

THIS PLACE'S INCREDIBLE | JAN. 21, 2022



Staying at This Mystical Santa Fe Hotel Is Like Travel Within Travel

By Foster Kamer



Photo-Illustration: The Strategist; Photos: five graces

The Inn of the Five Graces, a humble Santa Fe spot capable of leaving a massive psychic footprint, is a great hotel, maybe perfect. A night there is a night spent sleeping inside an artist's global tableau. It's also a restorative pod, and more simply, a pitch-perfect way station good for showing up, sleeping, and leaving. It has two of the key markings of a truly great hotel: It could really only exist where it is. And on its best nights, it can be worth so much more than a simple night of shelter.

I ended up at the Inn of Five Graces at the tail end of a cross-country road trip in April 2021 — my first time traveling since the pandemic started — after some spring skiing in Taos was cut short by a set of panic attacks, probably long in the making. I needed to unclench. I knew a travel writer who'd recently made the same trip, who gave her highest commendation to the Inn of the Five Graces. This was over all the other Santa Fe spots your better-knowing friends will recommend, like Ten Thousand Waves (“great, worth a stop for dinner and/or a spa day”) or the cozy, chintzy hipness that is the Inn of the Turquoise Bear. That is, if I could swallow the nightly rate, which usually hovers around \$715. I couldn't. So I did what any halfway decent traveler knows to do in a situation like this: Call the hotel directly, speak to a human, and beg.

There are any number of bargaining tactics when it comes to getting a good hotel deal — including the leverage of reminding the front desk that an empty room makes less money than one with a body in it — but there's no ace up the sleeve quite like a total lack of regard for your own dignity. I gave them my budget, told them I needed this, and promised to leave a good review.

I got the room. It was still \$510. This turned out to be, I assure you, an absolute bargain.

Five Graces costs what it costs because it's a thoroughly transportive experience, travel within travel. It sits on a small block off to the side of the Santa Fe Plaza, the beating heart of Santa Fe's sightseeing action, just a few steps from San Miguel Mission, thought to be the oldest church in the United States. A warm lobby, narcotic in its quiet, plush comforts, spills out into one of a few stone courtyards on the property with antique fountains dribbling water, where you can eat breakfast or have a few cocktails. I got to my room through a heavy antique wood door that opened onto cool adobe walls and beams; turnover service included touches that might be cheesy elsewhere (a dreamcatcher laid out on a folded bed corner, or the stereo, left on, softly playing Spanish guitar music) but felt sincere, almost necessary, here. I found myself lowering my voice to a whisper.



The Inn of Five Graces

From \$715

This place is death by a thousand soft kisses and small touches. Fresh tortilla chips and smoky salsa sat on top of a gratis mini bar. Next to one of the room's star attractions, a wood-burning kiva fireplace, were stacks of piñon, long matches, and pre-rolled kindling paper, with detailed instructions for the uninitiated. (Or: "Just call us, we'll light it for you.") There are rugs, metal, and turquoise, and vintage framed prints of birds with Arabic captions under them. There's New Mexico, yeah, but also, Afghanistan and Tibet. And you may start to wonder: *Who the hell dreamt up this place?*

That would be Ira Seret — former business partner to Anne Klein and protégé of Diana Vreeland — and his wife, Sylvia. They were some of the first importers of Afghan sheepskin coats to fashion houses in the late 1960s and early 1970s, and have been refining their artistic project ever since. This will not be more obvious than when you step into your bathroom, hopefully with a bath in it, and get a psychedelic face full of color and texture: die-cut word carvings lining the entire bathroom where there aren't mosaics, tiles from all over the world, everywhere you look. To call these bathroom tiles is to call *Guernica* a nice picture, or *Hamlet* an interesting play — accurate in the technical sense, but something only an insane person would say.

One of the inn's intricate mosaic-tiled bathrooms Photo: Kate Russell

You never want to leave a great hotel, and if you do, you experience its gravitational pull. I didn't do much exploring in Santa Fe. I picked up dinner, ate it in the Five Graces courtyard, listened to the babbling fountain, and wrote some postcards. Back in my room, I lowered the lights, drew a bath, threw a few logs of piñon on the fire, and got in the tub. I marveled at the mosaics, considered the expanse of this planet and all the things we can find in it, bring back with us, and attempt to annex into the patterns of our lives at home, rather than simply collecting exotic curios and tchotchkes from far away. I let this, someone else's world, just envelop me, soothe me, and melt away the weariness I was carrying ahead of that night, for the last 13 months before it. One night in a great hotel might leave you a few hundred bucks lighter, but it can also leave you more grounded, with more heft in your soul than you showed up with. Also, ideally: some nice stationery.

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