

Last Scene Here [JONATHAN SOROFF]

WEST INTENTIONS

Just Deserts

So you're a guest at a big-ticket fundraiser in the ballroom of the Mandarin Oriental. Your charming other half is sitting next to a woman who impulsively invites the two of you to a salon weekend that she and her husband are hosting at a ranch they own near Tucson, Ariz. As a Bostonian, the prospect of sunshine in February makes you instantly respond, "We'd love to!" even though, as one friend puts it, "You hardly know these people! It's either a cult or some weird sex thing," while your brother, a doctor, predicts that they're planning to harvest your organs.

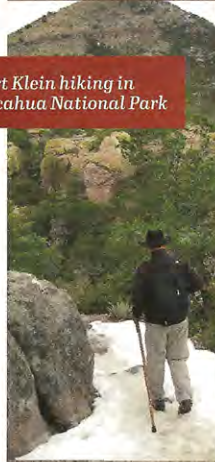
Then an elaborate and beautiful invitation arrives, packed in a wooden crate with cryptic descriptions of what to expect, along with the admonition to "come prepared to talk about one of your passions." There's an Agatha Christie quality to it, like being asked to attend Davos, Renaissance Weekend, or the Allen & Company Sun Valley Conference, minus all the security, helicopter wash and titanic egos.

The enigmatic allure leads you to book plane tickets, which is how we found ourselves flying into Tucson on a Friday morning and driving two hours through the Sonoran desert, past the highway that leads to Tombstone (where Wyatt Earp and Doc Holliday had the gunfight at the OK Corral), past Cochise Stronghold (where the great Apache chief made his last stand against the Feds), past a Wal-Mart that the Coen Brothers and Quentin Tarantino couldn't come up with on acid, past Beck's Show Pigs and Feed, the Sunzona Baptist Church, and across grasslands as monotonously beautiful as the Serengeti. We went through a checkpoint for U.S. Customs and Border Control, negotiated close to six miles of pitted mud in a rental car that was decidedly unfit for off-roading and finally arrived at **Sunglow Ranch**. Nestled at the base of the Chiricahua Mountains, it's considered sacred ground by the Apaches, and it's where Geronimo hid out from the Feds. It also abuts a sizable swathe of National Forest filled with lions and cougars and bears—oh, my!—and it's about as close to a postcard of the Old West as you can get without actually riding herd with John Wayne.

We were greeted by our hosts: **Chrissy Kazis**, owner of a recruiting firm, and her husband, **Mitch Sayare**—an MD, professor, biotech mogul and an amateur (but professional-caliber) photographer and astronomer (which is what drew him to the area in the first place). Over the next few hours, like the ensemble cast from a Noël Coward play, the other guests assembled, 13 in all. Some of us knew each other. Most of us



Robert Klein hiking in Chiricahua National Park



Mary Kakas and her twig



Me and Sam in the Chiricahua mountains



Geronimo, who once belonged to George Strait



Going riding



The view from the ranch

didn't. Those I knew included **Mary Kakas**, the irrepressibly upbeat furrier turned philanthropist, art dealer **Robert Klein**, whose Newbury Street gallery is one of the country's premier sources for fine photography, and **Bonnie and Merle Berger**—she's a political activist, he's a world-famous pioneer in reproductive medicine. Then there was **Jim Fiala**, a Back Bay businessman who I couldn't place until he remembered giving me a ride to a party in Newport once, and his wife, **Teresa**, a flight attendant whose accent is unmistakably Memphis. Like in *Clue*, there was a professor, **Peter Hawkins** of Yale, although thankfully, no one murdered him in the library with a candlestick. Then there was **Sue Irving**, a marketing executive, with her other half, **Mike Alexis**, a building contractor who focuses on environmental projects, and the Colorado-based **Dempseys**—**Chip**, a commodities trader turned social entrepreneur, and his wife, **Jen**, a PhD candidate. It was an eclectic crew, to say the least.

After dinner, the salon began, with five people making presentations, followed by lively discussion (accompanied by plenty of bourbon). The next morning, a group of us went riding in the **Coronado National Forest** (my horse, I'm proud to say, once belonged to country music star **George Strait**), which was followed by high tea back at the ranch (where a string quartet serenaded us and Mary Kakas showed off the twig that had lodged itself in her cleavage while riding). For a bit of R&R, I scheduled a massage with a woman whose family had been ranching the area for four generations and whose great-grandfather had been a deputy for Wyatt Earp. A delicious dinner was followed by another fascinating evening of discussion and debate, while the next morning offered the opportunity for a snowy hike in **Chiricahua National Park**, which could just as easily be named Giant Phallus National Park, given the huge and hugely suggestive rock formations.

But the weekend's focus remained the salon, and if you'd ever told me that I would spend three days in Outer Nowhere, Ariz., engaged in scintillating dialogue about everything from Dante's *Inferno* to football to how Hillary Clinton dropped the ball to the Motion Picture Production Code of 1930, I would've never believed you.

To misquote Eleanor Roosevelt: "Small minds discuss people. Average minds discuss events. Great minds discuss ideas." Thanks to the salon at Sunglow Ranch, a group of us were allowed to feel like great minds, if only for a weekend. ***

Avez-vous dish? Dirt? A spectacular social occasion? Call JS at 617-859-1400, ext. 303, or send an e-mail to jonathan@improper.com.