



EAST CAPE Eden

*Sing a Song of Serenity after a Long Journey,
and You will be Singing of Villa del Faro.*

-story and photos by Larry Dunmire-

Ah, talk about the proverbial “long and winding road.” Musically, the Beatles recorded their classic, number one hit singing about one such road years ago, and now, here I am in 2010, singing their memorable lyrics as I’m actually driving upon one. Add the word “dusty” to follow “long” and “winding,” and you’ve an apt description of the sentiments I’m feeling as I jump and bump along the East Cape’s Palo Escopeta Road, a true example of a “washboard road,” if ever I’ve driven one.

Continued on page 84

PHOTO COURTESY OF DEVORA WISE



PHOTO COURTESY OF DEVORA WISE



It's July, mid-Summer in Baja, and I'm singing the classic Beatles song "The Long and Winding Road" to myself.

It's hot and dusty. Anyone who's familiar with Baja's Summers knows of the soaring temperatures that descend upon the Peninsula this time of year. (Think Palm Springs, by the Sea, for example.)

Always searching for the new and unique hotel experience throughout the Baja Peninsula, I'd heard favorable mention and endless praises of a small "eco-resort" by the name of *Villa del Faro* (Villa of the Lighthouse) from friends who'd stayed there. They couldn't say enough great things about it, and wouldn't stop badgering me until I'd visited it, too. The small, personable-sounding, five-room B&B sounded just my style, as well, so, I'd made a reservation, and then began making plans for my visit with the Villa's manager, Devora Wise.

"Villa del Faro is not a place for everyone," states the resort's website. While lacking

barhopping, shopping and golf courses, Villa del Faro's East Cape location "offers solitude instead of shops, long walks on the only swimmable beach on the east cape, hikes into the deep arroyos instead of golf, watching the whales play from your private balcony instead of TV and personal care from the friendly family who run and own it."

On my way out to Villa del Faro, I'm following the map and detailed directions that she's provided me. I don't have many choices for routes to the hotel, as this is pretty much the only way to reach this particular part of Cabo's East Cape from the airport San José del Cabo, short of a long haul up the East Cape Road.

I'm coaxing my Ace Rental Car, a smallish Volkswagen mini-SUV, along the rutted washboard road, kicking up plumes of dust as I go. The Palo Escopeta Road gets its name from the yellow-flowering shotgun tree that edges the desert road. The road extends roughly in an easterly direction,

beginning just outside the San José del Cabo International Airport, and continues for about 20 miles out to the East Cape region where I'll find Villa del Faro, and the tranquil Sea of Cortez just beyond.

The directions provided by Devora, state, in no few words, that the Palo Escopeta Road presents a bit of a driving challenge. "But getting there is well worth the trip," they also promise.

A "challenge" the drive is, indeed, but I persist with patience and a sense of humor, all the while singing the Beatles song to myself. I'm weathering the Palo Escopeta road, over all its many dusty bumps. It seems like more than 20 miles. But suddenly, I'm afforded my first view of the Sea of Cortez, and then, just as quickly, the Palo Escopeta ends, coming to a happy conclusion as it intersects the East Cape Road. According to the directions, after a left turn on the East Cape Road, I've just a few more miles to go before reaching Villa del Faro.

Fifteen minutes later, I spot the Villa del Faro sign and climb onto their driveway. I'm completely unprepared for my first view of Villa del Faro. After the challenge of the lengthy, dusty and winding Palo Escopeta Road, I'm greeted by an unexpected-welcoming cool, verdant, landscaped oasis. The driveway circles around a serenading, gurgling fountain. Villa del Faro's architecture reminds me of an appealing blend of Italianate, Mediterranean and Mexican architecture.

Unprepared for this, I'm dumbfounded, pleasantly surprised, and as I enter the Villa's cool, main building, I'm met and welcomed by Devora. Either she reads my mind (or just knows the inclinations of thirsty, male travel writers/photographers) and offers me a chilled *cerveza*, with which I thankfully wash down the Baja road dust. The beer

also quickly dissipates my frazzled Palo Escopeta road nerves. All the frustrations that preceded my arrival at Villa del Faro are quickly forgotten.

She suggests we take an overall tour of the property before taking me to my room. It's not a large property, in the Los Cabos scheme of things, she says. "We're small here, just twelve acres," she explains, "and there are just five rentable spaces here at Villa del Faro." She shows me their two *casitas*; ("little houses" in Spanish) Casita Tres and Casita Dos. Casita Tres features a large, comfortable bedroom, and Casita Dos has two connected bedrooms, all with hand-carved furniture, tiled floors, fully-stocked book cases, their own private terraces and gardens, with panoramic views of the Sea of Cortez.

Taking a bit of a detour, we walk down a small foot trail to their Stone Beach Cottage,

built right upon the beach at the foot of the Villa's hillside; she says the Beach Cottage is probably their most popular rental with guests. Built of giant granite stones, it has a large indoor fireplace, an outdoor shower, no running water and an outhouse located near the cottage. It is "obviously for campers and the young at heart."

Later, we finish the tour down a winding concrete pathway through beautiful desert

Continued on page 86

(FAR LEFT AND BELOW) | *The verdant landscaping, fountains and handsome architecture of Villa del Faro awaits guests just beyond the welcome sign. The Stone Beach Cottage offers a more rustic charm for the more adventurous of guests.*



gardens, past fountains, and I get a glimpse of a giant pool, glittering in the afternoon sun. "And this is the Casa Alberca - the Pool House, and your room" says Devora, as we approach a large palapa-covered house that sits alongside the beautiful pool, the latter which is adorned with life-like paintings of marlin upon its bottom.

"Wow, *fantastico!*" is all I can say, again unprepared and duly impressed with my "room," which is really more a complete house. Casa Alberca has an expansive, comfy,

art-filled living room, full kitchen and bath, and several fireplaces.

I'm not sure whether I'm touring someone's large, comfortable home, or maybe a museum, or perhaps an art gallery, or all three at the same time. I share my confusion with Devora, and she explains the evolution of Villa del Faro with me. The owners today consist of "a large family of friends and artists who came down to the Baja over 20 years ago, with the goal of creating an ecological oasis in the middle of nowhere."

While at Villa del Faro, I learn that it was the husband and wife team of Richie and Jessie Guerin, veteran Baja aficionados and renowned Southern California home building contractors that set the entire Villa del Faro project in motion over 20 years ago. They discovered this idyllic spot in 1989, located at Punta Peruchera during one of their many family Baja camping trips with their kids, and while towing their "tin fishing boat" on a trailer behind their washboard-weathered Suburban. The Guerins were





understandably captivated by the location, which is near one of the only swimmable beaches on the East Cape (great for their kids) and also offered great fishing and proximity to top East Cape surfing breaks (great for Richie).

They had an idea, a vision, and purchased the 12-acre lot later that year. They then began building themselves a second, vacation home - intended for family and their building company members, in March, 1990. From the beginning, the crew camped out as construction progressed. The building project attracted and included many family members, as well as friends. Everyone quickly became intimately involved. As they explain it, the central core of family and friends consisted of many artistic and talented people, and everyone wanted to contribute.

“We are builders and artists, writers and craftsmen by profession. Everyone wanted to contribute - parents, children and friends.” It truly became a “labor of love.” Often times they mixed their concrete in holes dug in the ground, hoisting the five-gallon buckets of concrete onto their shoulders, and carrying the concrete up ramps and ladders in order to pour the walls and roofs. They used only hand tools.

First, the kitchen was built, of course, and then the main house with living quarters, which was then followed by a second “casita,” and then another, as “friends” or associates in their building business, joined in the project. The family chose a design that scattered little houses here and there, rather than one huge imposing structure, evident with most large hotels. The result is a closeness to the desert,

(FAR LEFT AND ABOVE) | *Taking it easy is what Villa del Faro is all about, whether lounging outdoors in a hammock, kicking back in the living room, or taking a dip in the large pool. The guest rooms are beautifully appointed. Art and various other curios and such make Villa del Faro seem to be part B&B, part museum.*

a sort of interaction between civilization and the wildness of nature, they say.

In many instances they built around the cactus, leaving many natural plants and trees untouched.

Molds were made for tile and balustrades. They built a shop for cabinetry, and an in-house woodcarver and furniture maker made the doors and chests and tables.

Continued on page 88



PHOTO COURTESY OF DIEVORA WISE

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They found a local iron-worker to fashion the iron gates and some of the windows. The Mexican crew was gathered from one small town in mainland Mexico's state of Guerrero, and as more were needed, more came, the story goes.

Over the years, the Villa del Faro's "family and friends" found themselves spending more and more time here at Villa del Faro (and why not, I say!!), "as their love for Mexico deepened." "We came here to live in Mexico, with Mexicans," states Jessie Guerin. Some of them have even become Mexican citizens.

For years, it was as they'd originally planned - a private, Baja vacation home for the Guerins and their extended family. Then one night, as Jessie Guerin tells the story, in

2006, she thought "why not convert Villa del Faro into a small hotel," in order to share their East Cape vision, their home, with like-minded Baja aficionados?

These days, the houses are filled with original art, amazing details and personal touches that they have spent years lovingly creating.

My first night at dinner in their small, intimate restaurant, over a scrumptious dinner of Pasta and Shrimp *Sorrentino* (Brie Quesadillas with mango chutney is the appetizer), I meet Geoff Ewan, a "friend" of the Guerins, and partner in the Villa del Faro project. He's noticeably excited, I observe, and tells me that he's looking forward to *manana*, as excitedly as a young child on the night before Christmas.

He explains that tomorrow is Villa del Faro's "Solar Day" - they're receiving the delivery of a large shipment of the newest top of the line photo voltaic equipment - 34 large solar panels and a brand new Multiquip generator that will replace their two ancient, stinky generators. It's a project he's been working on for more than three years, and the new panels will more than double the hotel's solar power capabilities.

The next morning I awaken early to my first Villa del Faro sunrise. The Casa Alberca's French doors make a stunning frame for the soft sunlight as the sun appears from out of the Sea of Cortez, a novelty for this West Coast guy. The atmosphere here at Villa del Faro is of complete peace and tranquility.

Each morning I start out with a long walk on the deserted beach, followed by a relaxing swim in the pool (solar heated, of course!). Afterwards, I enjoy taking my time photographing the desert scenes, and ambling through the property's winding walkways to the dining area for breakfast, listening to the varied birdsongs of woodpeckers, orioles, quail, finches, cardinals. The hotel's bird list of feathered visitors even includes a couple I've never heard of, and have a hard time pronouncing, the pyrrhuloxia and phainopepla.

I've truly found an East Cape "Garden of Eden" I think to myself, as I sit down to a delicious breakfast of steaming Mexican coffee, an *omeletta con salsa & guacamole*, and freshly-squeezed orange juice. As I eat, I am mesmerized by the tiniest of hummingbirds, with an indigo chest and a flashing neon hot pink neckband, which continually visits a nearby hummingbird feeder, whirring

fearlessly near enough for me to touch.

Over the next few days, I explore the heavenly grounds of Villa del Faro, often swimming in the cool, crystalline Sea of Cortez to cool off. Devora and I enjoy our photography conversations - she's an excellent, enthusiastic, and accomplished photographer, and over the 17 years that she has spent at Villa del Faro, she has beautifully captured the life and scenes at Villa del Faro. Her exquisite photos are featured in their promotional photo-book. Later in the day, she takes me up the East Cape Road to their nearby Mexican neighbors at Rancho Boca de Salada, with a host of horses, goats (for cheese), and cattle. She introduces me to Lucretia, the wife of the local Mexican *caballero* (cowboy).

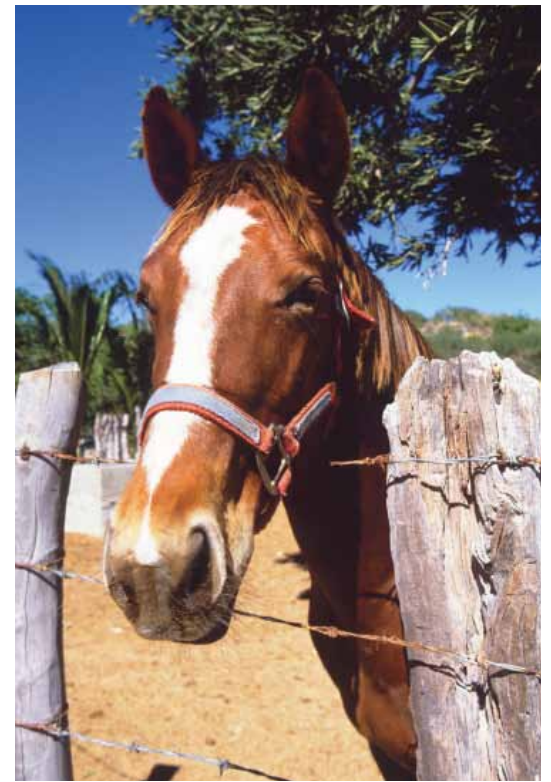
The next day, I jump into the Villa's Toyota Forerunner for a day-long East Cape adventure with Kurt Franck, another "friend" and Villa del Faro partner. We blast

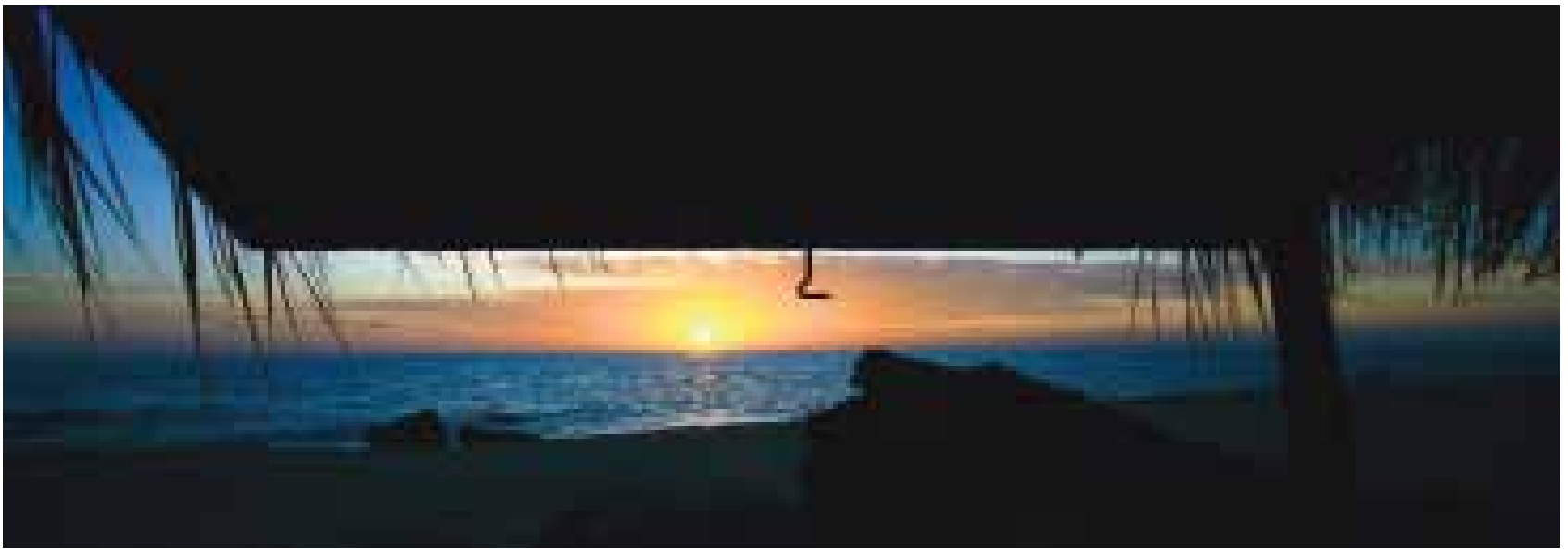
north along the East Cape Road, dustily visiting several of the East Cape's beaches, along with the unique town of Cabo Pulmo, known for its distinctive reef system and tremendous snorkeling and scuba diving, and also panga fishing, if you so desire.

One of their favorite beaches, just south of Cabo Pulmo, is Los Arbolitos, which is an inviting beach with palapas lining its shore. I imagine lazing about it on a windless sunny

Continued on page 90

(FAR LEFT AND BELOW) | *The restaurant at Villa del Faro offers tantalizing dishes and an intimate atmosphere. Luminous sunrises over the Sea of Cortez can be enjoyed virtually every morning. Up the road from Villa del Faro, Cabo Pulmo offers fantastic diving opportunities. Cacti are profuse around Villa del Faro. Rural, agrarian charm and horses are present at the nearby Rancho Boca de Salada. Just south of Cabo Pulmo, Los Arbolitos Beach is a favorite daytrip destination.*





HORNED LIZARD AND WOODPECKER PHOTOS COURTESY OF DIEVORA WISE

(ABOVE) | *The breathtaking natural scenery and laid-back atmosphere more than make up for the absence of modern amenities at “off-the-grid” Villa del Faro. As an eco-minded paradise, it is home to a diverse abundance of Mexican wildlife, including caracaras, horned lizards and woodpeckers.*

Summer’s day and snorkeling the azure Sea. But today’s stiff wind and waves keeps us from entering the water. Next time, I promise myself, next time...

Gloriously, I spend my two final nights enjoying the Beach Cottage, feeling just like Mexican Family Robinson. I go to sleep with the sounds of the waves outside my window, and awaken a couple of times each night to head out and stargaze from the beach, tracking the progress of the brilliant Orion and the incredible Milky Way overhead.

Sadly, all good things must come to an end, and my stay here nears its conclusion. As I’m packing my (very) dusty Ace Rental car to leave, I take inventory of all I’ve experienced here at Villa del Faro. I’m no longer anxious of driving the bumpy Palo Escopeta Road back out to San José, and vow

to drive a little quicker on my way out, after having learned the fine art of washboard road driving from Kurt.

What have I learned at Villa del Faro? If there are lessons to be learned from experiences such as this, it’s that we don’t have to put up with power lines and phone lines hovering over our heads, like I have at home. We don’t need to be “on the grid” - “It’s good to be off the grid,” Geoff told me, during our solar conversations.

I’ve come to the awareness that solar power is definitely in our future. Another lesson learned is that the Guerin family, along with their many talented “friends,” have created a truly cool, colorful and comfortable East Cape oasis here at Punta Peruchera, its small blinking lighthouse on a steel pedestal. Villa del Faro is “exquisitely off the grid,” as they proudly state, and has become a welcoming “home” to the many animals, flocks of birds and yes, even to us adventurous humans willing to drive out the dusty Palo Escopeta Road. The road’s really not that difficult, as I look back now on the experience. Villa del Faro, as personified

by the “family and friends” responsible for creating and running this oasis, truly practices what they preach: “*mi casa es su casa!*” Their house is surely our house.

The final Villa del Faro lesson I’ve learned is that if you’re desirous of finding the Baja’s “Garden of Eden,” it’s surely at the end of a long, winding, and very dusty “washboard” road.

Drive on, *amigos!!!*

And don’t forget to bring your Beatles CD for the Escopeta singalong!

For more information on Villa del Faro, e-mail: rental@villadelfaro.net, or visit www.villadelfaro.net.

All Cabo Living readers will receive a 20% discount from ACE Car Rental. (ACE’s rental office is located just outside the San José del Cabo International Airport.) To reserve via e-mail, contact: ace_sjd@yahoo.com, or call US toll free at (866) 225-9220 or Mexico toll-free at: 01-(800) 821-7977. Or visit them online at www.acerentacar.com El Fin!