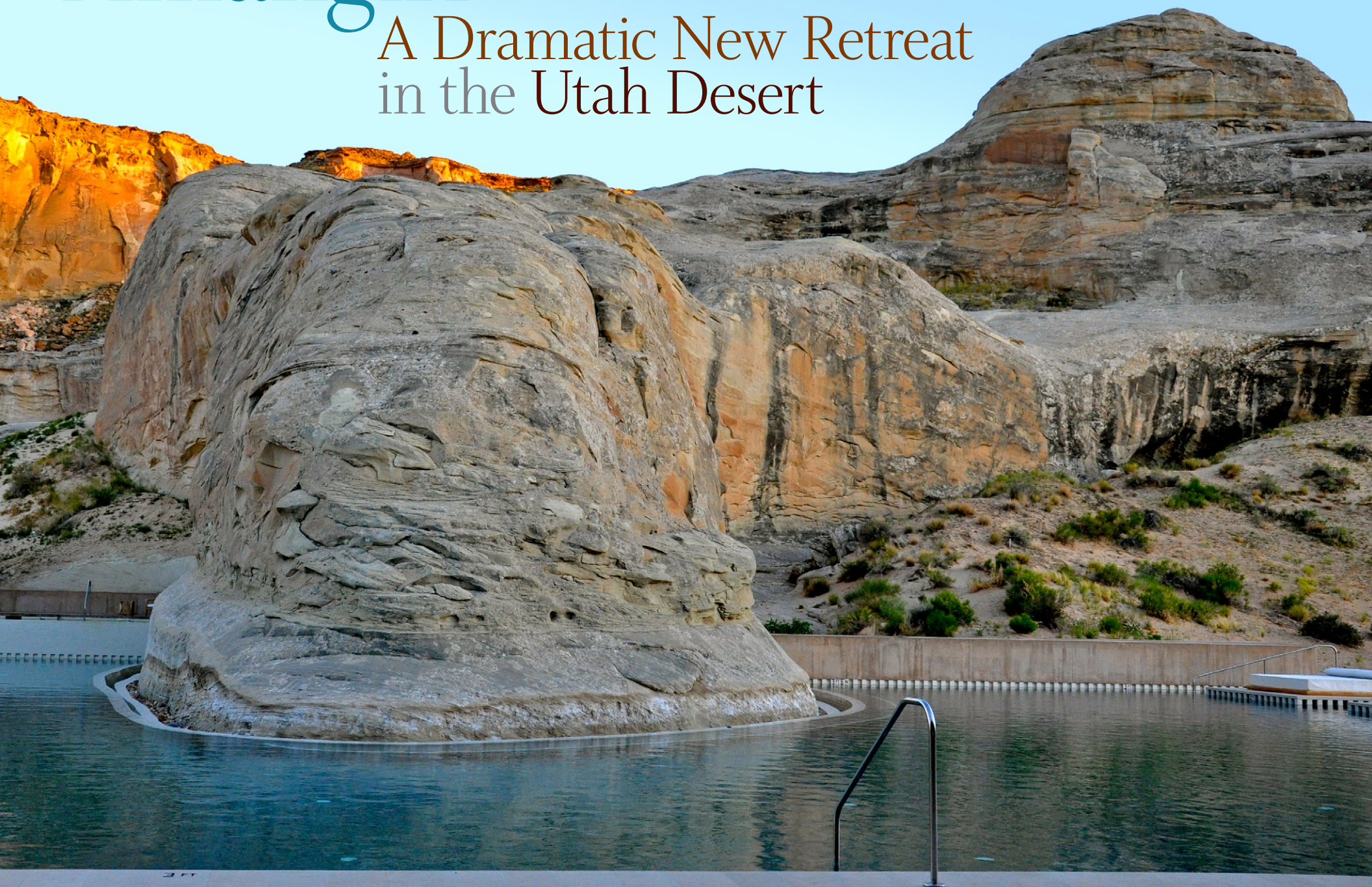


Andrew Harper's Hideaway Report online

JULY 2010

Amangiri

A Dramatic New Retreat
in the Utah Desert



{ OPINIONATED REVIEWS BY A WRITER WHO TRAVELS INCOGNITO AND ALWAYS PAYS HIS OWN WAY }

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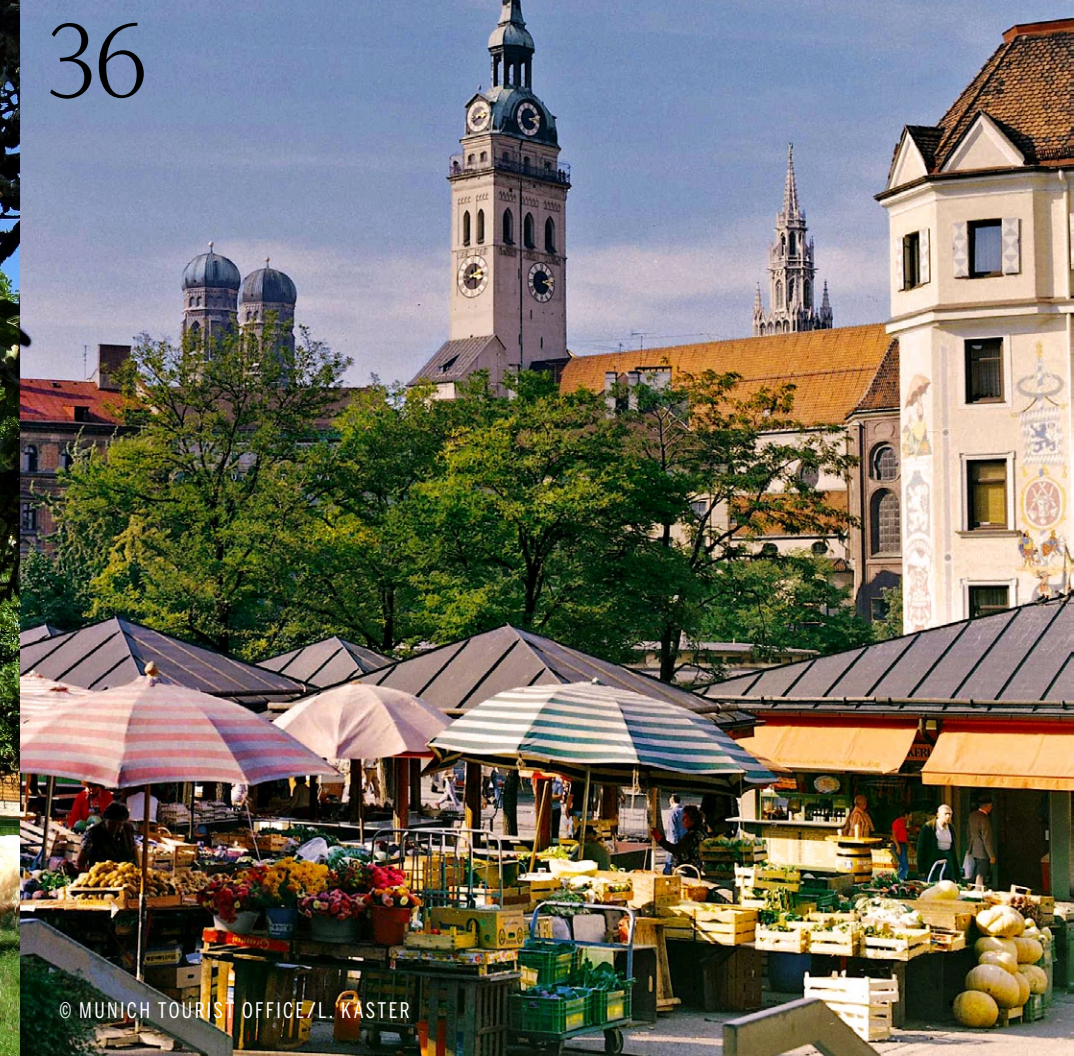
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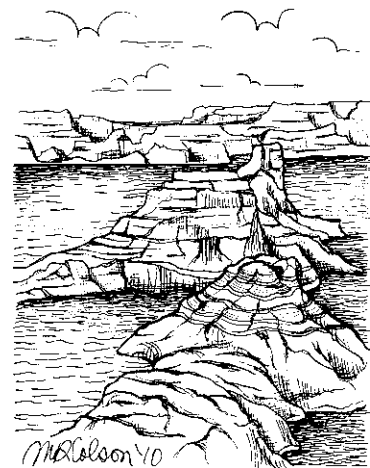
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AMANGIRI

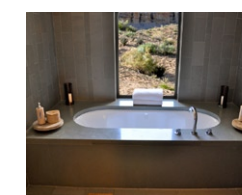
A Dramatic New Retreat in the Utah Desert



THE FIRST AMANRESORTS PROPERTY IN THE United States, Amangani, opened outside Jackson Hole in 1998. More than a decade later, it has acquired a sibling, Amangiri, situated close to Lake Powell and just 25 minutes north of Page, Ariz., and the Glen Canyon Dam.

Since its debut last October, **Amangiri** has received strikingly polarized reviews. Now we understand why. This is a place to which it is impossible to remain indifferent, and one likely to inspire both adulation and antipathy. In our view, it is a triumph.

Set on a 600-acre estate, Amangiri is surrounded by some of the most overwhelming scenery in America. From its central Pavilion, a polychrome desert landscape of bluffs, mesas and stratified rock pillars unrolls with epic grandeur toward the Grand Staircase-Escalante National



Amangiri
ROOM PICTURED MESA VIEW SUITE

Amangiri continued

Monument. Just finding the courage — or temerity — to design a building in such a stupendous setting must require a very high level of confidence and ambition. Clearly, Adrian Zecha, the founder and presiding genius of Amanresorts, lacks for neither. Apparently, Zecha was personally involved in every stage of the resort's conception, even insisting on its precise location, one that necessitated an exchange of private and federal land authorized by a 2005 act of Congress!

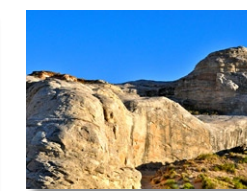
We have long been admirers of Amanresorts, but our enthusiasm is not completely unqualified. On a recent visit to India, we stayed at the Aman New

Delhi and, to be frank, didn't much care for the place. And we have always struggled to think of Amanresorts as an international, as opposed to a purely Asian, hotel group. It is not that we don't like Amanjena in Morocco, or Amangani in Wyoming, it's just that the original properties in Thailand and Bali were created in cultures that are, by instinct, exquisitely gracious and hospitable. We were therefore agreeably surprised by the warmth of our welcome at Amangiri. From the outset, the staff's desire to please was almost palpable. And later in our stay when minor mistakes were made, the regret was so obviously sincere that it was impossible to feel annoyed.

The final mile of the approach to Amangiri is along a winding dirt road that ends abruptly at the foot

of a steep staircase leading up into the Pavilion. This is a huge, open space with multiple woodburning fires that contains the reception, living room, library, dining room and open kitchen. On one side, picture windows frame the desert; on the other, glass doors open onto a terrace beside an extraordinary swimming pool that winds around the base of a dramatic escarpment.

The controversy surrounding Amangiri has centered on its architecture. As soon as you arrive, its buildings demand your attention and require you to form a judgment. Made of concrete, they display a Modernist severity that makes absolutely no concession to traditional resort design. To its detractors, Amangiri is an unappealing series of bunkers, which no amount of imaginative interior design



Amangiri and
the Landscape

Amangiri continued

can soften. To be honest, we were slightly taken aback at first. But then we started to see the structures in their extraordinary natural context and they began to acquire a sculptural quality. The buildings are like massive boulders or rocky outcrops, the austerity of which is appropriate to the harsh desert environment.

The resort comprises 34 accommodations in two wings. We had opted for a “Mesa View Suite,” which was accessed by a private flight of steps. A courtyard with a dining table, chairs and a screen made of Douglas fir was separated from the bedroom by a glass wall. There, a king-size bed on a raised platform was

surrounded by a striking expanse of white-stone floor. Beyond the bed was a living area with a sofa and wicker reading chairs, which in turn led out onto a so-called “sky terrace” with daybeds, a huge


“ ... at night, beside the fire and beneath a canopy of stars, (the room’s terrace) was transformed into a magical refuge and private stellar observatory. ”

square block of natural wood for a table and a recessed ethanol-burning fireplace. In our view, this is one resort where every room could usefully have been provided with a plunge pool, and on a future trip, we might pay the extra money for a Pool Suite. The terrace lacked

shade, and we found it too hot to be pleasant during the day. But at night, beside the fire and beneath a canopy of stars, it was transformed into a magical refuge and private stellar observatory.

One “wall” of the bedroom was formed by a floor-to-ceiling wooden cabinet containing a fridge, TV/DVD and so forth, on the other side of which was a dressing area with twin sinks and a generous amount of hanging and storage space. An adjoining bath lined with sage-green tiles contained a soaking tub and two wall-mounted showers. Beyond the tub, a large window framed the fissured walls of a towering mesa. Submerged to the neck in fragrant water, watching the rugged cliffs catch fire in the late evening sunlight, was an experience we are already impatient to repeat.

Amangiri continued

unsurprisingly expensive. At breakfast, the buffet  was excellent, but one morning our poached eggs arrived in a puddle of hot water. Given the obvious energy and competence of the management, we are confident that such minor flaws will soon be rectified.

Amangiri’s principal amenity is an atmospheric 25,000-square-foot spa, the reception of which overlooks a glass-tiled reflection pool and a smoldering central fireplace. Five walnut-lined treatment rooms provide serene settings for a full range of massages, body treatments and hot-stone therapies. In a semi-trance after an exceptionally relaxing massage, we wandered outside and

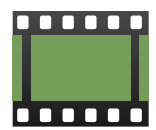
slumped on the stepped terrace surrounding the heated outdoor pool. We found ourselves alone. There was neither a sound nor a zephyr of wind and, losing all track of time, we sat in silent contemplation of the desert and the surrounding cliffs for close to an hour.

The menu of activities at Amangiri is seemingly endless. And just minutes’ drive from the lodge, you are in a wilderness area where a GPS suddenly seems like mandatory equipment. We took a wonderful five-hour guided hike around the property, accompanied by Mike Friedman, whose resumé includes spells as chief guide for both the heli-skiing operation in Telluride and for Exum Mountain Guides in Jackson Hole. An enormously engaging and articulate man, he was an inexhaustible mine of

information about the Four Corners region and the Colorado Plateau.

Amangiri is surrounded by the so-called Grand Circle of national parks, with Bryce, Zion and the Grand Canyon all within a three-hour drive. (Apparently, the resort plans to purchase a helicopter.) The guided excursions are exceptionally well-organized, our only caveat being that they are extremely expensive: A guided tour of Zion National Park is \$1,225 for two; a 27-foot boat on Lake Powell costs \$1,080 for up to four hours; and a day’s guided rainbow trout fishing in the clear water below Glen Canyon Dam will set you back \$1,000 for two.

Unfortunately, getting to Amangiri is far from simple. Great Lakes Airlines provides unreliable service from Phoenix to Page (one hour) using fairly uncomfortable



Click photo above to view scenes from our guided hike at AMANGIRI

19-seat Beechcraft turboprop aircraft, while the drive from Phoenix takes about five hours (\$750 for a chauffeur-driven BMW). On balance, the most convenient point of access is Las Vegas, from where it is a four-hour drive. The resort can arrange helicopter transfers from Las Vegas, with the possibility

of pausing for lunch at the bottom of the Grand Canyon en route. And the airport in Page can take private jets as large as a Gulfstream IV.

We came away from Amangiri extremely impressed, our high expectations having been comfortably exceeded. In less than a year, it has become

one of the finest resorts in the United States. And although expensive, it is among those exceptional places that really are worth the money. 🍷

Amangiri 🌿🌿 97; Mesa View Suite, \$1,000 (summer high season); Pool Suite, \$1,500. 1 Kayenta Road, Canyon Point, Utah 84741. Tel. (877) 695-3999. www.amanresorts.com

Mandarin Oriental, Las Vegas

AT A COST OF \$11 BILLION, the new CityCenter development in Las Vegas is the largest privately funded construction project in the history of the United States.

The 76-acre site contains three hotels, including Aria with a mere 4,004 rooms. Having survived a 2009 lawsuit between joint venture partners MGM Resorts and Dubai World, CityCenter opened in December, thereby providing employment for close to 12,000 people.

The primary purpose of our visit was to stay at the new **Mandarin Oriental** at CityCenter, which, with just 392 rooms, is a boutique property by Las Vegas standards. We took the elevator to the lobby on the 23rd floor, the doors parted and we entered a hushed world of polished black marble, subdued lighting, Asian art and serenely efficient staff. Seldom has a hotel felt more like a refuge from the world outside.

Descending to the 16th floor, we were escorted to our room by an effortlessly

obliging member of the reception staff. There, we discovered an Adam Tihany-designed interior decorated in restrained shades of red, beige and gold. The bath was equipped with an egg-shaped soaking tub and a walk-in shower. In general, the room displayed precisely the consummate professionalism we have come to expect from Mandarin Oriental.

Amenities at the hotel include a two-level, 27,000-square-foot spa with 17 treatment rooms, decorated in a style intended to evoke 1930s Shanghai. A magnificent eighth-floor pool deck provides two lap pools, two Jacuzzis, a plunge pool and 20 cabanas.

Restaurant options include a gourmet French restaurant, *Twist*, by Parisian three-star chef Pierre Gagnaire. (Las Vegas now has virtually a full set of celebrity chefs,

