

PALM SPRINGS LIFE

THE
EYE-POPPING
ART OF

DESERT X



SPECIAL
LOCAL MUSIC
ISSUE

SUSHI
AND
WHISKEY

THE
TRAM ROAD
CHALLENGE

ODE TO
THE
SMOKE TREE

THE RETURN
OF JOHN
BARROWMAN

FRONT ROOM



RENTALS

The High Desert Airbnb Game

How to minimize wear and tear, capitalize on photo shoots, and meet millennials' demands for amenities.

BY LISA MARIE HART

What's bringing all the cool kids to Yucca Valley? At a property called Starship Landing, it's the six-person hammock circle, living room disco ball, mainstay hot tub, stargazing/sun deck, fire pit, outdoor shower, pool table, record player, telescope, Jenga XXL and Connect 4 games, and fresh juice delivery. And there's that national park down the road.

Brad Klopman knows how to create an attractive vacation rental property. It's his business. As founder of The Cohost Company, he partners with homeowners and cash-flow investors to manage and market their tricked-out spaces scattered around Joshua Tree, Pioneertown, and Yucca Valley. Through his Cohost Collective community of properties, Klopman is cultivating a brand of rentals his guests can trust.

"I cater to both groups," he explains. "For hosts, I maximize occupancy. I help them curate the experience for potential renters all the way from the preconstruction or remodel phase through guest check-in and check-out. We create a boutique hotel experience in a private home framework, then market it through social media. Each home has its own identity and its own Instagram account. If guests have a good experience at one Cohost Collective property, they know they'll get a good experience at another."

Klopman and his wife, Cynthia, are L.A. transplants who well understand the clientele. After their Yucca Valley elopement in 2013, Klopman left the film industry to plant rustic new roots near his growing portfolio of Airbnbs. Cynthia coordinates Desert Reset, a series of healing yoga and hypnotherapy retreats held at Cactus Moon Retreat, a six-bedroom property with a pool and yoga studio that her husband manages.

When advising homeowners on outfitting their spaces, Klopman knows aesthetic counts, but it's not his first consideration. "When owners pick out a coffee table, lamps, and furniture I tell them to buy what's durable," he says. "You're really running a hotel when you start getting over 15 reservations a month. You might have to sacrifice design, but you'll be happier with something that lasts over something that's pretty."

One risk involved with stylish short-term vacation rentals is the growing number of

Photo: Colin Vega opposite: Doreen Rich



Marketed as a "modern bohemian retreat on 2.5 acres of desert land," The Moondance is a cozy former horse ranch built in 1961. *opposite:* Starship Landing's outdoor shower.

FRONT ROOM



Day or night, guests find time for a contemplative soak in the hot tub at Starship Landing. *below:* The property's open living and dining spaces.



Six chairs form a ring around the fire pit at Cactus Moon Retreat, creating a place to unwind after a day of yoga workshops in the on-site studio.

smaller businesses looking to get around photo shoot fees. After discovering that two guests had arrived with a 20-person crew to shoot a full lookbook, Klopman now vets inquiries more carefully. If he finds out a guest owns a clothing company, for example, he works out the terms up front. "Maybe we do a social media trade," he might suggest. "We like the exposure, but there needs to be a clear set of expectations, because that's where the real wear and tear comes in. We have to get a deposit so they treat the house well."

The Airbnb game has changed quickly in recent years. Gone are the days when someone could list an old house online and people would book it and show up, Klopman confirms. As inventory grows and competition stiffens, rentals need to keep pace with guests' wish lists. "The market is only oversaturated with mediocre properties," he says. "It takes more money to get in the game, but you'll do well. And renters will sleep farther from the park if it means a better experience."

Basic properties once considered hot bookings have seen occupancy slip to those with more to offer, especially in terms of outdoor extras. Klopman says a fancy kitchen and bathroom redo are superfluous when young guests are looking to the exterior — and he doesn't mean a few camping chairs and a barrel of firewood. "You can't miss the point of why people come here. They want to sit in a hot tub and stare at the stars. Our property called The Sweet Spot is crushing it on Airbnb because they have that, plus an outdoor shower, fire pit, barbecue, large covered patio with outdoor dining, and a porch swing. They have all the Instagram moments," he says of the new-construction build with only one bedroom and one bath. "They're booked 30 nights a month at really good rates."

Of course, the owners want to soak up some of that desert pleasure, too. "They could come out from L.A. and use it as a second home," Klopman says. "But they're either going to make \$1,000 that weekend or not. It's so lucrative, it's hard to say no to that."