

# BILTMORE

MAGAZINE

## THE GRAND DAME TURNS 80



The Official Publication of the  
Arizona Biltmore Resort & Spa  
*Complimentary Copy*

GOING GREEN  
ALL OVER  
SPA FOR TWO  
THE NEW  
AGE OF TEA



# ARIZONA BILTMORE

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THIS YEAR COMMEMORATES THE 80TH BIRTHDAY OF THE ARIZONA BILTMORE RESORT & SPA, AND WE COULDN'T BE MORE PLEASED THAN TO SHARE THE CELEBRATION WITH OUR GUESTS. NOW THAT THE RESORT IS AN OCTOGENARIAN, LET'S TAKE A LOOK AT WHAT HAS BEEN SEEN AND DONE HERE IN THE PAST EIGHT DECADES.

By Julie Lemerond

### Biltmore History

Long before Phoenix was a highly developed tourist destination, before Camelback Road was paved and during the time that the state of Arizona was still an infant, two innovative brothers named Warren and Charles McArthur came into town, in 1910 and 1913, respectively. They rolled up their sleeves and dug their feet into a popular Dodge dealership, which later expanded to 11 dealerships across town. They also hit the broadcast radio circuit and started KTAR, 92.3, today a talk radio station in town. But perhaps one of their most curious and exciting ventures was creating what was known as the Wonderbus, a Dodge truck emptied on the inside and decorated with tables and chairs, with bunk beds folding off the side of the bus for sleeping at night. The McArthur brothers would give desert tours to travelers with the Wonderbus, and eventually came to realize that Arizona is a great tourist destination, which prompted them to move on to their newest venture—the Arizona Biltmore.

Through investors, the brothers received the \$1 million necessary for starting up the project, and brought their eldest brother Albert onboard to design it all. Albert Chase McArthur was a Harvard architecture graduate and had studied under Frank

Lloyd Wright in Oak Park, Ill. In fact, all three of the McArthur brothers were familiar with Frank Lloyd Wright's work; they had grown up in a Chicago house designed and built by Wright.

The Wright influence is obvious throughout the resort, but Albert had his own take on things, too. He requested permission from Wright to use the textile block system for which Wright was known. Wright agreed to it only after charging the brothers \$10,000 for a consulting fee, which the McArthurs interpreted as the patent for the blocks, leading to slight tensions over the miscommunications. (See sidebar Blocks)

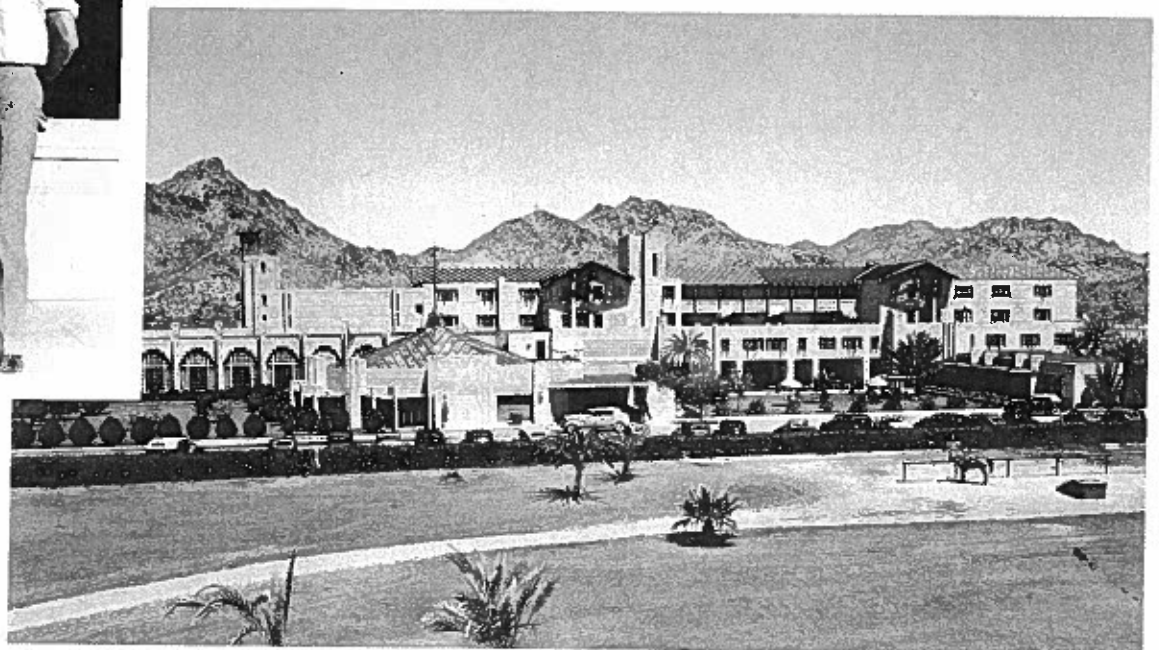
### Moving on and Opening

The resort was finished and ready to house guests by February, 1929. A huge three-day opening was the result of several hundred invitations being sent out, with the hopes that a few hundred would respond. However, nearly all invited guests decided to hop onboard for the grand opening, which would now be recreated three days in a row. The large ceremonial key is still preserved in the History Room to honor the grand opening.

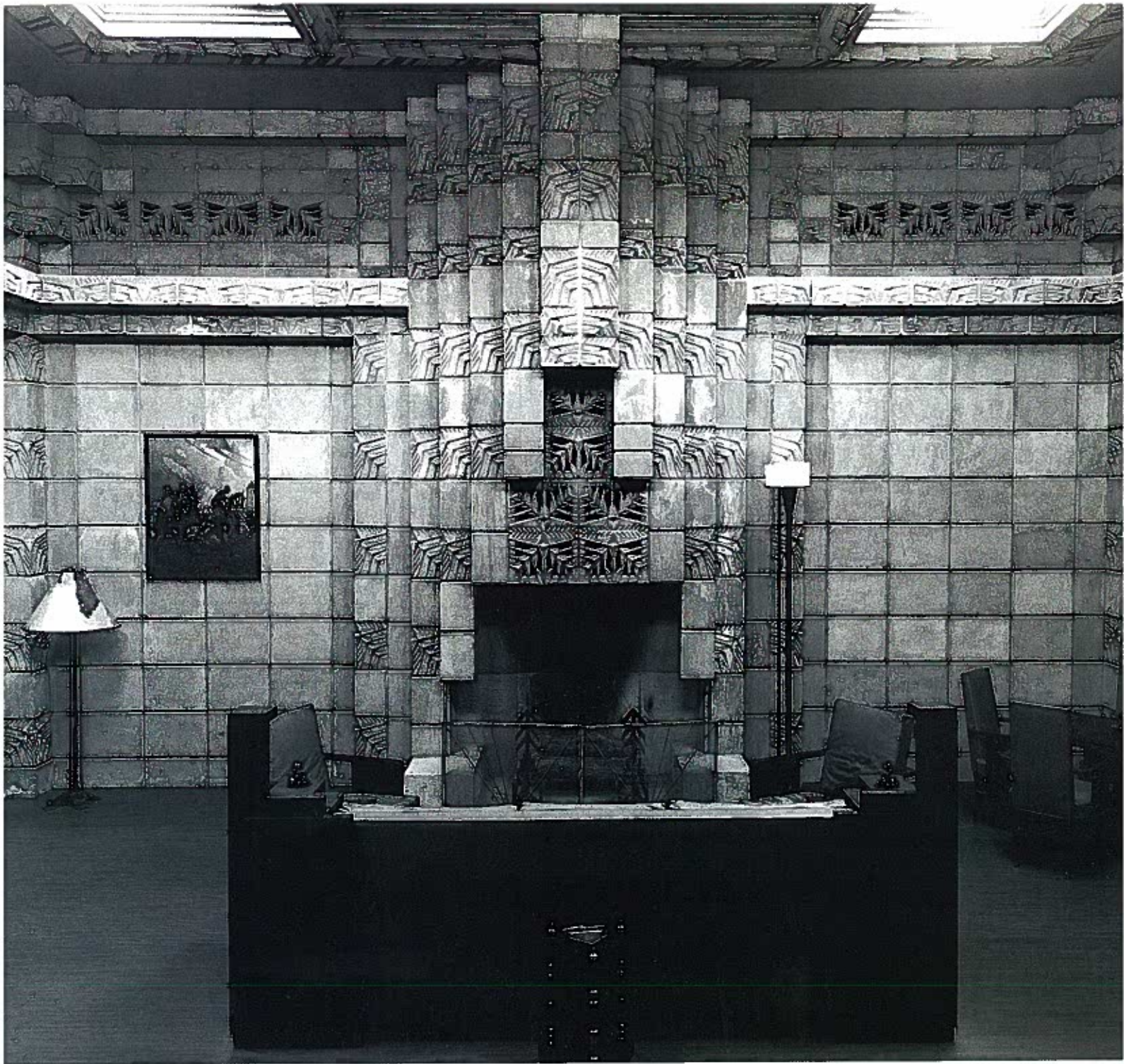
In the fall of that year, just a handful of days before the resort was to open for the tourist season, came the Stock Market Crash



The resort's beginnings.



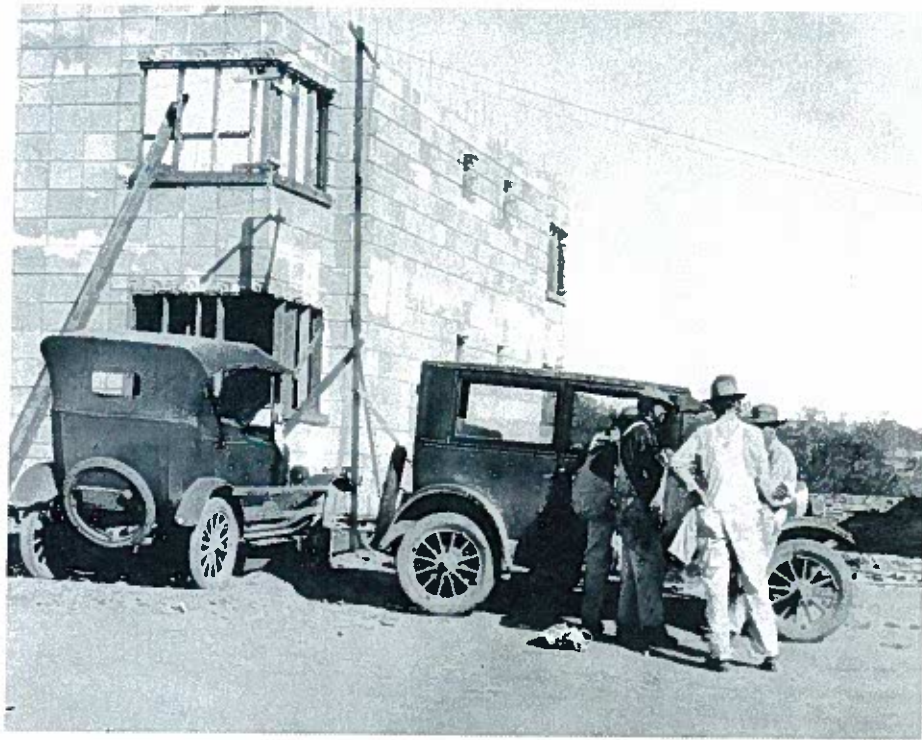




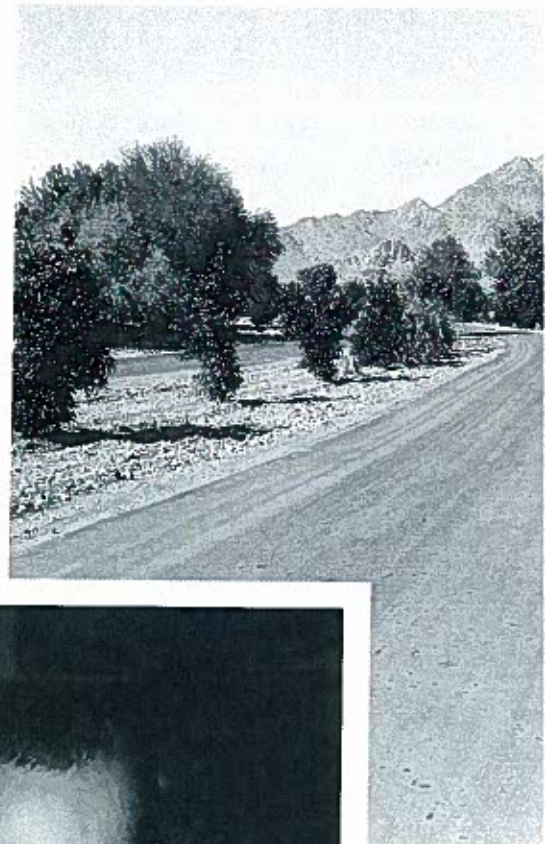
#### MYSTERY HISTORY

Prohibition was well underway during the beginning years of the Biltmore, but finding creative ways to get around those pesky liquor laws kept the party going here. The Mystery Room was a hideout for guests (men only!) to smoke cigars while enjoying the forbidden fruits of the day. Someone was always on lookout for Phoenix police, who had to drive eight miles uphill to the north to try to bust the partygoers. The room was equipped with a glass ceiling, and a spotlight signal was made visible when the authorities were on their way. By the time the police had arrived, the men had had been shuffled back downstairs and the mystery room door spun around to look like a bookcase.





In the early years the Arizona Biltmore was the only building in the area.

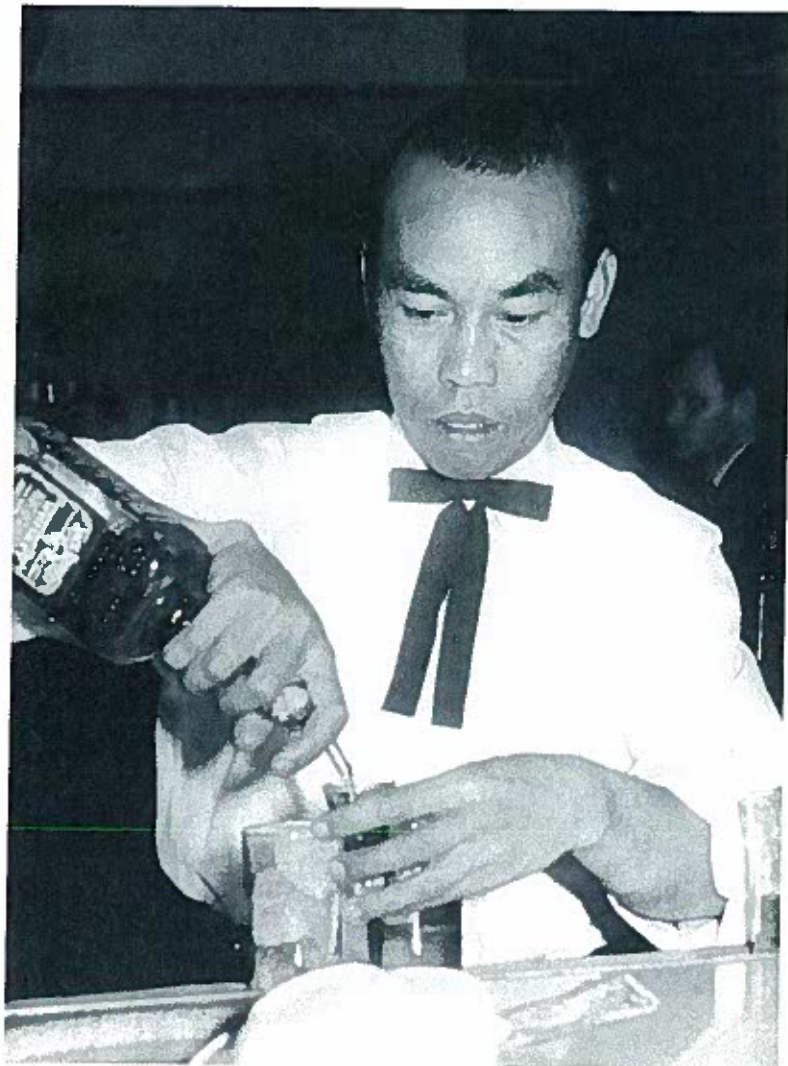


### TEQUILA SUNRISE

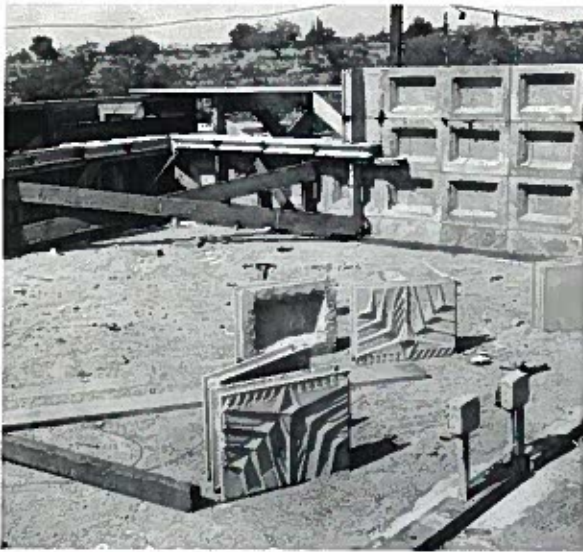
Though famous legends were often the guests at the resort, sometimes history was made by the staff as well.

Sometime in the late 1930's/early 1940's, bartender Gene Sulit was on shift, when a prominent guest asked him to create something refreshing for him to drink while lounging poolside.

And thus the original Tequila Sunrise was invented. Tequila, Crème de Cassis and fresh lime over ice is what Sulit concocted, and though the recipe has morphed a bit over the years, guests at the resort can still order the original at any bar on premise. Thirsty?







The building of the Biltmore blocks.

### THE BLOCKS

The textile blocks used to build the resort had been a source of tension between Albert McArthur and Frank Lloyd Wright. McArthur, though an architect, was also a passionate mathematician, and he argued with Wright that the blocks should be rectangular rather than square. Ultimately, it was McArthur's project and his opinion won over.

Wright's philosophy was to use materials from the land to create the building, and this influence carried itself through the Biltmore. The blocks are made of sand and water from the canal that flows right past the resort, and a factory was set up onsite to create the 250,000 blocks needed to build the resort.

The design on the blocks was thought to represent the leaves of a palm tree, but apparently the mathematician McArthur had more foresight than mere decoration; the pattern on the blocks also represents the mathematical equation for the refraction of light.

of 1929. William Wrigley Jr., one of the original investors in the project, was able to financially bail out the Arizona Biltmore Corporation, and with that, ownership switched hands to the Wrigley family, where it would stay for 43 years.

During the Wrigley family's tenure, the Biltmore became a destination for Old Hollywood greats and political dignitaries. The pool area turned inspirational for some, with Marilyn Monroe claiming the Catalina Pool to be her very favorite, and Irving Berlin coining the tune 'White Christmas' outside his cabana. Every American President in office since the resort's opening has spent time here, and have all been memorialized in photos in the lobby.

In 1973, the Wrigley Family sold the resort to Talley Industries, whose intention was to turn the Biltmore into a year-round resort. Ironically, while setting up a sprinkler system to comply with fire codes, a welder accidentally started a six-alarm fire (Arizona's first!), and ultimately created 2.5 million dollars worth of damage.

But the Biltmore has only become better since the fire, with numerous renovations and expansions seen in the past 35 years, increasing the amount of meeting space, guest rooms, leisure

areas and spa facilities. To this day, the resort continues to be considered the most prestigious and stylish resorts in the state and promises a long future. Its nickname, Jewel of the Desert, couldn't be more appropriate.

### Bridging the Past with the Present

The sense of pride about the history of the resort is evident throughout the staff. Today, Becky Blaine, the resort historian, continues to tell the story of the Biltmore, using more modern means.

"For the 80th anniversary year we will be offering more historical aspects for guests to enjoy, such as historical dinner tours, tea and history tour packages, lunch and history tour packages, etc.," she says.

The resort is using today's technology to tell the story of the resort. History podcasts and vodcasts are available to download for free on the website, [www.arizonabiltmore.com](http://www.arizonabiltmore.com). Also coming soon will be iTouch tours, allowing guests to self-guide themselves through a tour of the resort while getting a bit of a history lesson at the same time.

"We want to introduce the history of the Biltmore to the younger generations in a way they can understand," says Blaine. "It's the same great history. We're just repackaging it." **B**