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Traveler

Marfa, Texas Is Finally Getting a High-End Hotel

Written by **Stirling Kelso** • April 06, 2016



Photo by Casey Dunn

The lobby of the Hotel Saint George, with Marfa Book Company in the rear.

Even with the opening of its first full service property, this quirky desert town stays true to its roots.

Marfa is a weird place: With fewer than 2,000 residents, the town has its own NPR station but no decent grocery store. There's an indie bookshop yet only a smattering of restaurants, none of which keep regular hours. And although Marfa is isolated even by West Texas standards—hours from the closest airport—it's home to 16 art galleries (that's about one for every 124 residents) as well as the Chinati Foundation, which holds hundreds of works by artists such as Dan Flavin, John Chamberlain, and local hero Donald Judd. Over the past decade a pilgrimage to Marfa has become a bucket list trip for anyone who wants to appear culturally plugged in. Which is why big hotel brands have been eyeing investments in this underserved little boomtown.



Photo by Casey Dunn

An exterior view of the Hotel Saint George.

Predictably, residents would rather keep Marfa local—and yes, weird—including former Chinati board member Tim Crowley, who’s staving off the big brands by offering his own vision of what a smarter, more stylish hotel here can be. The longtime resident has converted a 1930 low-slung stucco building downtown into the Hotel Saint George (set to open this month), named for an inn that occupied the same site from 1886 to 1924. Crowley’s hope was to give visitors a higher-end alternative to Marfa’s motels and campgrounds—something it sorely needs when, say, the director of the Pompidou pops in from Paris.

But beyond the novelty of a full-service stay, it’s the hotel’s art collection that will get people talking. Nearly 300 works by regional artists such as Christopher Wool, Mark Flood, and Jeff Elrod are exhibited throughout, including pieces in all 55 guest rooms. But the Saint George is more than an art hotel—a phrase, it turns out, Crowley loathes: “Art hotels are usually missing one thing—good art,” he says. “This hotel is more a reflection of the history and community of the artists, writers, and craftsmen who have called Marfa home.” That starts with the structure itself: Architects at the Houston-based Carlos Jiménez Studio preserved the original wood beams and poured-concrete columns, and reused 100-year-old bricks. Marfa furniture maker Joey Benton of Silla built the front desk from metal and rich mahogany, while resident welder Mac White—“who’s just as likely out fixing a horse trailer,” says Crowley—created the massive steel doors at the entrance.

Crowley wants the Saint George to serve as a cultural hub for visitors and residents—much like other boutique hotels that have opened across the country (the Dean in Providence, the Ace Hotel in Pittsburgh). It will house the new location of the Marfa Book Company, a decades-old institution that hosts readings and lectures all year. Allison Jenkins, formerly of Aspen’s Ajax Tavern and Austin’s LaV restaurant, is the chef behind the hotel’s LaVenture restaurant, which will serve French-inspired dishes, while—to the locals’ sweet relief—the hotel’s casual café will serve three full meals a day. And whether or not you dub the Saint George an art hotel, its collection is a remarkable gathering of some of the world’s greatest artists—or, as Marfa residents call them, neighbors.