Chef Steffen may be at the Grill at the Wigwam for now, but someone will soon discover his hidden talents and propel him to a bigger stage, perhaps the next Iron Chef! So make your reservations now, while there are still seats available.

Our three day weekend at the Wigwam Resort accomplished just what we needed: rest, relaxation, romance, time together and fabulous dining! We managed to leave the resort to do some shopping in Scottsdale, but there was really no need to leave other than that. I will return to the Wigwam Resort in 2010 - that's MY New Year's resolution. I hope you add it to your list, too.

The Wigwam Golf Resort and Spa, 300 Wigwam Blvd., Litchfield Park, Arizona 85340. (623)935-3811; www.wigwamresort.com.

Experience Old School Golf at the Wigwam Resort

BY MICHAEL VILLALPANDO

Golf at the Wigwam Resort is an old school throwback. Starting with the Blue course, designed by Robert Trent Jones in the '30s, the layout is wide and lush. Old-growth trees line the fairways along with quite a few ball-attracting bunkers. At just over 6,000 yards, it's not a "monster", but does require a good repertoire of skillful shots. Doglegs and water are strategically placed along the entire course. I especially like the canals crisscrossing the course as they held a lively assortment of fish racing up and down their own little track.

Fish aside, I thoroughly enjoyed the course, especially since I played the entire first round without any of my golf balls sleeping with any fish. For me, a weekend golfer with a 15 handicap, to play a round of golf with just one ball is a major accomplishment. Overall, the Blue Course was fun, challenging and rewarding.

November was prime time to be in Arizona and the weather did not disappoint at 65°-72°. It was cool and sunny, perfect for golf. Oh yeah, my score? 86.

Next up was the Gold Course, a

course with a reputation as a long ball hitter's delight. Not being one of them, I stuck with the white tees, about 6400 yards with a 70 rating. Another Robert Trent Jones design course, it has been updated by Forrest Richardson with some hole lengthening, bunker and green reconfigurations. Once again, the condition of the course was immaculate. Rich landscaping included lots of color, mature trees and towering palms gently swaying in the breeze. It's worth mentioning again that the entire golf resort has that old school feel. It's like you feel you might bump into Frank Sinatra or Peter Lawford on the back nine or more likely, the 19th hole. With such history and perfect location, it's easy to understand why the Wigwam Resort enjoys such a high percentage of repeat guests.

By the way, getting to the 18th green was quite a challenge with a water hazard to carry, and a canal lurking next to the green. I was happy to finish with a bogey, and yes, with the same ball from the day before. The Wigwam Golf Resort is definitely a place I'll return to, especially to check out the Red Course and make it a trifecta.



photo courtesy of the Wigwam Resort

The Blue Course's 14th hole shows off many of the courses features, including the old-growth trees.



photo courtesy of the Wigwam Resort

The 17th hole exemplifies the challenging nature of the Gold Course.



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