

Love the Buffet, Grab a Wagonload of Almond Cookies



The California Club, Los Angeles

by Lew Toulmin

I visited the California Club and stayed for a night in October 2009 and stayed for three nights with my wife in July 2017.

HISTORY AND THE BUILDING: The Club was founded in 1887, and is the oldest private social club in southern California. Its members include leaders in business, industry and government. Women were admitted as members beginning in 1987. The



clubhouse was designed in a classical style by noted architect Robert Farquhar. It is located in downtown Los Angeles, in an excellent position near Fifth and Flower Streets, beside the LA Central Library. The building is massive—seven stories tall and measuring about 95 yards deep and 50

yards wide. The building includes a multi-storey garage, which is large enough that a car show is held there, for members' cars, each year in October. The garage has its own gas pump and car washing facility. It is quite easy to miss the entrance to the garage, which is just before the building on the one-way Flower Street.

The LA Metro (subway) is currently (2017) building a subway line right in front of the Club and blocking one lane of traffic; this should be finished by the end of 2017.

FACILITIES: The Club facilities are remarkable, and include a barber shop, shoe shine, dry cleaning, tailoring service, good rooftop gym, fitness trainer, steam room, sauna, masseur by appointment, and wine, spirits and clothing shop. The public meeting rooms are quite beautiful, with very high ceilings. The largest room is about 100 by 60 feet. The large public rooms and smaller meeting rooms can be rented by reciprocal guests. According to staff, charge for a gathering in a small meeting room is about \$40. There is a modest library. The club has an excellent collection of original art of the West.



Staff were helpful and knowledgeable.



FOOD: Breakfast, lunch and dinner are served Monday through Friday, and dinner is served on Saturday. Other than that dinner, there is only room service on the weekends. Even breakfast is via room service then. The Club reportedly has a large wine cellar with wine offered at very reasonable prices.



Our breakfasts in 2017 were excellent although individual items were a bit expensive. The star meal was the Tuesday night buffet, which was amazing. A 35-foot-long table groaned with exceptionally fresh seafood, included shrip (bay and large), crab claws, crab lumps, ahi tuna, large fresh fish, and artichoke hearts, salad, etc., etc. These were just the appetizers! My wife had Dover Sole, a “B,” and I had a hanger steak, also a “B.” The large dessert table was loaded with spectacular chewy almond cookies, and terrific

maccaron (better than Laduree's at the Original LA Farmer's Market), and also crème brulee, ice cream, coconut layer cake, cheesecake, petit four, chocolate mousse, etc. The almond cookies were an A+ or almost an "Oh My God!" -- our highest rating. Serving staff were very accommodating and helpful. I should note that the total cost of the buffet was expensive, though, at \$72 each including tax and charges.

RULES: The dress code is coat and tie for men, and dresses, suits, skirts (with blouses, sweaters or jackets), or pantsuits for women. This is relaxed to business casual on the third floor and above. No denim shirts or jeans are allowed, and no running shoes. All rooms are non-smoking. Despite these rules, I managed to legally avoid wearing a tie for my entire three day stay!

BED ROOM DESCRIPTION: There are 51 bedrooms, of which about 20 are reserved each night during the week as in-town apartments by members, leaving only about 31 rooms available during the week for guests and reciprocals. My en-suite single room in 2009 was about 12 x 14 feet, with a single bed, quiet air conditioning, a small Sony TV, wireless internet access, and simple but attractive décor. I inspected a large room overlooking the adjacent park. This double room was more lavishly decorated, was about 22 x 15 feet, and had a walk-in closet and large bathroom.



Our 2017 king-bed junior suite had a 16 x 17 attractive bedroom, a large side hall with numerous drawers and four small closets, a large bathroom with yet more storage, a sofa and chairs, and two large windows overlooking the beautiful Egyptian-style LA Main Library. Some minor complaints: the shower knob fell off (but was fixed the next day), our floor (the fifth) had a slight odd acrid smell, perhaps due to renovations, the TV was oddly placed, and the AC was a bit wonky.



BED ROOM RATES: Rates (in late 2009) for a single like mine were \$140 for reciprocals, not including tax or breakfast or parking. (This latter was \$23 per night.) The larger bedroom I inspected had a reciprocal rate of \$180 for single occupancy or \$205 for double occupancy, plus tax, breakfast and parking. A one bedroom suite was \$285 for single occupancy and \$25 more for double occupancy.

In July 2017 the rate was \$295 per night for our king junior suite.



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v. 1, July 2017