

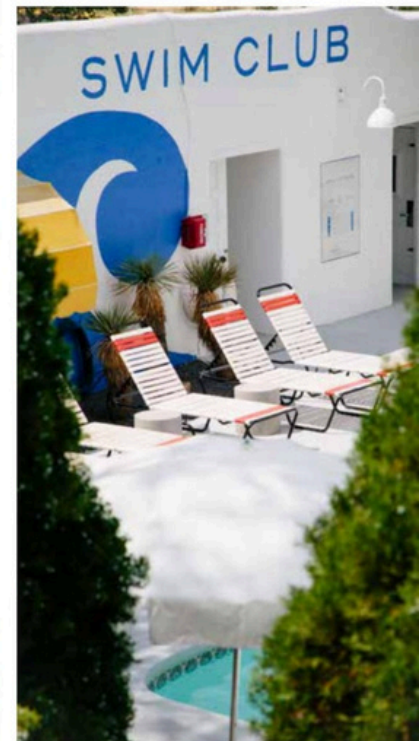
FROM A 1930S ADOBE MOTOR COURT TO
ONE OF SANTA FE'S MOST STYLISH STAYS

EL REY

COURT



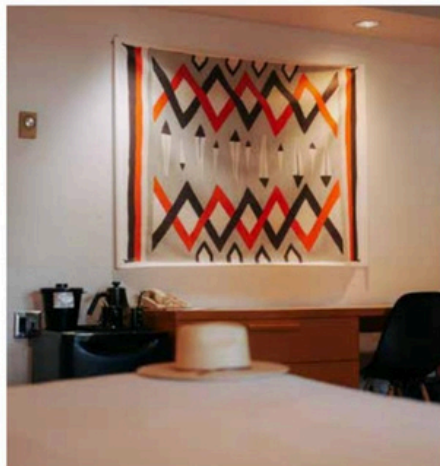
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ZEB WILSON, CASEY DUNN, JAY CARROLL, KRYSTA JABCZENSKI



“WE’VE TRIED
TO PRESERVE
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OFF ROUTE 66.”

The first thing you notice about El Rey Court isn't the pool or the low-slung casitas—it's the bones. Tucked along a historic stretch of old Route 66 just south of downtown Santa Fe, El Rey remains unmistakably rooted in its origins as an adobe motor court, even after nearly nine decades of change. Outside, its restored vintage neon sign continues to glow above Cerrillos Road—an enduring landmark from the heyday of the American road trip.

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“TAKE TIME TO LINGER, AND IT’S THE QUIETER DETAILS THAT REVEAL THEMSELVES: THE KIVA FIREPLACE ANCHORING THE LOBBY LIVING ROOM, THE TREE-SHADED ALAMO COURT LAWN.”

Originally opened in 1936 as the El Rey Inn, it evolved from motor court to modest motel before Bullwhip Capital acquired the property in 2018—a purchase years in the making after its founder had long admired the place. Working with designer Jay Carroll, co-founder of California-based lifestyle brand Wonder Valley, the team preserved the adobe Pueblo Revival exteriors while introducing a contemporary Southwestern aesthetic. Marketing Director Cecilia Doria describes El Rey’s style as “desert meets mid-century modern,” layered over the property’s original adobe bones. That history reveals itself in small but telling ways. “We kept a lot of the original details. The painted trim around the doors and the Spanish ceramic tile paintings throughout the property all came from the previous owners,” Doria says. “You’ll find these little vignettes in different rooms where the history really shines through.”

Its architecture tells the same story. Adobe buildings define Santa Fe, but purpose-built adobe motor lodges are surprisingly rare. The original heart of El Rey—now home to the lobby, front desk, La Reina mezcal bar, and surrounding guest rooms—remains

the same thick-walled adobe structure that first welcomed motorists. “We’ve tried to preserve that feeling of arriving in your own little world off Route 66, where guests could pull right into the carport outside their room,” Doria says. Like many roadside motels, El Rey grew alongside the popularity of automobile travel. Across the five-acre site, decades of architecture styles coexist. The once separate Alamo Court and its swimming pool—now home to the seasonal Swim Club—date to the 1950s, while the two-story Spanish Courtyard at the rear of the property was built in the 1970s. When Bullwhip Capital took ownership in 2018, both became part of the reimagined El Rey Court. “It’s a real conglomeration of eras that we’ve tied together,” Doria says.

No two guest rooms are exactly alike. Chimayó-woven headboards, Saltillo tile, and vintage 1960s furnishings are layered with contemporary pieces, giving every space its own character. “We have 86 rooms, and they’re all a bit different,” Doria says. “Each one is a little surprise.” That same layered approach extends to the artwork. Photography, graphic illustration, Navajo textiles, and works by regional and out-of-state artists reflect the same

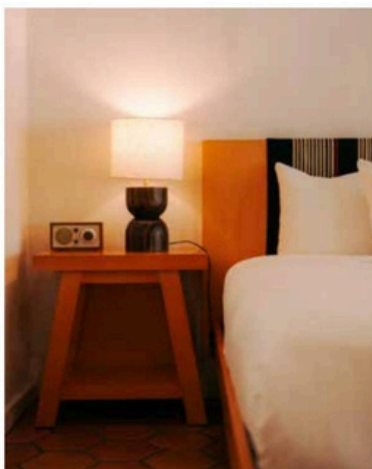
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thoughtful mix of old and new. Photographer Lisa Eisner's *Rodeo Girl* series hangs in one suite, while another features a striking black-and-white portrait of Georgia O'Keeffe. Behind the lobby's front desk, Los Angeles painter Logan Maxwell Hagege's portrait of Apache artist Chesley Goseyun Wilson greets arriving guests. Fellow Angeleno John Zabawa also left his mark, creating El Rey's now-iconic smoking cactus emblem and La Reina's horse motif.

Take time to linger, and it's the quieter details that reveal themselves: the kiva fireplace anchoring the lobby living room, the tree-shaded Alamo Court Lawn, and a vintage greenhouse repurposed as a satellite retail space for Santa Fe plant shop Sage Botanical. Live music drifts from La Reina most evenings; the property has become a coveted setting for weddings, and each May hosts its annual High Road Music Festival. Perhaps that's El Rey Court's greatest design achievement. Rather than restoring the motel to one idealized moment in history, its owners have allowed every chapter—from the original 1936 adobe motor court to later additions—to remain visible. The result isn't a nostalgia play, but a property whose style comes from nearly a century of thoughtful evolution rather than reinvention.

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