

Vacayou



Well Q&A: Legacy, Longevity and Reinvention at Rancho La Puerta

TRAVEL WELL, WELL Q&A, WELLNESS GETAWAYS

Rancho La Puerta (The Ranch) in the mountains of Baja California is one of those places that “wellness travel addicts” (like me) dream of visiting. That dream was fulfilled for me in 2009. To spend an entire week at a destination spa, especially one like The Ranch is life-altering. The landscaping is breathtaking with inspiring sculptures to discover and the scent of fresh rosemary in the air. Mt. Kuchamaa provides not only a gorgeous backdrop but incredible hiking opportunities. There were two spas that I took full advantage of! Fitness options were broad and I tried several new things including drumming (surprisingly aerobic) which was fabulous. The food was healthy, creative; the lectures and master classes were mind-expanding. And the staff and guests made my first solo destination spa experience welcoming.

The highlight of my stay was attending a talk given by my hero and the founder of Rancho La Puerta, Deborah Szekeley. Almost every Monday evening, Deborah has been holding court since The

Ranch opened 80 years ago. Her knowledge, wisdom and perspective have truly changed me in so many ways.

This Well Q&A is with Hervé Blondel, the General Manager of [Rancho La Puerta](#). We discuss what makes The Ranch a unique immersive wellness resort/[destination spa](#) and the camaraderie that develops from their philosophy that there is always space for learning and to become better.



Sallie: What makes Rancho La Puerta a unique wellness resort and destination spa?

Hervé: I have been spoiled by being at The Ranch. Here there is always space for learning to become “Siempre Mejor” (Always Better). I have been working in hospitality for 30 years and The Ranch is one of a kind, for its location, the gardens, the energy from Mount Kuchumaa, the staff and the guests. Some of them have been to different spas all over the world and come back to The Ranch and tell me, “this is the best place I’ve ever been.” I think it is the camaraderie we have within The Ranch community that really sets us apart.

S: Tell us three things most people don't know about Rancho La Puerta.

H: (1) We have three generations of staff working at the same time at The Ranch in different departments. Many staff started their careers at The Ranch. (2) The Ranch rescues cats and fosters them on property. The reason we have a turnover of these animals is because many of our guests adopt the cats and take them home. (3) Macario Olea is our master ceramicist. He makes all of the signs at The Ranch, the ones that our guests are familiar with and that they see all around the property pointing them in different directions.

S: What motivates you to do what you do? What is your "Why?"

H: I am inspired by the passion of the people I work with and work for. I am motivated by the energy that I



receive from the amazing people I encounter every day. I enjoy working in a social environment. The camaraderie of the guests is unlike anything I have experienced in my career. The spirit of the guests, The Ranch, and the greater Tecate community motivates me and makes me happy. I wake up smiling every morning knowing that something new awaits me as every day is different and exciting.

S: Who has had a deep, lasting influence on your life?

H: When I was growing up I spent a lot of time at my neighbor Simone's house. She was an art collector, great chef and hosted a variety of guests with different backgrounds. She was extremely hospitable and had

opera singers and other people with diverse professions as house guests.

Simone was supportive of me and when I was with her I was like a little sponge, always learning new things. She introduced me to the fascinating people who stayed with her and she also taught me how to love cooking. We always experimented together; for example, we made dishes from a Middle Ages

cookbook. Through Simone, I learned that I liked to make things with my hands. Today, ceramics, Japanese woodworking and chocolate making are all things I enjoy creating with my hands (during my spare time). We all need a creative side to bring balance into our lives.

S: What does “wellness” look like for you in your daily life?

H: I eat lots of ice cream, lots of cream and lots of meat. I’m joking! In all seriousness, health and wellness is a philosophy that I learned at The Ranch and it adds balance to my lifestyle. It is about achieving wellness in the mind, body and spirit. I eat organic and seasonal foods and I appreciate the journey from the farm to my table. When I wake up in the morning, bright and early, I go for a run around The Ranch track. I listen to music, and occasionally I pause to look at the Mt. Kuchamaa and Alex’s Oak. I also use this time to meditate. Meditation does not have to take place in a bedroom or on a mountain in stillness; I practice a moving meditation when I run.

S: Rancho La Puerta has amazing cuisine. Tell us about one of your favorite dishes.

H: I appreciate all the dishes at The Ranch. The Wednesday salmon is a guest favorite, but we also have an array of vegetarian dishes that are amazing – dishes I never expected to see. The creativity in our kitchens makes our cuisine unlike anything I have ever encountered. The food is healthy and flavorful and many of our guests take recipes back home with them. Our culinary team also cooks based on the seasonality of the produce. For example, if mulberries are in season then guests will see them in their salads, in vinaigrettes and in their flan dessert. The Ranch teaches us how seasonality is key and that we need to get a variety of healthy foods onto our plates. And yes, I too love the Wednesday salmon.

S: You work for one of the most iconic, special people in the world of spa and wellness and my personal hero, Deborah Szekeley. What have you learned from Deborah?

H: Pay attention to details! It took me two years to gain her confidence. I remember taking a walk with Deborah around The Ranch. She said, “Hervé move this, do that, and cut the trees, I cannot see Alex’s Oak.” She’s always on point and cares deeply about the details, even today. And that’s what makes The Ranch different – the little details that nobody notices at the end of the day, but that makes things better.

Deborah has a strong personality, and she is very sweet and loves the people who work at The Ranch. She has created a connection with the guests that go further than them being guests; they have become friends. The Ranch is more like a big family rather than a resort and we love it when our family comes back home to The Ranch.