

HOME DINING RECREATION TRAVEL COMMUNITY HEALTH STYLE

805 LIVING

DECEMBER 2011

A Few of Our Favorite Things

A photograph of a silver bowl filled with white truffles, set against a blue background with wrapped gifts. The bowl is in the foreground, and the gifts are in the background, creating a festive holiday atmosphere.

SWEET TREATS,
PRETTY PRESENTS,
FESTIVE PARTIES—AND
THE GENEROUS SPIRIT
OF THE SEASON



HOT TIP

Sometimes travel includes carting home a bottle of the grape or Great-Aunt Edna's heirloom teacups (what, you're going to trust the post office?), and that involves multiple incantations to the baggage gods to keep that precious cargo from being smashed to smithereens. The new **VinniBag** (\$28) is an inflatable air cushion that protects bottles or other breakables, whether traveling by plane, train, bus, or car. The one drawback: It's not a space-saving item when in use but it does deflate, fold, and stow when not; Wades Wines, Westlake Village, wadeswines.com.

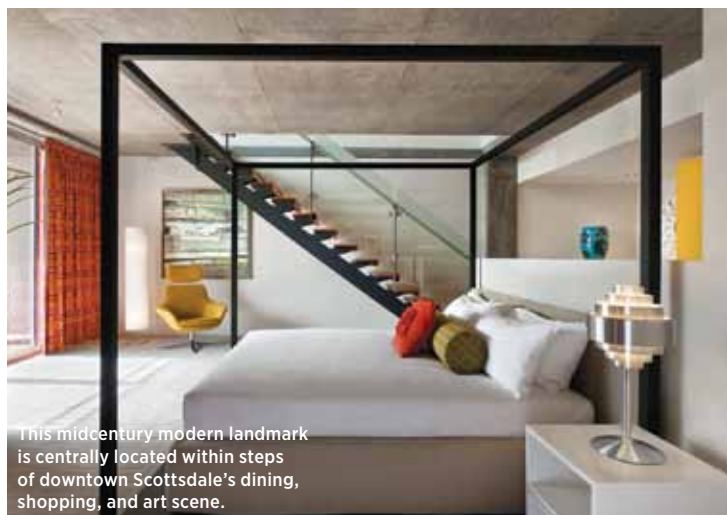


A preflight stay at the retro-chic Custom Hotel makes jet-setting fun again.

PAUL DYER

Cool Factor Near LAX

A long flight halfway around the world is no excuse not to go somewhere fabulous, but waking up at 3 a.m. to make an early morning flight from LAX might be. **Custom Hotel** (rooms from \$129; jdvhotels.com/hotels/losangeles/custom_hotel) opened in September in the airport corridor and offers a stylish option for preflight stays. Sleek furnishings and knock-your-socks-off city-light views ensure a restful night's sleep, while amenities like a coffee bar, game room, relaxation lounge, tiered-sundeck pool, and two hopping bars plus a restaurant actually start the vacation a day early.



This midcentury modern landmark is centrally located within steps of downtown Scottsdale's dining, shopping, and art scene.

DESERT DEAL

SUNNY SCOTTSDALE looks even brighter from the new Loft Suite at the '60s-era **Hotel Valley Ho** (hotelvalleyho.com). The two-level, 1,335-square-foot suite (from \$359 per night) has a floating staircase and two balconies that overlook the pool, with a bedroom, desk, and master bathroom on the lower floor and a modern kitchen and living room above. The full-service kitchen can accommodate a chef-cooked private meal (for an additional fee). High-end finishes and furnishings complete the home away from home, which is tucked into the retro-cool property that received a massive \$80-million overhaul in 2005.



WHEN YOU DO LEAVE HOME WITHOUT IT

A night on the town in Santa Monica just got a little more chic with the debut of the Fred Segal Lending Library at the **Loews Santa Monica Beach Hotel** (loewshotels.com). Guests who stay in an oceanfront suite at the property can replace forgotten items (like those reading glasses left at home on the nightstand) or add new flair to their outfits with hip accessories like purses, embellished scarves, and

cocktail rings. The items are chosen based on what people are most likely to forget and also include pet toys and children's books. If a library loan inspires a burning desire to own, the items are available for purchase (the Fred Segal store is just six blocks away). The "Suite Deal" package (from \$600, through December 30) includes a \$50 dining or spa credit per day, free internet and parking, and use of the Lending Library.

Best in the West

The 805's own **Hotel Cheval** (hotelcheval.com) in Paso Robles was selected by *Sunset* magazine as one of its "25 Best Hotels in the West" for 2011. The editors looked for special details and good value when putting together their list. This month, stay there while enjoying special Paso Robles holiday activities like the Vine Street Victorian Showcase (December 10), where pedestrians take over 13 blocks of Vine Street in downtown Paso Robles to view holiday-decorated Victorian houses, and the Victorian Teddy Bear Tea (December 17); pasoroblesdowntown.org. ♦

BY MALLORY McCREARY

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