

Sunnylands Historic Estate Landscape

The historic estate at Sunnylands was built on 200 acres of blow-sand desert and was designed by landscape architect Emmet Wemple and horticulturist Rolla J. Wilhite. A section of the estate was developed as a 9-hole golf course designed by Dick Wilson. With 13 man-made lakes, over 180 acres of turf, and groves of trees, the original landscape was designed as a park-like setting to appeal to the Annenbergs' fondness of their Pennsylvania estate. Today, the Sunnylands has 11 lakes (re-lined) as part of our thriving man-made ecosystem and the turf has been reduced by more than 60 acres.

In addition to the golf course and park-like features, Walter also requested that the estate be constructed as a bird sanctuary. An avid birder, he wanted migrating and native birds to be attracted to Sunnylands as a place to rest and nest. With 13 lakes stocked with fish, a plethora of trees for canopy cover, and various shrubs and hedges to hide in, Sunnylands quickly became a high-traffic area for local birds and those migrating on the Pacific Flyway. Today, because of its landscape, Sunnylands is a welcoming spot for more than 150 species of native and migratory birds.

As part of the original park-like design of the estate, a variety of trees, including over 600 olive trees were planted. The Annenbergs were fond of olive trees as evidenced by their first fine art purchase together, the painting *Olive Trees* by Vincent van Gogh. Although the olive trees were not originally allowed to fruit, today Sunnylands harvests the olives to create Sunnylands Olive Oil. Other trees on the estate include eucalyptus, pepper, California cherry, mesquite, Virginia Live Oak, and carob trees.

Also on the estate, planted close to the ninth hole on the golf course, is a magnolia tree. This *Magnolia grandiflora* was a gift from President Nixon in 1972 to Walter Annenberg in

thanks for his service as the Ambassador to the Court of St. James's. It was taken from the magnolia tree at the White House, which was grown from a cutting of the magnolia tree at President Andrew Jackson's Tennessee estate, the Hermitage.

Part of the welcoming experience of Sunnylands is driving up the winding driveway from Frank Sinatra Drive to the historic house. The house is initially hidden from view with rolling green hills and a variety of trees and shrubs, but slowly comes into view upon ascending the driveway. This landscaping technique is known as "hide-and-reveal." The landscape designers used this method to create a dramatic reveal of the house, as guests arrive surrounded by beautiful and lush scenery.

A bronze and aluminum sculpture by Canadian artist, Art Price, titled *Birds of Welcome* greets guests as they appear over the hill and turn toward the historic house. The Annenbergs first saw this sculpture at the Gander International Airport, while making a transatlantic flight to Europe. In 1971, they commissioned Price to create a second casting for Sunnylands. In the center of the driveway stands the Sunnylands flagpole. Whenever the Annenbergs were in residence, the white flag with their logo was flown.

In 2001, a simple mausoleum was built on the estate designed by Palm Desert architect, Alfred H. Cook. Walter Annenberg was interred in 2002, and Leonore Annenberg in 2009. The mausoleum references the pink pyramidal roof, the marble of the interior, and the egg-crate coffered ceilings of the historic house. Due to code requirements outlined by the city of Rancho Mirage, the Annenbergs designated 50 acres of the estate as a zoned cemetery.