

Resort at Pelican Hill

Three years and counting

Luxury Newport Coast resort owned the Irvine Co. has received many accolades since it opened.

BY SARAH PETERS

NEWPORT COAST — Managing Director Giuseppe Lama still has the receipt from the Resort at Pelican Hill's very first customer and purchase: an early-morning cappuccino.

Pelican Hill, owned by the Irvine Co., runs an occupancy rate of about 70% year to year, with highs spiking up to 90% in the summer months, but the travertine marble halls were quiet and the valet empty Nov. 26, 2008, when the resort first opened.

"The vision hasn't changed or altered," Lama said of the 504-acre "Tuscan Village" resort which took three years of construction and opened during the peak of the recession.

"We're continuously moving forward because we got the fundamentals right."

Lama and Ralph Grippo, Irvine Co. president of resort properties, claim the resort's success comes from the standard formula in the luxury hospitality industry of focusing on customer service and building relationships.

Condé Nast Traveler, Travel + Leisure, GolfWorld, Golf Magazine, Andrew Harper's Hideaway Report and others have rated the resort as among the top in the nation. The American Automobile Assn. ranked the resort as a Five Diamond property for 2010, 2011 and 2012.

"I understand quality construction and quality amenities," said Garrett Calacci, president of Newport Beach-based builder Waterpointe Homes. "I understand the quality in homes I build, so as a professional, I can tell that the features [Irvine Co. Chairman Donald Bren] put in this hotel are over the top."

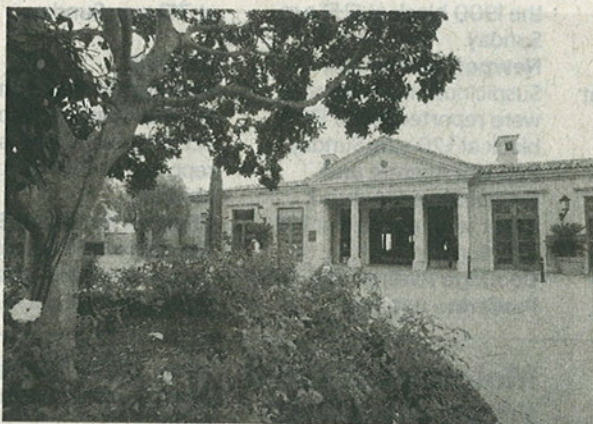
Calacci was among the resort's earliest guests. When he sold his home earlier this year, he moved into the resort rather than buy another property.

Although friends tease the bachelor that he'll have to move out of his two-bedroom Pelican Hill villa



Photos by DON LEACH | don.leach@latimes.com

FINE FURNISHINGS: The Villas Clubhouse at the Resort at Pelican Hill includes plush interiors.



eventually, he said that for now the resort fits his busy lifestyle.

"There's just something about driving under that car path bridge every night when I come home," Calacci said, in reference to the structure spanning South Pelican Hill Road. "It feels like you're a world away."

However, the bulk of the resort's guests come from within a two-hour drive of Newport Coast.

About 60% of them are Southern California locals, with the remaining split between out-of-state and international guests, Grippo said.

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TOP NOTCH:

Pelican Hill was designed by Irvine Co. to be the "jewel on the crown" of the Irvine Ranch.

Irvine Ranch — the 93,000-acre land parcel, of which more than half is permanently preserved open space — the resort was designed to stand for the next 100 years, Grippo said.

The resort's design takes after the work of 16th century architect Andrea Palladio, whose crisp lines and elegant proportions can be seen across the Irvine Co. portfolio and surrounding residential developments in Newport Coast.

"Part of what we've done as a company is look at the entire Irvine Ranch and build out, as a master plan, this part of the world," Grippo said. "Rather than build just anything here, we took the time to think of what would be the most important to build here. Our view as a company is long term in everything we do."

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