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A Trip & a fall

UNITED STATES

Palm Springs, Riverside County, California

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11 min read

There is something quite ethereal about driving down a mountainous stretch of highway at sunset in the southern California desert. All around seems to flutter the stuff muses use to make guitar twangs. Maybe it's no coincidence such sounds associate seamlessly with notions of the word "western" itself. Headed west now, in fact, in a powerful, plush seated, smooth handling, bass bumping, four-month-old Ford Mustang convertible with the top down. The wind pushing at my face and ears is refreshing against the enduring desert heat. Music off now, the arid sound of nothingness rings out through the lilting twilight. A few hundred yards ahead, approaching lights pulse and hover over the horizon like spectral orbs. In truth, they are evidence that other life is present somewhere within a reasonable distance of wherever I am. That was the question; this is the story.

My Godfather Bob lives in Rancho Mirage, California. In addition to the pure joy of driving his convertible Mustang (yeah, it's not mine), one of

the many things my Godfather likes about living there is its proximity to the locations where the cowboy westerns he loved as a kid were filmed. Retired from a successful medical practice back east, he and my Godmother Linda, cashed out of the cold game while they were young enough to enjoy the “Desert Life”, as they call it. It’s filled with lots of sunshine, great food, golf, golf carts, and mini-epic road trips throughout California and the Great Southwest. It’s also littered with people back east hitting them up for use of their guest room.

As one of their *favorite* folks back east who had never taken them up on a sincere and standing invitation, I decided to do so last year. One ridiculously frigid winter day in New York, I reached out to my Godparents. Two months later, I found myself under the sun as I’d never known it—all the way up and generating a pulsing heat seeming to possess the power to heal any ailment. “Why don’t I live here?” I said to Linda an hour into my visit. Decisions, decisions. Aghh. I immediately made another decision; don’t make any more decisions right now. Let Linda and Bob take care of you. Be a guest. Sleep.

Saturday morning, or afternoon, I woke up from a 12+ hour snooze and felt like a human again. Godfather Bob was up chilled out watching westerns in the family room. At his urging, I helped myself to the fully stocked fridge (the first I’d seen in months), cooked up a mean breakfast and kicked it on the couch with Bob and a few dozen intrepid cowboys and indie—I mean—Native Americans riding horses hard, fast, and loose all over the same desert sitting off in the window just behind me. My dad grew up watching westerns on Saturdays like his

good friend Bob. If you did a deep dive into the sun struck Saturday memories of baby-me, you'd see the faces of both men, angled up alongside various cinematic heroes and villains of the old west.

I dig a good western (especially the 'spaghetti' kind), but I'm a bigger fan of the Kung Fu cinema of the 70s. The Shaw Brothers little Hong Kong studio churned out film after film relying on actors and stunt men with serious talent developed over decades of extreme physical and mental training. Performance of the various styles of martial arts, which had been taught and studied in China for centuries, was finally on film for the world to see — and what an amazing sight it was.

With similar amazement, food has always been a very special part of my life. I remember the first time I heard my mother's cake mixer come on and ran to the source of the sound to see the commotion for myself. The feeling of love my mom gave me in that moment — pulling up a chair for me to stand on and urging me to put my hand on top of hers as she moved the mixer — has stuck with me from that day to this and is seared into my associations with preparing good food for people. That love is real and addictive. Love. Is that what this trip is really all about?

Meanwhile back at the Rancho... Huevos and a principle lesson I'd lost sight of crystalized before my third eye: Life is mis en place. The concept is akin to culinary Kung Fu. Like the ancient Chinese martial arts, it represents a way of life and modus operandi. Consider for a moment, the napkin you place in your lap when you sit down to dine in a restaurant. Did you notice it? If it was neatly folded in uniform with the others on the table, I doubt you gave it much thought. But you

probably would, if it was balled up or had been thrown on the table in haste. Mis en place, which literally means “put in place,” also serves as culinarian-speak for preparation and anticipation.

Decidedly precise yet creatively flexible, mis en place is a mantra that invokes the essence of hospitality — and of life too. At least, it’s the spirit of the life I aspire to live. A mindful mindset reflecting readiness. Meeting one’s own needs by searching out those of another. Expecting successful resolution in fielding dreams yet to be served or spoken of; finding “it” every time... Umami.

FOUR, TREE, TWO, OH...

P.S., CA

These are the notes from the above referenced CALI 101 class of relaxation. Rest runs flat out in hybridized, double-timed, metered rhyme; endorphins mate and make you stay up late to witness a starry nighttime your eyes had never gleaned a conception of before relocating to their presently altered state of belonging to a mind operating from a new point of reference — or system.

Station.

Four; Sixteen; Blue; Long overdue entry; Gentry and Yeoman set; Twenty; Fifteen; Hut: To three, to be misplaced at this strange and somewhat awkward moment of “discipline” while sitting up at a desk with power outlets at the San Francisco International Airport. Hmm, I

can feel that I'm in California again. It's been about 14 years since the last time I was here. By here, I do mean California and San Francisco in particular. It's amazing how much is on my mind right now; I feel heavy and slightly depressed. I wonder if it's just tiredness or sleepiness. I don't know, I've been awake most of the week but barely conscious; and currently inundated with shit and wonder and an unsettled sense of purpose—my purpose. I know, but I don't know. I have no idea what it really is. Sure it's unfolding daily—even hourly—but for some reason, God isn't giving me much in terms of instructions. At least not so much line item or step by step directions of exactly what to do. I suppose that would take the fun out of it though, huh? Ya know, life and all? Yah, apparently God is WAY more fun than me. Duh. As if. I just wish—strike that—I pray for clarity and that the Spirit would catch me. Hold me. Keep me. Lock me in and down. Amen? Amen.

Anyway, I digress, and I digressed previously as well because I remembered the adage that has followed me throughout my career, “don't think, just write.” So I'm trying. Again. And perhaps that is what this whole thing called life is actually about—getting it wrong and being able to get up and try it again. And the redundancy is part of the poignancy. I think. Shit, apparently “poignancy” is actually a word. I swear, most days I have no idea what the fuck I'm doing. But like Bull Durham said, “You've gotta play this game with fear and arrogance.” And like Count Basie sang, “I needs to be be'd with.” Bee Tea Dubs, for some reason it really sucks to be so far away from what's her face again even though we live in the same city and never see each other and can't seem to be able to...anything. Fuck that for right now actually. I guess I

still have feelings — strong ones — that will not leave me the fuck alone! Okay, return to decorum despite this beached whale of a mess of sentiment and shit. Ha... I don't wanna be your friend, I just wanna be your lover. No matter how it ends. No matter how it starts. Forget about your house of cards. WTF is wrong with me. Tranquillo carnal. Todo bien.

¿POR QUE? POR QUE, P.S., CA, AKA PALM SPRINGS, CALIFORNIA

...is what the universe was serving all the wayyy upp. I feel blessed! Where'd these mountains come from? Mojave? Lunch? Absolutely. Something out of The Jetsons and The Flintstones, Palm Springs is the small town people from around the world visit so often, cosmopolitan trends trace their roots here. And like Rancho, P.S. ain't no mirage either. It's part of a desert archipelago of several oasis-towns in the wider COACHELLA Valley that play host to everything from PGA golf, to Serena Williams' tennis, to STAGECOACH and a hip country music waggoneering crowd, to the other INTERNATIONAL MUSIC FESTIVAL bearing its NAME, this desert oasis & the 'Desert Life' it sports, is a strong blended mix of old Hollywood, The Golden Girls, THE MAGNIFICENT SEVEN, Miami Vice, and The Weeknd's latest story of survivable mayhem.

Yeah, I'll have dessert. Won. Two forks and some sort of "so good" perfectly shaped something? It's crispy, delightful, and Belgian...Si. C'est Si Bon. Have you seen my words? Nay? Aye, I have none. What

light fluff from yonder... crème brûlée crêpes?! Mmmmmhmm. Stuffed full of fresh ecclesiastical berries, blue, straw, raas. Gracias, Dios mio.



ABOVE: Photography: Jason Persse from Brooklyn, NY, USA 📍 Indio, Riverside County, California, United States of America

Mis En Place, meet *Open Heart*. Go have a Best Day Ever like the guru said. Apparently I wasn't listening, but with the flick of a fork I'm still free—and yeah, this one's on me. Best date ever too. As pleasantly surprising as ordering dessert in the desert with incredibly pleasant company just after graciously gulp-worthy Belgian bière and Gulf shrimp, avocado, papaya, tarragon and the sweetest mussels mariniere and Belgian fries...somebody slipped and got a little waffle batter on a

few too, I think. So yes, I will be back. I'll even let you pick up lunch next time. So we'll go for breakfast.

BTDub didn't even mention, but with the desert air's healing heat and this pleasant beer sipping, you look perfect and just fine disfrutando tu postre in this sunshine. It's *your* season. Mussels, montañas y muscle cars? Si. I mean, yesss ma'am. Red. Drop topped. Couped. Errrythang. Wish this was my life like all the...time to go. Check, please, I got this. Playing with no plans tonight. Nothing worked out the way I planned. It was perfect. Solid junket. Now. BREATHE.

Relax. Holidaze's in. Blazing hot desert drive if I wasn't grooving with the wind in this sweet Mustang. I'm converted. Horses need a rest and I'm finally @ THE ACE HOTEL... What's up Ace? Clean cut hip dude called Nenet (sp?) (Belgian??) @ the front desk, friendly and informative... Chris. Guru bro. Real, cool, friendly, informative young brother. Respect. Industry standards over and hanging out. General Hospo. Como se dice... California je ne sais quoi? Ain't nobody worried...aint nobody trippin bout nada...this is the vibe that every hotel should want and seek, but then again, this is not a place for everyone...doesn't take long to see just how chill and attentive service should be...as for "mis en place" and/or what it actually means (Fr: put in place), this is it. And you know it's done right when it's seamless/organic/sneaks up on ya and next thing you know you're relaxed and having a good time. Call it, ninja hospitality.

Like I said, ain't nobody trippin. And with a few more sips of my "facial" at the poolside extension of the Amigo Room bar, I'm all goodie

in my hoodie. Middle school humor aside, the “The Desert Facial” — vodka / pineapple / mint / cucumber and a splash of soda—is a tasty and refreshing drink especially in this desert air. This “air” is just an amazing substance in and of itself. Warm and inviting. Especially for a guy who caught a break on a flight and a retired Godfather wise enough to leave the snow to drift on by and live to love the so-called ‘desert lifestyle.’ ...yah, So...I was wondering, could I bum one? Sweet. Thank You. Next. Drinks on me. Keep it up barkeep. WE APPRECIATE YOU!!! TIPPED NOW!%!%

Wandering off to go party and bulliish w/ some new friends... Worrrrrrrd. Pleasure. Peace. Soul food. Hungry. Walk and a smoke? Yess maan. Blessed to be under such a bright night sky. And this air alone was enough to get me high and harping on its realness. Forreeel; for real it’s JUST air...ere I misplace my meaning, please overstand...air JUST, still, and unpasteurized. Just. Like when it had a taste in the Garden of Eden right before we fucked everything up. The smell of fresh trust. Guess an oasis in the desert does that to a lonesome travelling man. Women are fine. At least they understand themselves, but we men are in the desert until...well shit. There ya go. Suddenly in the middle of the concrete pathway through the logical labyrinth of two-story stucco rooms, there was my sign. Literally, there’s a five-ish foot wide sign that reads

“EVERYTHING WILL BE OK”

sticking out of the ground like a cartoon cactus. Indeed; those words

were water to me at that moment. Just had a call with my sister; bad news back home, but like the sign said...

And another thing says the Rocky-in-my-head's Mick, "Ya bum...no tix to Coachella...fucking pass fell thru...missed a flight..almost didn't make it at all...*Mis en* my ass!" Then, all of a sudden again, I looked up and realized I was alright. It was 90 degrees and I was on the golf course with my Godfather...an occasion that was long overdue. And, of course, we played a course in Indio *DIRECTLY* across the road from the polo ground. Playing golf with mountains in the back and fore grounds and with music in my ears. Everything was indeed 'okay'. Segue. Si se...

WE GON' BE...ALRIGHT.

Aiight. Let's eat! Again. If you love art deco-desert architecture and the old records your aunt used to play and dance to while taking care of little spongy baby-you, then this is a cool place to come and cool the heck outta ya life. ADD in HD, pool, music, lights, camera flashes, trivia? Knight, King, or Queen? Both. Pardon me. "Where is the restaurant?" Thanks man. King's Highway: the diner. It's an old Denny's (one of the first?? idk) and looks like an outtake from a grindhouse flick...the digs are neo-modern-artisanal-deco decked out to the detail...Svc is patchy with rays of sunshine. Interesting selection of late night eats...including the surprising placement of garganelli on the menu...We'll see how it is.

Been waiting for a hot minute with cold coffee. Like I said, this side

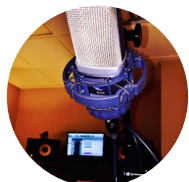
needs work, but it's also mad late...think I look kinda crazy too and it really is cool just to kick it here. I think the dude waiting on me now is the manager anyway. Real recognize real. Subtle graces make good places. And at least the post-Coachella crowd / pre-StageCoach-goers are good for ambience. And that's another thing about Ace Hotels; the "fit." Everything just goes, including the clientele that seems to fill in any gaps. From young families to young-ish, stylish, slightly nomadic, new-school professionals and entrepo'negroes like myself, the people I meet at the Ace always suit the mood of the occasion.

Apparently Palm Springs sits in a "bowl" in the middle of the Coachella Valley, comprised in part by the San Jacinto Mountains which are tripping me out right now. The desert sky makes the mountains look like part of the roofline of the refashioned 1960s desert modern resort. Some of the rooms are like that one cool guy's college dorm, stacked and staggered on and alongside mini-villas with a little more luxe — courtyards outfitted with embedded banquettes and outdoor fireplaces and pits. The cheese on the grits. Style at ease. Pueblo? Hopi?? Hope's soulful homage to the glory of old Rat Packed Palm Springs. Here's to them and to you. South by Northeast man meet Great Southwest Left Coast lady. Desert digs. Dig.

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