

## The Mission Inn: A Living History of Riverside

**It's a Destination Hotel ... Replete with Buttresses!**

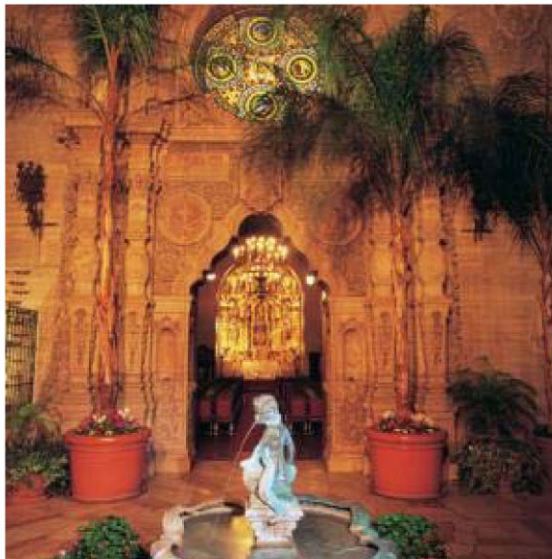
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Riverside was once the second-richest city in the country. Soak that in for a second...

One signature monument to that wealth is a legendary hotel that spans a city block, took decades to complete, has a founder of epic eccentricity and is called **The Mission Inn**, though it has nothing to do with missions or any one religion in particular. It's also on the **National**

**Register of Historical Places** and is a California Historic Landmark. So of course it has its own **museum**.



The Raya Altar and Tiffany stained glass windows are two treasures housed in the Mission Inn's St Francis of Assisi Chapel.



The rotunda was once used for Christmas carolers, who lined the six-story spiral staircase.

pergola that led from the station directly to the hotel. Extra-wide hallways show where the steamer trunks of the day could pass one another in a bustle. **(EXPANDED PHOTO GALLERY HERE)**

Recently renovated, updated and generally rescued by **Duane** and Kelly Roberts for about \$15 million, The Mission Inn is, basically, the identity of Riverside. The hotel's brand/logo has even been incorporated city wide on street signs, buildings and seals.

The hotel **itself** is three-architects deep in its construction -- and the crown jewel is the specially built chapel -- St. Francis of Assisi

The Mission is a story of one man's relentless pursuit of his passion for art collecting, travel, civic pride and entrepreneurship -- and it was all years before William Randolph Hearst repeated **Frank Miller**'s arc and applied it to **San Simeon**. Miller was also a pacifist that patrolled the hotel with a pet parrot on his shoulder. (And, yes, that was a fun sentence to write.)

Started as a boarding house, it evolved into a destination location and hotel in 1902 -- mainly because Miller would dress as a monk and ride the trains to steer would-be patrons under the



The Alhambra Suite at The Mission Inn.



The pool area, circa 1950. (Mission Inn Museum and Archive)

Chapel. The chapel has beamed ceilings and ornate doors (26'x80'x30') that features two treasures: the Rayas Altar (at left) and Tiffany-designed stained glass windows. No wonder they do about 400 weddings annually at the property.

### The new **Kelly's Spa** was installed

by, um, Kelly Roberts after she and her husband took control of the place. The amenities therein are a welcome, modern and luxurious addition -- 12 expertly appointed treatment rooms, soaking tubs, outdoor patio, relaxation rooms, etc. With obvious taste and an eye for luxury, the staff and facility is top-notch. (Sabrina gave us the best deep-tissue we've had in years).

The entire hotel experience is a study in arrested elegance -- not quite faded, not quite pristine. From the carved wood and probably tons-heavy registration desk to the Franciscan-inspired wood banisters, moldings and doors one is never far from a living history lesson. Some of the other eye-grabbers are include flying buttresses (really!?!), domes, a bell tower, clock tower, interior courtyards, private patios, fountains and a five-story, open-air rotunda with a circular wrought-iron staircase.

The art collection is astounding, as well. Too much to list here, but you could contact the museum for a more fertive rundown.

**President Nixon** not only got married by the fireplace in the lobby lounge, but he also got the call from Ike in 1960 while staying in the Alhambra Suite. Our guess is that Dick knocked back a couple of martinis in the now-named Presidential Lounge in the lobby, too, which was once **President Theodore Roosevelt**'s personal suite for the 1902 dedication. President Taft left a specially built chair behind (he refused to sit in it as it overtly addressed his girth). In all, six presidents have stayed there, including Dubya.

Divesting the history from the hotel is impossible; however, there were no stories about the pool, which is still a study in 1920s Hollywood-type glamor. It was the only thing the docent didn't mention on the guided tour, which we highly recommend to all guests or visitors to Riverside.

There are three in-house restaurants. **Duane's Prime Steak and Seafood** is named after, um, yeah... . It is a traditional, plush, AAA four-star rated steakhouse similar to the best old school ones in New York City. The captain and entire wait staff would be entirely comfortable at Tavern On the Green. Seriously. And the steak Diane was table-side prepped and perfect. The portions are River-sized, so don't go too heavy on the family-style sides.

Las Campanas is a stand-up, gourmet Mexican restaurant with way-pleasant patio seating. The third is The Mission Inn Restaurant and Spanish Patio -- an equally safe bet for better-than-usual American and Mexican fare with an outstanding Sunday brunch.

The Mission Inn has been doing its thing for a long, historic time. They've got it down to a hospitable, memory-making science. It's a memorable destination worth the trip to the IE.