

go west

A superspa has landed in the dusty Utah desert. Joan Juliet Buck slips through slot canyons, drifts along Lake Powell, and follows the dinosaur tracks. Photographed by Patrick Demarchelier.



DESERT ROSE

Daria Werbowy on the shore of Lake Powell. Phi pebble silk matte-jersey tank dress, \$1,195; www.net-a-porter.com. Boat transport provided by Antelope Point Marina. Details, see In This Issue. Fashion Editor: Phyllis Posnick.



ROCK STEADY

Inside one of the area's slot canyons. Moncler olive-green nylon jacket, \$620; Moncler, Aspen. Chloé leather shorts, \$1,395; Chloé boutiques. Bottega Veneta oxidized-silver necklace, \$2,850. Cartier Santos 100 watch. Sartore boots, \$1,145.



TUMBLEWEED COUTURE

Daria in Yves Saint Laurent's sleeveless coral dress (\$690) in natural satin—and a spiky tumbleweed crown, found on the property. Details, see In This Issue.

BEAUTY NOTE

Bare necessity: Lancôme's Color Fever Shine Lipstick in Bronze Heat—a shimmering, canyon-colored nude.

I arrive at night, nowhere. The turnoff in the desert is near a stretch known as “the moon.” A simple rusted iron gate leads into five miles of unpaved road where I can make out strange buttes and looming formations, a tiny wooden cabin, and then, as the car descends into a wide valley and rounds a concrete rectangle, an impossible sight: Immensely wide steps rise to a wall with a sheet of slow-falling water. A tall gallery lit by lanterns under strips of red canvas leads into a square, huge Second Life

palace. A vast room with six fireplaces set in the sheer walls, dining tables to the right, and near the end, an open kitchen where couples are sitting at a dark stone counter, eating dishes cooked by four chefs who push cast-iron skillets deep into the bright wood-burning oven behind them. It feels like home. The grandest, purest, cleanest version of home you could imagine. There’s a large round tangle of tumbleweed against a wall and not one Native American artifact.

Amangiri, the newest of the Aman group’s 23 small havens, is in the Utah desert just north of Arizona. When Utah is on daylight savings time and Arizona is not, the staff toggles between two time zones; but whether it’s 11:00 A.M. or noon, past and future vanish for guests, replaced by a delicious present. In the middle of an immense and pitiless geologic landscape, you are treated as if you too were one of the wonders of creation.

I know the West, its cowboy bedsteads, wagon-wheel chandeliers, and transparent coffee. In the West, you are knocked about while peering at things you don’t understand. At Amangiri, 34 rooms and 102 in staff, you connect with nature without passing through the Walmart parking lot. It’s a potent combination of comfort, sensual rewards, and privilege. Adventure begins with a perfect macchiato, a dish of pomegranate seeds, and croissants. And then it’s into the BMW SUV to be driven about to natural wonders where naturalists and paleontologists explain canyons, dinosaurs, and petroglyphs to you and you alone.

My pristine bed faces a mesa. The architects, Rick Joy, Wendell Burnette, and Marwan Al-Sayed, know the desert: The concrete of the walls is mixed with local desert sandstone so that patches of pink and gray appear and vanish with the light. Water has been coaxed to seep through holes in the walls along the walkways, so that the patina called Desert Varnish will build up and blend the hotel into the landscape. On my pillow, instead of a chocolate, is a tiny sage wand.

I wake to sunrise over the mute desert shapes. A confident jackrabbit stares at me. I’ve seen jackrabbits only as they ran away. Behind him, the desert opens out, immense. The huge swimming pool wraps around a huge rock, hiding the massive spa where there are Water and Flotation Pavilions for out-of-body experiences. To Glenda Bennett, the young Navajo therapist who inspired the four Native American treatments called Journeys, the wood-lined massage rooms are like the inside of Navajo hogans. My first massage is called a Dawn Journey; it involves salt, clay, earth, and smoke from burning cedar. Time vanishes in the dark room.

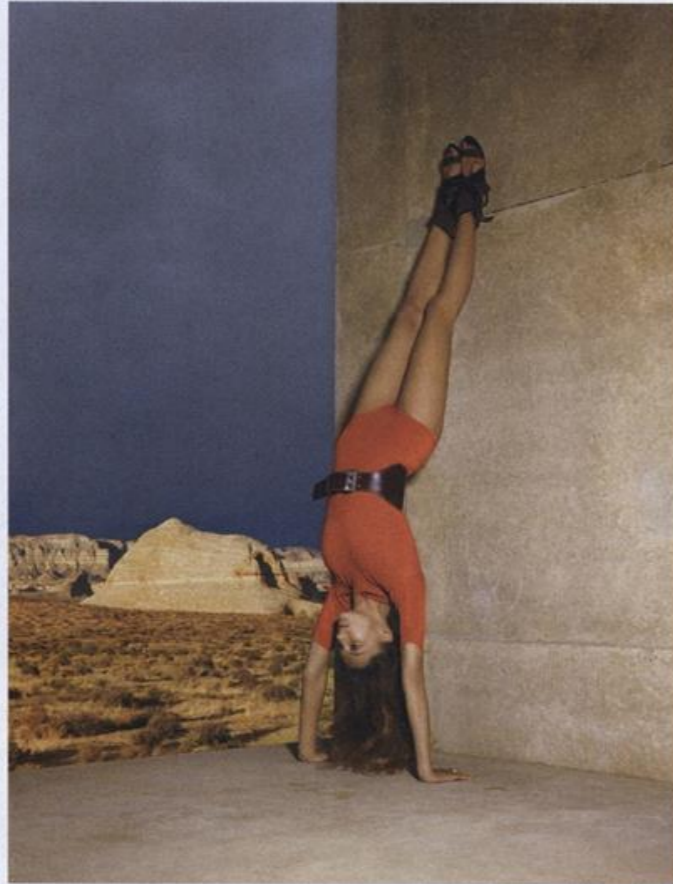
Amangiri is a marvel of engineering, logistics, and daring. It’s run by a young Australian couple, Ross and Sunny Lusted, whose last posting—you imagine the Aman world as a sort of diplomatic corps—was the Aman in Montenegro. Ross Lusted, a chef whose talent for Thai cuisine was noticed 20

years ago in Singapore by the Indonesian-Czech creator of all Amans, Adrian Zecha, was given the challenge of installing paradise where there was only geology. Planning took seven years. Food is flown into Las Vegas, then driven 275 miles to the resort. Lunch, by the hypnotic wood oven, is great: subtle, four-star. My swordfish is light, my salad perfect, and the wood-smoked mushrooms taste the way all mushrooms should taste, forever.

Jade appears, a tall young man in a sage-green polo shirt. He’s my “guest assistant” for the week, but no one spells this out. He simply becomes the person who executes my every wish as if it were his own idea. We hike on Aman property among the hoodoos, formations of Navajo sandstone 175 million years old, swirled into fat meringues by wind and water. Skinnier columns are kept stable, Jade says, by pressure from caps of 100-million-year-old Dakota

sandstone. Keep that in mind. Time feels elastic out here. There are dinosaur tracks on Amangiri’s 600 acres. On a hoodoo out by the road, men drew votive herds of horned animals some 8,000 years ago, and right next to the procession, on May 14, 1903, a cowboy carved his name: Bill Chynoweth.

At Bryce Canyon the next day, I see the earth opened in a giant gash to expose an infinity of clustered red hoodoos that look like melting Cambodian temples. Gayle, the natural-history expert enlisted by Amangiri, explains that weather does all the work. Ice and heat chisel cracks into the sandstone, pieces fall away to reveal shapes that change as the wind clears the sand, until it’s a single column that grows thinner and thinner until it loses its Dakota cap and a sudden tumble annihilates it.



BACKGROUND CHECK

Breathtaking views are around every corner at the resort. Rochas silk bodysuit, \$1,475; Barneys New York. Altus weight-lifting belt, \$25. Chloé sandals, \$595.

GOOD SPORT

A 25,000-square-foot spa and state-of-the-art gym, including a yoga studio, are part of the attraction at Amangiri—though it’s tempting to spend the entire time outdoors. Gucci white cotton scuba band dress, \$2,495; (800) 456-7663. Details, see In This Issue.





A RIVER RUNS THROUGH IT

Daria—who is learning to ride—watches the Colorado River rush by Lees Ferry. Ralph Lauren Black Label suede shirt, \$1,898; ralphlauren.com. American Apparel cotton bra, \$10; (888) 747-0070. Emilio Pucci leather pants, \$3,380; emiliopucci.com. Nine West Vintage America Collection boots, \$139. Vintage silver bracelets; Barbara Trujillo Antiques. Horse provided by Sentinel Rock Adventures. Details, see In This Issue.

It's getting cold. A yellow haze hangs around the sun. "It's a sundog," says Gayle. "Within 48 hours there will be moisture, some form of precipitation."

"Which is more powerful, fire or water?" I ask him.

"Water," says Gayle. "Definitely water."

It was water that sawed through what's called the slot canyon, reached by Hummer on Navajo land on the following day's expedition. A slot canyon is a slit between rocks, shaped by rushing torrents of spring melt and flood, and so carved out by stuck boulders and so striated and so full of incised whooshes and streaks that it seems alive with everything that ever happened to it. Jade coaxes me into it. I love my claustrophobia. Even on Navajo land, I carry pills in case an elevator stops between floors. The walls are the color of cheek blush, and I'd appreciate them more if it weren't for the way they're closing in as we proceed. The Hummer driver beams at a big stone on the ground: "That fell down last Tuesday," he says.

I have to decide whether I belong to the claustrophobia pills or whether it wouldn't be just fine to push right in here at this gap so narrow that the stones touch both my shoulders at once. I try hyperventilating, but I'd rather know what happens around that dark corner right in front of me. Which turns out to be more curves—and streaks—and sharp concavities, on and on until sunlight and what looks like a meadow, although it's only

We float alone between red cliffs under a purple sky and alight at Lees Ferry, where the Paria River rushes into the Colorado

sagebrush and more desert. We now have to turn around and go back in, but I know the walls didn't fall on me the first time, so I can return to the slot canyon. Bring on the tiny chasms!

Back at the spa, it's a late Midday Journey that promises to realign some subtle energies. I rise from the massage table, head back to the room, and start writing. That night on my pillow is a tiny horsehair key ring.

At breakfast I watch one of the chefs ritually roast five jalapeño peppers in the wood oven, for good luck. Connie the trainer teaches me how to stretch out the leg tendons that no New York chiropractor has been able to heal. Jade drives me through light snow to the Bureau of Land Management's Visitor Center in the little town of Big Water, where, it turns out, he will be elected mayor the following week. A bearded docent introduces the thirteen-foot-long tail of a teenage version of a new species of hadrosaur: *Gryposaurus monumentensis*. There is the sacrum of an adult *Gryposaurus*, and the skull of a monstrous *Diabloceratops eatoni*. Just north, one of the richest paleontological sites on Earth outside of China has disgorged fifteen new species of dinosaurs since 2000. "Were they scaly?" I ask. "Covered in a kind of fuzz," says the docent. "Turns out the DNA's more like chickens'."

That night at dinner, eating a tasty little roast AOC poulet from some organic farm makes me feel immensely powerful. On my pillow is a pouch with five copper spheres in it.

When they began to wall up the Colorado River at Glen Canyon to make Lake Powell in 1956, countless archaeological sites and canyons were lost—and, presumably, dinosaurs. It took 24 years for the water to fill up Glen Canyon, to make a reservoir and power generator for Arizona, Nevada, and California. I want to see the old version first, to go on the Colorado River as it was when it ran through Glen Canyon.

A tunnel to below the dam gets us to a raft. Blue herons fly by, and merganser ducks. Ravens squawk above Horseshoe Bend, which now looks to me like the big version of the Aman pool. We float alone between the dense heft of red cliffs under a purple sky. The only invaders are the feathery Australian tamarisk trees with long thin thirsty roots. We alight at Lees Ferry, where the Paria River rushes into the Colorado, and together they head for the Grand Canyon.

On my last day I can face Lake Powell, a recreation area beloved by millions. We are the only ones to set off from the Antelope Point Marina; the boat speeds through open water with low rocks on either side.

At last we come to a long empty dock. After a few minutes on pontoon and sand, we round a corner of cliffs and see where hundreds of millions of years of water and wind built Rainbow Bridge, an arch of golden-pink stone with an immense span, the largest natural bridge on Earth. A Navajo tipped off a settler's wife about it, it was found in 1909, Zane Grey wrote about it, Teddy Roosevelt camped beneath it, and all summer it swarms with visitors. Today, we are alone under the bridge, which spans two cliffs above a rocky gully.

Here is a silence I have never heard before. I settle into the stillness as tight as a hug. The sun is warm. Jade and John, the boat driver, are utterly quiet; there is nothing to say. I don't want to go further or explore or ask questions or add anything to the great rock casing of silence.

A forest ranger arrives, pulls out a binder with photos of the Rainbow Bridge 100 years ago, and points out a three-pronged dinosaur track, like a giant chicken foot. Now that there is talking under the Rainbow Bridge, it's time to leave. The boat pulls out into the water and noses into Cascade Canyon until we can go no farther. And now I understand.

We're floating at the tops of cliffs. The low rocks beside us are the same as the tops of the cliffs we looked up at yesterday; what was 700 feet above now plunges below us underwater. We are flying. I'm in a little motorboat over flooded canyons, but it's as if I were high in the air. It's both. American Magic. □

the particulars

AREA ATTRACTIONS Amangiri is situated in a private valley in southern Utah bordering Lake Powell. Guided day trips—by foot, on horseback, or by small plane—may be arranged to nearby Bryce Canyon, the Grand Canyon, Zion National Park, and the Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument. Also on offer: hot-air ballooning, mountain biking, helicopter tours, snowshoeing, cross-country skiing, golf, rafting down the Colorado River, or a Lake Powell cruise on a luxury houseboat.

THE SPA In Sanskrit, *aman* translates to "peaceful" and *giri* to "mountain." The 25,000-square-foot spa features a combination of Eastern, Western, and Native American treatments. There is an emphasis on water-based therapies at the Water and Flotation Pavilions. Yoga is available in the glass-walled studio or outdoors in the canyons at sunrise or by moonlight.

GETTING THERE Flights from Denver or Phoenix to Page, Arizona, then 25 minutes by car to the resort. Rates from \$800 per night, (800) 477-9180; amanresorts.com.

EASY RIDER

The road to Amangiri. Balmain silk-and-chain-mail dress with crocodile belt; thewebstermiami.com. Phi boots, \$1,195; Mona Moore, Los Angeles. In this story: hair, Thom Priano for Garren New York Salon; makeup, Stéphane Marais. Hiking-guide service and locations provided by Adventure Partners. Details, see In This Issue.

