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Take the Frank Sinatra tour of Palm Springs

Trevor Summons, Correspondent Posted: 03/12/2011 10:52:39 PM PST

I have a friend who is a very good singer. He specializes in the repertoire of Frank Sinatra. For about a year he used to live in the Palm Springs area and many mornings he would stroll along to the site of Sinatra's final resting place and sing the great entertainer a few of his best known songs.

Palm Springs has only recently woken up to the fact that there is still a great interest in the life of Sinatra and, in particular, his time in the desert city. I decided that I would also track down a few memories of the man whose presence was so big for all of us, who lived within the age of his long life.

Like my friend I began at the graveside. It is extremely modest. It lies in a simple grass area surrounded by similar markers.



Sinatra's desert retreat: Living area with original recording equipment

Considering how big Sinatra's life was, there is a feeling of unreality about it. The marble slab is only about 2 feet by 1 foot, with just the entertainer's name and dates, and underneath the inscription "Beloved Husband and Father." Above is inscribed the title of one of his famous songs: "The Best is Yet to Come."

Strangely, this song was not composed for Sinatra but for his rival Tony Bennett. However, Sinatra recorded it in the early '60s and made it his own. It was the last song he sang in public before his death in 1998 at the age of 83. He had a pretty good run.

My next stop was The Sinatra House, located in a quiet area of the original residential part of the city.

This house was bought by Sinatra in 1947 when he was looking for a retreat and was beginning to make a lot of money. His career had several ups and downs and this was the apex of his first successful time.

The house is not open for public viewing although you can see it on one of many organized tours of the area. It is available, however, for overnights, and also for daytime functions. Compared to some of the palaces modern stars live in, this is a modest dwelling. It is 4,500 square feet with the famous grand piano-shaped swimming pool and cabana at one end of the grounds, and the house at the other. A covered walkway gives shadows along the edge of the pool resembling piano keys. "That was not planned; it just turned out that way," said Jesse Garza, the marketing director of the renting agency, who manages the property.

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Walking around the single-story home it is impossible not to imagine the wild times that went on here. Sinatra called it Twin Palms for the two thin palms that still grow beside the pool. They were the tallest around. "He also had a flagpole there on which he would raise the Jack Daniels banner," Garza said. "It would tell the other residents that Frank was home and looking to have some fun."

It was here that Sinatra courted, won and eventually married Ava Gardner. Theirs was a tempestuous and stormy relationship.

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"One evening Ava motored down from Hollywood absolutely seething," Garza related. It seems she had caught wind of Frank's dallying with her friend and rival, Lana Turner. "A row broke out and in the process a bottle of champagne was thrown."

It missed its human target and landed in one of the basins of the master bathroom. The crack it caused is still there - a testament to one of the most remarkable and difficult relationships in mid-20th century entertainment history.

The furniture in the house is not Sinatra's own except for the original recording equipment in the living area, installed in 1951. But it is of the time, and anyone who has lived in parts of that era will recognize it and feel at home. If you want to stay there then you will have to pony up \$1,950 a night (three nights minimum). For a day's function it will set you back \$6,000. Garza said that they do have lots of bookings for it. If you decide to follow my tracks there is an upside - the cemetery visit is free!

To hear Trevor Summons discuss this and other columns visit www.sbsun.com/trevorstravels. Check out his blog at www.trevorsummons.blogspot.com. Visit his website, www.trevorsummons.com.



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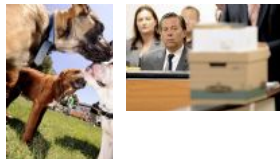
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