

THE  MUSIC CENTER
OF LOS ANGELES COUNTY
30th Anniversary
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The Secret Tropics

...closer than you think.

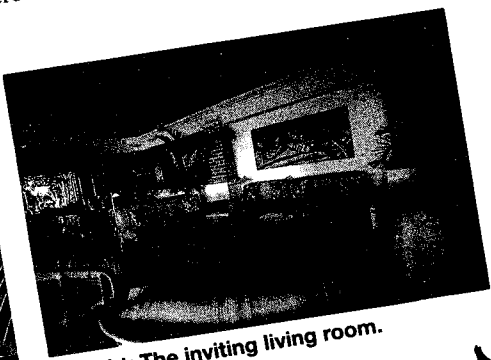
by Alan Harris

If someone asked you "where is the closest tropical living to the Western United States, what would you say? It's not Hawaii and certainly not the Caribbean, but would you believe it's just two hours from California? A paradise where the quality of life is much better, cost of living much lower, and violent crime almost non-existent. If you have not guessed it yet, it's Puerto Vallarta, Mexico! Just about 120 minutes by air south of San Diego lies one of the best-kept tropical secrets of the world. Still the charming little town of cobblestone streets which meander through quaint whitewashed buildings of Spanish tile and bouganvilla covered roofs. Graceful Coco palms sway through the pristine humid air. It is one of the few resorts with beach vendors who are polite and respectful and with English-speaking police officers outfitted in white bermuda shorts and pith helmets. By the way, Puerto Vallarta is one of the few places left on this earth where one can safely walk the streets late at night. There is an endless list of sports activities, probably more than any other resort I know. How about sport fishing, water-skiing, wind-surfing, scuba diving, sailing, parasailing, golf, tennis, horseback riding, mountain climbing, lake fishing, bull fighting, hot-air ballooning, roller blading, to name

just a few. The only sport I can think of that Puerto Vallarta doesn't have is snow skiing. But most important to me are the people, one of Vallarta's greatest assets. The locals are fun, good spirited and about as friendly as you can get. The foreign community who live there consist primarily of Americans mixed with a few Canadians. Unlike many "gringo" retirement communities in Mexico, where most sit around waiting for their day to come, sort of a "God's little waiting room," PV retirees are active, spunky, into golf or tennis, many in there 70's with a youthful frame of mind and a pure delight to be around.

The new Marina Vallarta is a charming pleasure yacht haven to visiting boats from all over the globe. So popular, it is about to be enlarged by two times the current size. Restaurants throughout Vallarta are good and plentiful. The top two in my book would be Adobe Cafe and Cafe des Artistes. Nightlife provides many exciting hangouts and discos.

Another of Vallarta's great assets are the magnificent private Villas along the coast, many of which are available for rent. Truly an experience all travelers must enjoy. If there are more than two or three couples in your group, or if you are a family or corporate group that doesn't want crowded hotel lobbys or screaming kids in



Left: The Villa Verano is a lush tropical paradise. Right: The inviting living room.

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a swimming pool, a fully-staffed private villa is "a must." They're more fun, exciting, private, and usually cheaper than staying in a nice hotel. One villa in particular, known as "the showplace of Puerto Vallarta" is the former Macy estate, "Villa Verano" ...a lush tropical beachfront paradise sprawling over an acre of vibrant green vegetation. A "small home" of just 14,000 square feet, with ten magnificent marble-floor bedrooms, all with ensuite baths and spectacular views. With the adjacent home available, the estate can accommodate up to 36 guests. The inviting living room is 35 x 50, and the dining terrace has a view to die for of the entire Bay of Banderas, considered to be one of the largest natural bays in the North Americas. The huge crystal-clear pool features an underwater bench seat all the way around its perimeter, ideal for just cooling off among the palms with a tropical drink in hand. Adjacent to the pool lies an open-air gym where one can work off the Villa's famous margaritas. For the more adventurous, walking is at its best with shops, restaurants, and nightlife just five minutes away.

Each day, a sumptuous lunch was served to us around the pool bar that comfortably seats 20. All of us fell in love with the staff of eight, who spoiled us rotten. My wife says I haven't been fit to live with since. Juan is the major domo, who sees that every request is graciously attended to. His sidekick, Jose, always had a sparkle in his eyes, an infectious smile on his face, and a tray of margaritas ready. There is an upstairs maid and a downstairs maid and if Soli or Nora found your clothes tying on the floor, they would be washed, pressed, and hanging back in your closet that afternoon. Then there is Carmen, a delightfully robust jovial chef, who pleased our palates each meal...a true talent with flavors. I must not forget the two gardeners Amancio and Pepo who kept the grounds as a tropical dreamland. The Villa has been host to many notable celebrities, which is quite evident by the numerous beautifully framed photographs adorning the walls.

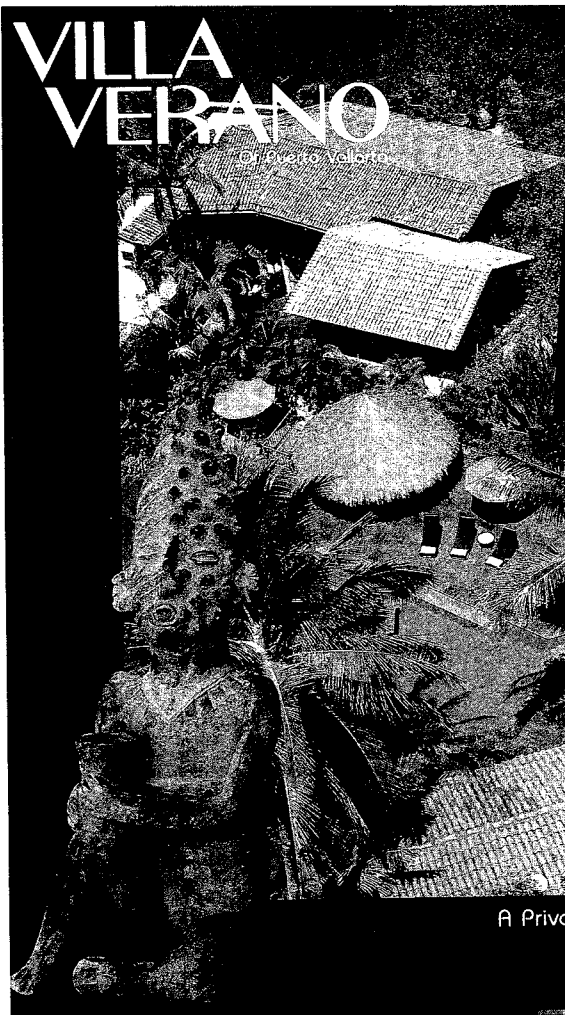
There is nothing like waking up in the tropics to the sounds of the rolling surf and a view that goes forever. Nothing I like better than to live in a bathing suit so graciously for so little. In the sixty-seven countries I have traveled, I have not found such a paradise with all the amenities as Villa Verano and Puerto Vallarta. □

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South of the Border

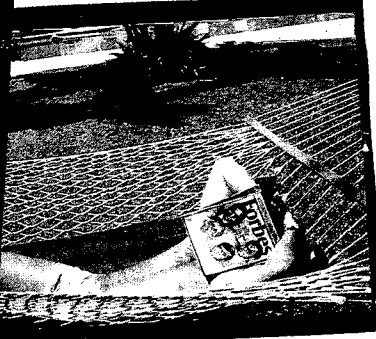
Veni, Vidi, Vici (I came, I saw, and boy were we Conquered) - "Villa Verano" Burt Hixson's fabulous 10 bedroom estate on the "Gold Coast" of Puerto Vallarta, recently played host for a recent TV taping of the famous "Lifestyles." Burt Hixson, owner of Marina del Rey's Warehouse Restaurant, spared no if-and-s-or-buts to provide top notch hospitality of his awesome "Muy Casa Grande". The dazzling view of the ocean provided the backdrop for the scrumptious brunch. Among the guests were the shows hostess, Mary Frann and Mayor Fernando Gonzalez. But the best was yet to come that evening.



VILLA VERANO
© J. Photo & Video



Burt Hixson,
Pat & Dick Van Patten
Mayor Fernando Gonzalez,
Gerry Battle
Gerry Battle getting much needed siesta



Burt Hixson, Ruta Lee, Gerry Battle, The Dick Van Pattens, Ida Myers and other guests taking a dip after a fabulous brunch.



Another admirer pluming its feathers for Ruta Lee!

A Private Estate in Paradise



One of the fabulous gardens



Lynne Barstow de Perez, Gerry Battle, Ida Myers



Some of Mexico's finest entertaining the guests at brunch.

Down Mexico Way

Dinner at 8 was served on the veranda as the ocean breezes danced as the Mariachi's played, the tequila flowed and the TV camera rolled. After all those Margaritas it was time for a nightcap of laughs, hugs and adios mi amigos. Plans were made to recapture the spirits soon when Burt Hixson and associate Gerry Battle again host the Thalians Presidents Club on September 16th at the Warehouse Restaurant.



Ida Myers, Frances Dans



Looking out the veranda at glorious sunset

Dick Van Patten



Gerry Battle, Ruta Lee



Mary Frann and Burt Hixson taking a break from taping



Lifestyles camera crew and guests taking photos of the sunset



*Burt Hixson,
Mary Frann,
Mayor Fernando Gonzalez Corona*

"The dinner" party - as director sets up shot



*Burt Hixson,
Gerry Battle,
and chefs
preparing
elegant meal*

