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In Palm Springs, a New Set of Pleasure-Seekers Take Hold

What is it about Palm Springs that keeps drawing waves of people looking to slow down, drop out, go a little wild? Irina Aleksander meets the latest arrivals who are inventing the desert oasis all over again.

After touring L'Horizon, I want to see the other Palm Springs, and so I drag Fife to Melvyn's, the restaurant opened in 1975 by Mel Haber, a transplant from Flatbush, Brooklyn. Palm Springs has plenty of interesting dining options—most notably, Birba, Cheeky's Italian-themed cousin, and the modern Workshop Kitchen & Bar, where the walls are concrete and fries are cooked in duck fat. But Melvyn's is the desert's version of Brighton Beach kitsch. There are tuxedo-clad waiters; a piano lounge called the Casablanca; and retirees in ascots dining alongside younger people like Fife, who wears a fedora. We order the steak Diane and watch a woman in a pink halter top entertaining two older gentlemen at the bar. "Her name is Sherrie," Fife guesses. "Definitely a Sherrie or a Marcia. Marcia used to be a party girl, but now she just enjoys Chardonnay." As we leave, Sherrie/Marcia is dragging her silver foxes onto the dance floor to the tune of "Sweet Caroline."

Restaurants & Bars

Birba: A busy garden eatery with a well-priced farm-to-table Italian menu. birbaps.com; entrées \$10–\$23.

Bootlegger Tiki: A dimly lit “Tikeasy” bar owned by photographer Jaime Kowal (left). bootleggertiki.com.

Melvyn’s: Come for the flambé bananas and tuxedo-clad waiters; stay for dancing in the Casablanca lounge. inglesideinn.com; entrées \$23–\$43.

SO.PA: Giacomo Pettinari, an alum of Spain’s El Bulli, mans L’Horizon’s open-air restaurant. lhorizonpalmsprings.com; entrées \$27–\$55.

Workshop Kitchen & Bar: A minimal space where the fries are cooked in duck fat. workshoppalmsprings.com; entrées \$22–\$37.