

**SUNSPOT:** After going through the paces at the STRATA Spa and Wellness Center, visitors to Garden of the Gods Resort and Club can make time for some self-reflection.



PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY OF GARDEN OF THE GODS RESORT AND CLUB

# A Healthy Outlook

Thanks to the holistic approach of its owners, all is very well at the Garden of the Gods Resort and Club. By Jon Rizzi

**THE SANDSTONE SPIRES** and fins have stood tall for more than 70 million years, but the sight of them never gets old. You get that sensation immediately upon entering the Garden of the Gods Resort and Club, where the floor-to-ceiling windows in the Grand View Dining Room and The Rocks Lounge reveal the 1,300-acre “garden” of roseate formations from which this Colorado Springs redoubt—and the renowned park it overlooks—takes its name. From dawn until dusk, the sun limns these ancient monoliths, creating chiaroscuro of multi-hued ridges, craters and crags that seem to change shape and color every 30 minutes.

This natural spectacle not only inspires wonder but also a sense of spiritual and physical wellbeing. It’s a combination that has drawn visitors to Colorado Springs since the late 1800s and prompted Texas oilman Al Hill to buy the 330 acres on which he built the private Garden of the Gods Club in 1951. It also explains why all 27 holes of the resort’s Kissing Camels Golf Club offer glimpses of the namesake sandstone smoochers, and why every one of the resort’s 56

exquisite guest rooms and suites faces the red rocks, with a walk-out patio or terrace to bring them that much closer.

“When you walk on the property, it just kind of takes you to that zen,” says Colorado Springs businesswoman Judy Mackey, who joined the club in 1989. “You naturally relax.”

## NEW OWNERS, NEW APPROACHES

In 2013, Mackey and her friend Brenda Smith were looking to start a holistic wellness center and wanted to rent space at the Garden of the Gods Resort and Club from Sunrise Company, which had purchased the property from the Hill family in 2007. Instead, the two women wound up buying the entire resort and club.

In the nearly seven years since taking over, they have gloriously revamped the 90,000-square-foot clubhouse/lodge, which, Mackey claims, “was like going into an assisted-living facility; the energy was dead.” They also expanded the lodging options by developing Vermilion, a community of six cottages, 14 casitas and 17 currently-under-construction villas—all impeccably ap-

pointed and featuring flexible configurations for one to three bedrooms. (The resort owns the cottages and rents the others for private owners.)

In part a response to the insurgence of VRBO and Airbnb, these luxury residences pair all the independence and comforts of home with the refined food, services and amenities in the main resort. The result is cossetting indulgence, which in every cottage and guest room expresses itself most conspicuously in the form of a high-tech Plum wine dispenser preloaded with bottles of your favorite red or white varietal to savor by the glass at the precisely correct temperature.

## A DIFFERENT STRATUM

Without a doubt, however, the property’s most significant upgrade is the 31,000-square-foot realization of Mackey’s and Smith’s vision: the STRATA Spa and Wellness Center.

Initially called the International Health and Wellness Center, STRATA focuses on personalized, holistic wellbeing programs tailored by more than 20 physicians, therapists and clinicians to produce optimal physical, emotional, intellectual,

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social, environmental, spiritual and mental health. The successful integration of these layers, or strata, suggests a process similar to that which produces the geological marvels in the Garden of the Gods.

Headed by Dr. Mike Barber, a board-certified cardiologist, internist and electrophysiologist, STRATA brings together the complimentary talents of topflight naturopaths, psychologists, osteopaths, chiropractors, dieticians, clinicians, nurse practitioners, kinesiologists, acupuncturists, fitness experts, massage therapists, estheticians and other specialists.

"This is multidisciplinary medicine at its finest," summarizes Grant Jones, STRATA's Vice President of Wellness. "A collective powerhouse of modern wellness expertise."

STRATA divides into four basic areas: STRATA Med (Medical Center), STRATA Body (Spa), STRATA Salon (Esthetics) and STRATA Fit (Fitness). The Wellness Center building houses all but STRATA Fit, which occupies the south end of the main lodge. At press time, due to COVID-19 precautions, both STRATA Body and Fit were offering limited services.

A calming, relaxed energy permeates the STRATA building. When a client arrives, a wellness concierge screens him or her and schedules an initial consulting session with a personalized team of medical specialists to assess the course of action. "We work together on this to make recommendations and a program that addresses the underlying causes of any health concerns," Barber says. "We're not just going to put paint on rotting wood."

The clinicians possess the tools to perform numerous types of assessments (including genetic-testing analysis), and the range of treatments and therapies comprises everything from naturopathic tinctures and IV nutritional and hormonal therapy to massage, acupuncture and cupping to halotherapy (sauna with Himalayan salt blocks that emit negative ions to counteract the

positive ones radiated by computers), meditation and a weightless cocooning in a Haslauer Pure Sense Soft Pack Bed.

The center has numerous programs specifically designed for women and for men, as well as multiple proactive wellness and fitness curricula, including a year-long Concierge Wellness Membership, available to the public. For an annual fee of \$2,950 (\$246 per month), you receive primary provider care, a baseline physical exam and access to medical massage, acupuncture, chiropractic treatment, nutritional consultation and much more.

## TPI AND TEE TIMES

STRATA also takes special care of golfers with its TPI Body Workshop. Run by Kissing Camels Golf Club PGA Director of Golf Rich Parker, Dr. Shane Wells and Fitness and Lifestyle Instructor Tracy Iverson—all of whom are TPI Certified—the "Body-Swing Connection" sessions help players discover the most efficient swing for their individual body.

Beyond the workshop, Wells says that integrating the TPI fitness and PGA instruction with different STRATA disciplines is akin to "giving the average golfer the same kind of 'team' resources the PGA TOUR pros have."

"The TPI protocols for the golf and fitness screenings quantify, validate and inform golf and fitness instruction," Parker concurs. "But the data also can indicate issues that may benefit from medical intervention."

An avid golfer and chiropractor, Wells explains that if a golfer can't do a deep overhead squat—one of the 16 TPI screening assessments—it can indicate lack of pelvic stability, requiring exercises to strengthen the core. "But it can also indicate a neurophysiological problem, and that's where I come in," he says. "We have the resources to go deeper when the testing reveals biomechanical flaws that exercise alone may not correct."



PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY OF GARDEN OF THE GODS RESORT AND CLUB

**KISS A CAMEL:** Resort guests are welcome to tee it up at the Kissing Camels Golf Club, and can further enhance the experience with an autonomous caddie. Noted designer Press Maxwell created the first 18 holes in 1961.

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**HAPPY BIRTHDAY:** The Garden of the Gods Resort and Club turns 70 next year. It was purchased by Judy Mackey and Brenda Smith in 2013 and has undergone extensive renovations over the last seven years.

Correcting a flawed perception of the club also proves challenging. “For years, we were that exclusive country club on the hill that only allowed members and their guests,” Garden of the Gods Club Director of Marketing Les Pedersen says of Kissing Camels Golf Club. “These days, pre-arrival, we educate resort guests that the golf course is there for them to play.”

The immaculate layout comprises 18 parkland holes designed by Press Maxwell in 1961, with another nine added 36 years later by Mark Rathert. Though carts are available, all 27 holes are walkable, with the added benefit this year of the ClubCar Tempo Walk—a hands-free autonomous caddy that follows four feet behind and features all the bells and whistles (bag holder, GPS, coolers, USB ports and other accessories) of a luxury riding cart.

The Kissing Camels clubhouse grille, aptly named the Grand View, offers vistas as colorful as the history of a club known to import live dromedaries for the annual events like the Smoochers Ladies’ Invitational, Camel Drivers Men’s Invitational and the Sheiks and Shebas Couples Invitational.

The club’s longtime golf instructor, Shirley Englehorn, won 11 events on the LPGA Tour, including the 1970 LPGA Championship, but the woman forever identified with Kissing Camels is Lyda Hill. The eldest daughter of club founders Al and Margaret Hill served as president of the club for decades and competed in a dozen U.S. Women’s Amateurs. On her watch, Kissing Camels hosted the 1982 U.S. Women’s Senior Amateur won by Edean Ihlantfeldt.

After selling the club in 2007, Hill became one of the members of the investment group, led by Smith and Mackey, that purchased the club six years later.

### FEAST LIKE A GOD

While golfers enjoy wings, burgers and beers at Kissing Camels, the restaurants at the main re-

sort across the street make a point of integrating health-consciousness into the menus.

Food and Beverage Vice President Dan Daughtry and Executive Chef Thomas Hartwell seek out local producers for the freshest meats, fruits, vegetables, mushrooms and roasted coffee.

Changing menus with the season, they regularly consult with STRATA dietician Charlene Wang on scrumptious “Wellness Options” for breakfast, lunch and dinner that go way beyond the standard “spa cuisine” of smoothies, salads and skinless chicken breasts. A recent lunch followed a cup of anti-inflammatory Ginger, Turmeric and Carrot Bisque with a robust Superfood Club.

The Grand View dining room also serves sensibly and delectably prepared “Comfort Food” favorites such as four-cheese tortellini, pan-seared bison flat iron steaks and Reuben sandwiches. Add-ons and sides range from the wellness-oriented hydrated chia seeds and quinoa pilaf to the more traditional loaded baked potato.

### A NEW ERA

The Garden of the Gods Resort and Club turns 70 next year. Like the adjacent outcroppings that are a million times as old and the STRATA clients who benefit from the state-of-the-art treatments, the resort has aged with extraordinary grace.

The once-private enclave of privilege has redefined itself by valuing wellness above material wealth. That isn’t to say that the lodging, dining and golf are inexpensive; nor that STRATA, a direct-pay provider, will bill your insurance carrier.

But the august property now attracts people in search of something more worthwhile than status or a bag tag. STRATA is open to the public, not only to club members and resort guests, and the owners have even made it accessible and affordable to everyone on the resort and club staff. As the post-pandemic world cautiously takes shape, it’s both exciting and reassuring that a stunning, historic property so close to home touts health and wellness among its chief amenities. 

PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY OF GARDEN OF THE GODS RESORT AND CLUB

Jon Rizzi is the founding editor of *Colorado AvidGolfer*. For more on Garden of the Gods Resort and Club and STRATA, visit [gardenofthegodsresort.com](http://gardenofthegodsresort.com) or call 800-923-8838.