



# Art Club

Tamarisk Country Club Hosts Contemporary Artists

BY KENT BLACK • PHOTOGRAPHED BY OLGA TREHUT

It's the quiet hour in Tamarisk Country Club's dining room. It's too early for dinner, and only the occasional guffaw from the bar disturbs the serenity of the room. Indirect lighting and the shimmering water of the square reflecting pool in the middle of the room give it a soft quality. But, the power of the art in the room is not diminished. There is a four-panel video piece by Diana Thater called "Peony." Across the room are two large canvases – a blue one is entitled "Stone Butch Blues" and an orange one by David Benjamin Sherry is called "Nurture." Two slightly smaller canvases by LA/Joshua Tree artist Aili Schmeltz are nearby. It is truly an extraordinary room to experience.

The couple whose vision took an already brilliantly transformed clubhouse to another level are seated at a small table near the pool. They quietly reminisce about the events that brought them here. Rod Lubeznik, a trim, thoughtful Chicago businessman, first visited the Valley after his late parents bought a home in Palm Springs in the 70s. Susan – Rod's tall, elegant wife – met him in 2009 through their shared passion for art. Their first date was an art fair in Chicago where Susan, a former marketing strategist, was speaking on a panel.

"Susan was very focused on emerging artists and contemporary art," Rod says. "I was taken with her interest and knowledge of the people in the contemporary art world..."

"I was just taken with you," Susan quips with a smile. "It just seems from day one we were compatible," Rod says.

The couple spent the ensuing years traveling the world to see and, sometimes, collect the art they loved. They joined Tamarisk eight years ago and slowly became involved in the club's activities. Susan says she doesn't play cards or golf, so she rarely accompanied Rod when he played a round of golf or had lunch.

Everything changed with the pandemic. The couple quarantined at their house in the desert for 16 months.

"One of the members asked me if I would join him on a strategic planning committee," Rod recalls. "I said 'yes' and

became very interested in country club management and in the history and potential of Tamarisk as an organization."

When Rod joined the committee, it was agreed that the interior needed a serious remodel. He says that after they received approval from the club's board, the committee chose a design firm to come up with a concept. Shortly thereafter, two Tamarisk members — architect Steven Harris and interior designer Lucien Rees-Roberts — stepped forward and offered to create the design. "They're internationally renowned, award-winning designers," Rod says. "So, the board enthusiastically accepted their offer."

Both Rod and Susan felt strongly that the designs Harris and Rees-Roberts executed were so stunning and transformative that there had to be equally world-class fine art.

"But, because we were doing the project in the midst of the pandemic and there were costs ... we didn't anticipate, the art budget went away," Rod says. "In my opinion, the level of architecture and interior design is so excellent ... it would be a shame not to have art that could compliment [it]. That's when we came up with the idea of creating a program which we now call ART AT TAMARISK."

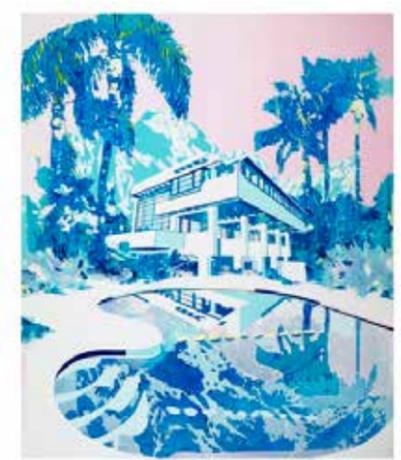
"We decided that it would be exciting if we could get art loaned to us by artists and galleries ... and change it up every year," Susan says. "And then we decided we should get a curator [so] it's not not about us. It's about the art, the artists, the club, and the membership."

Rod says Susan (who he calls "my star marketing and sales person") helped him put his pitch together.

"I just explained the concept to the board of directors and said, 'This is a way we can actually have significant art in the clubhouse without having to purchase it and make it part of the Tamarisk brand.'"

The board had implicit trust in the Lubezniks.

"We never told anyone in advance who the artists were going



Clockwise From Top Left: David Benjamin Sherry, *Nurture*, Courtesy of the artist and Morán Morán, Photo: Josh Schaedel. RJ Messineo, *4:00 Universe* Courtesy of the artist and Morán Morán. Paul Davies, *Limbo Pool*, Collection of the artist; Courtesy Peter Mendenhall Gallery. Brian Rochefort, *Crater 1 and Crater 2*, Courtesy of the artist and Massimo De Carlo. Nick Aguayo, *Wait until spring boogie woogie*, Courtesy of the artist and Vielmetter Los Angeles. Aili Schmeltz, *Charley*, Courtesy of Edward Cella Art + Architecture, Los Angeles.

to be, who the curator was going to be, or what art pieces were going to be here," Rod says. "We just presented a concept, and they embraced the concept."

Susan was the perfect person to consider candidates for curator, as she had served on the Board of Directors for the Palm Springs Art Museum. "The curator has to be ... fully credentialed," Susan says. "It needs to be somebody who's recognized by curatorial peers as somebody with the right education [and] the right knowledge to be able to make these selections. And then the person has to be able to process this place, this club, this environment, the membership, what we're doing here. And they have to be able to work with and be inspired by this stunning architecture."

Brooke Hodge, former director of architecture and design for the Palm Springs Art Museum and former deputy director of the Cooper-Hewitt National Design Museum, was chosen to curate the inaugural program for 2021-2022. The curator for the 2022-2023 program is Dr. Rochelle Steiner, former chief curator and director of curatorial affairs and programs at the Palm Springs Art Museum and former chief curator for the Vancouver Art Gallery.

Susan says the program's immediate success had a lot to do with how the art and artists were presented to the membership. The art wasn't just hung up on the walls for everyone to ponder. At the beginning of the season, when members were returning to the club, a reception and dinner were given and the artists and gallerists came to meet the 100-plus members and discuss their work. Susan says interest is so high that there will be another

dinner in February. They are also planning off-site programs to visit artists' studios in the region. Susan says an interesting side benefit for the artists is "[the artists] don't generally get to see their art in a setting where people are living with it. So, for the artists to be able to come here and see their art in (this) environment...and meet these people is something special for the artist."

Because of the club's proud history of diversity and inclusivity, they made sure that the artists in the program represented a range of different ethnicities, ages, races, and genders, as well as media. The installation includes sculpture, ceramics, paintings, works on paper, and video art.

Rochelle Steiner notes, "The artists included in the 2022-2023 presentation draw from a range of experiences and issues to create their art, yet each has some connection to California. I wanted to bring this breadth to Tamarisk for members to spend time with over the year."

Rod adds, "Using our history as a springboard to the future ART AT TAMARISK is but one of the ways we are expanding the member experience beyond what would be expected in a country club environment."

"We're thrilled by the enthusiasm of the members, the excitement of the gallerists and the artists, and the notes they sent us after the big opening we had in November," Susan says. "We're thrilled that members in the first season did many studio visits to these artists. They bought art and commissioned art. There's great anticipation for what's next."