



RURAL LUXURY

AN ART HOTEL WITH ROLLING GREEN LAWNS, ATMOSPHERIC ROOMS AND ECLECTIC CUISINE IS A SURPRISE IN HERITAGE OBSESSED RAJASTHAN. **RAVI SHANKAR** TAKES A DETOUR.



Clockwise from top: Eclectic outdoors; tin ducks by the pool; blazing frescoes; poster cutouts of the Bachchans

You could lose your way, reaching The Farm. But it's worth it. Careen off the four lane expressway going to Ajmer. Try and find a slender road that threads through open farmland. It leads to a wildly original, charmingly eccentric and luxurious retreat. The Farm.

The desert is a phrase-worn metaphor of Rajasthan. So, The Farm's huge swimming pool that dominates a central plateau is an unexpected contradiction, where a cold Carlsberg at 'Scrapture', the poolside cafe, seems a natural corollary of desert travel. Sensations, here, shift and meld. The ancient wooden rafters torn down from the owner's palace which was long ago inundated by a dam hold up canvas roofs. By the poolside, tin ducks are impervious to the welcome of water. Ellipses of a metal universe stand guard in a bedroom that is edgy yet eminently comfortable. The gigantic suites resemble Mediterranean dwellings from the outside but are cool inside, bathed with ivory light. Water flows into pebbles in bathrooms that seem designed by a dream team of Philippe Starck and M.F. Husain. The Farm is an unfolding dream, of restaurateurs and bon vivants Surya and Ritu Singh who also are partners of the chic Jaipur eatery Flow. They call the resort an Art Hotel—unusual sculpture, wall art and even poster cutouts of the Bachchans. An Amitabh Bachchan suite is in the offing.

The cuisine is unexpected, cover to cover. Thai chicken and safri maas. Surya loves to cook and does a mean job with a skillet and an apron. The menu thankfully ignores the mandatory heritage 'laal maas' and 'gatta curry' that's part of most Rajasthani restaurant menus today.

The Farm has many levels. There is a huge airy room down by the grass where you can lie on cushions and drink champagne with breakfast, sit on wingback chairs with theatrically tall backs, books on shelves and fresh flowers in vases. For the bucolically challenged, there is even television.

The resort's topography throws its own curve. An unfinished operatic structure stands winged against the sky. It's named 'Vibgyor'. Ritu says it's a fond ambition: to create a fine dining, cultural restaurant for all senses—food, music and theatre. Soon.

The Farm is an intensely personal experience that reflects the passionate tastes of two people who believe that art, cuisine and luxury come together to form a surprise at the end of a winding trail. Metal trees amid rolling green lawns are lit up at night. A gigantic fresco blazes on a wall. It makes the guest feel he is living within art itself. The art of living at The Farm is a breath of fresh air. Lots of it.

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