

Cognoscenti magazine

Because life is short

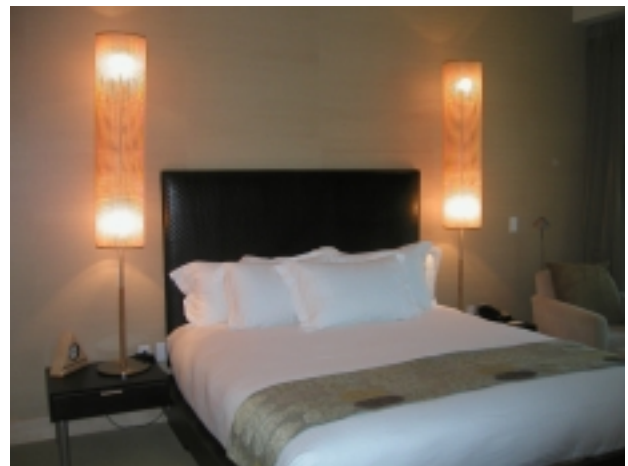
SANCTUARY CAMELBACK MOUNTAIN Scottsdale, Arizona

How to describe a resort experience that manages to combine an exceptional locale and superb interior and exterior design together with a surprisingly poor level of service attentiveness? Let us try...

Situated in the more elevated climes of Paradise Valley's most famous peak, **Sanctuary Camelback Mountain's** setting is among the finest in all of Arizona. Many of this boutique resort's 98 casitas are splendidly arrayed in relation to the Sonoran desert environment, offering fine views of Camelback's unique natural landmark, the "Praying Monk" rock formation. With the approach of evening, the whole mountain turns reddish-purple against the setting sun.

Our spa casita—one of 24 on the property—features a degree of decorative sophistication we've seldom encountered anywhere in the United States. Japanese minimalist themes are presented by way of expanses of blond wood, stone gardens, and low black tables. Curvaceous architectural lines by the entrance, on the inside of the gas fireplace, in the shape of a trendy blue sofa, and around the shower stall soften straighter lines elsewhere. The furnishings are at once stylish and comfortable; only the bedside clock, terribly thick and sporting solemn Roman numerals, is at odds with the fluidity coursing through the rest of the suite.

Depending on the time of day, sunlight streams into the bedroom or the salon—and even into the spacious and elegant bathroom as well. In the bathroom, there's a large, appealing *pouf* to sit on, with a basket



Fluidity and sophistication mark the setting, but negligence mars the service.

of thick bath towels rolled up spa style on the counter. An outdoor steeping tub located in a very private patio comes with its own sunshade, lounge chair, and aromatics to be poured into the bath.

The infinity-edge swimming pool is a taste of paradise, its clear warm blue waters dropping off on the horizon to yield views of palm trees and of Paradise Valley beyond.

In contrast to this superb natural and man-made environment, the lack of service attentiveness we encountered while at Sanctuary came as something of a shock. It would try the patience of our readers to recite the full litany of difficulties that a malfunctioning room telephone was to cause us—the promises not kept, the incoming messages lost, the tart staff who made us feel like it was *our* problem, not theirs, even management who failed to take responsibility. In keeping with the Zen-like character of this property, we are tempted to trade that famous koan, *What is the sound of one hand clapping?*, for a more mundane yet (in our case) equally enigmatic one, *What is the sound of one phone ringing?* Alas, at checkout two days later, we still didn't have our answer. It's fair to say that at this level of luxury, staff should never adopt a façade of fashionable equanimity when their lack of service attentiveness suggests that they are merely indifferent. That mindset works neither for *satori* nor for hospitality.

This article was written by Nicole Medvecky-Riggs,
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