



OLD-SCHOOL POOL RBI has always been a place to kick it.

◆ Then...

The time and place: 1961. A purchase agreement for \$6.48 million was made for 5,400 acres by Don and Lawrence Dailey and Harry Lee Summer. (Math: \$1,200 per acre.) By 1962, reservations were being made for home sales. And in 1963, an 18-hole golf course was completed and Rancho Bernardo Road was joined with Highway 395.

A year later, the hacienda-style resort and matching 500 homes were open for business at this inland retreat lush with sage, lavender and olive trees. "It's always been about casual elegance," says Gates of the property.

At the time, RBI invited its guest to "enjoy color television" and an all-you-can-eat fish fry fetched \$1.50 a person. Room rates started at \$8.

RBI started as a major golf and tennis destination. At one point there were 14 tennis courts. (Today, there are two.)

Symphonies on the Green lured Hollywood luminaries for immensely popular concerts held on the greens. The events were North County's answer to the Hollywood Bowl and were dismantled in the '80s.

The resort set itself apart with an all-female bell staff, who greeted guests in a uniform of short skirts. "It was in the stewardess era," chuckles Gates. "The guys loved it."



was \$26,500.) We pay anniversary tribute! —Gillian Flynn

The Inn Crowd

At 50 years old, the iconic Rancho Bernardo Inn reinvents itself.

Anyone who grew up in San Diego has a Rancho Bernardo memory. Mother's Day. Easter brunch. Yet the lush retreat is more than just a sentimental fave, thanks to its consistent (and extravagant) renovations.

Tennis courts have been bulldozed to make way for a world-class spa, replete with Bali-inspired huts and private pool cabanas. The Terrace restaurant has been transformed into a chic space where guests sip wine at settees by the fireplace. The latest swan-style makeover? The sports bar by La Jolla-based Esteban Interiors, which includes posh lighting and a stately bar.

"We work hard on trying not to be trendy," says GM John Gates. "We're not about glitz and glamour. That's a one-trick pony.

We have classic, honest designs that are timeless."

Built in 1962, the resort drew Hollywood guests like Bob Hope and Bing Crosby. (That year, the most expensive house on the links



HIGH WATER MARK The RBI spa boasts private cabanas.

◆ And Now...

In the resort world, staying relevant is everything. And Rancho Bernardo Inn has mastered it without trying too hard. The Cal-Spanish soul of the resort remains classic, but its offerings are contemporary. In 2005, the guest rooms were spiffed up and the award-winning spa was unveiled, boasting temperature-controlled casitas outdoors. Its "made fresh daily" menu brings seasonal-local to the treatment room with luscious lemon scrubs and sage potions.

On the golf front, all the greens were redone last year, and four holes were completely overhauled. However, après-golf remains the best part, thanks to Esteban Interiors' manly, modern remodel of The Bar.

"We wanted to bring a metropolitan European brasserie [feel] while maintaining the essence of the resort," says Esteban Lopez. "We designed a place where the established, sophisticated set can commingle with the younger, trendsetter crowd." Mission accomplished, guys.

The most anticipated project is shrouded in mystery. El Bizcocho, the French dining room with a history of star chefs like Gavin Kaysen, will be remodeled later this year, but there's no word on who's dictating the décor. Says Gates: "We'll be losing the formal feel." Think small plates, a lounge feel and no tablecloths. "It won't be a French restaurant." *Au revoir.*

