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# Tough luxe

Rustic luxury and gruelling hikes create lasting memories – and results – at this health retreat in Los Angeles. By Jody Scott.

| PHOTOGRAPHS ANSON SMART



The Ranch at Live Oak, a luxury boot camp in Malibu, nestled in the Santa Monica mountains outside of Los Angeles.



The communal living, dining room and kitchen are housed in the original Spanish hacienda.

EDITOR: MARK SARIBAN



This page, clockwise from top left: a communal area at The Ranch; the pool, a welcome respite from the heat; lunch is served at the shaded outdoor table; the calm living area, furnished with creamy linen sofas and weathered wood; The Ranch owners Sue and Alex Glassock. **Opposite:** paths and gardens connect the guest cottages to the communal hacienda.



In the whitewashed cabins, crisp linens, king or queen beds, bare timber floors, natural textures and limestone bathrooms all create a cocoon-like effect to help calm and recalibrate the nervous system. And while The Ranch is a phone-free zone, the cabins do have WiFi (a recent concession to the twitchy times we are in).

The sprawling 80-hectare property was once a working ranch owned by Hollywood film star William Boyd, of Hopalong Cassidy fame. The property also served as a children's summer camp, but then the tiny camp cabins lay abandoned for several decades before being reincarnated by The Ranch owners Sue and Alex Glassock.

In fact, it was fond memories of childhood summer camps and long days spent outdoors that inspired the Glassocks to create a retreat where guests could recalibrate their physical and emotional health. "I wanted to create a place that felt like when you are a little kid and go to camp and it's so happy," says Sue. "For years before we created it, we laughingly called it 'the happy camp'."

While The Ranch lies just a few kilometres away from LaLa Land (arguably the epicentre of global wellness fads), it has a surprisingly simple albeit strict philosophy based on exercise, low-calorie (just 1,400 calories, or around 6,000 kilojoules, per day) but nutrient-dense, organic vegetarian meals, rest and conversation.

Everyone – no exceptions – wakes at 5am to the sound of Tibetan bells and begins their day with a half-hour stretch class, followed by a bowl of house-made granola and almond milk for breakfast. Next comes the daily group hike along steep mountain trails for

four to five hours. Total immersion in nature, tough physical challenges, the talking and the tears that are often shed on the trail are all part of the magic, says Sue. "People are giving themselves permission to let go. It is quite cathartic and beautiful to see."

Back at The Ranch, guests eat lunch around the communal outdoor table under a wicker canopy or in the organic vegetable garden; that's followed by a mandatory nap. Then it's on to the afternoon's activities, which include a fitness class, a massage and a yoga class. All up that's eight, yes, eight hours of exercise every single day.

The evening meal takes place at a long table in the dining room, which is the original main house, an original Spanish hacienda with steel-framed doors opening onto the gravelled courtyard and gardens.

While dinner is a wine-free affair, there is no set bedtime and everyone is free to sink into the oversized linen sofas in front of the fireplace to keep the healing conversations going.

"Everyone is in it together, and that is part of the magic, I think," says Sue. "Everyone is really nurtured and leaves feeling completely empowered." And a whole lot lighter ...

For details, go to [www.theranchmalibu.com](http://www.theranchmalibu.com).

**W**hat's happens on the trail, stays on the trail at LA's most luxurious boot camp, where everyone hikes for at least four hours a day. And it has an A-list clientele that makes you wish those rocky canyon trails could talk. Former US First Lady Michelle Obama recently paid a visit, wellness maven Gwyneth Paltrow is a fan and Rebel Wilson famously lost almost four kilograms in a week here.

Perched on a magnificent ridge in the Santa Monica mountains, The Ranch at Live Oak sits high above Malibu's celebrity-studded canyons, gated ocean-front estates (where Kelly Wearstler has a summer house) and the sparkling blue Pacific Ocean. But this boot camp delivers results as seriously spectacular as the 360-degree views. Numbers are capped at just 18 guests a week, and everyone stays for a minimum of seven days.

After checking in, guests are weighed, have their body composition calculated and cholesterol tested before settling into rustic yet refined private cabins surrounded by leafy, landscaped gardens.

Before arriving at The Ranch, you're advised to give up alcohol, sugar, dairy and coffee, to make the transition easier. Guests are also asked to send a photograph of something that makes them feel at home – family, friends or even a pet – which is put into a frame on their bedside table.



ANSON SMART

