

DEPARTURES

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The
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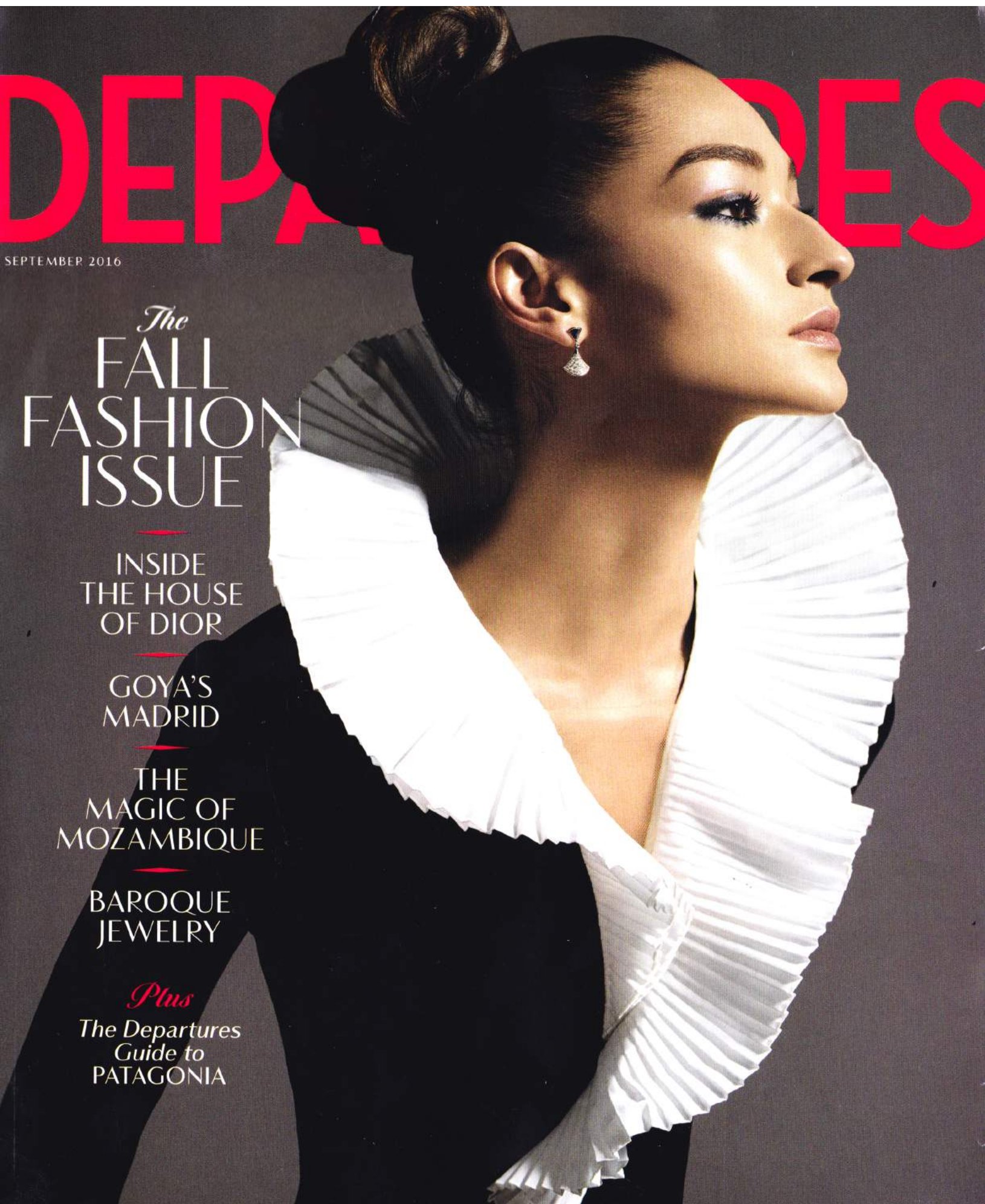
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UPDATE

Cabo's COMEBACK

After a devastating hurricane two years ago, Mexico's longtime playground is back. And with 13 new hotels, two golf courses, and countless private homes being constructed, it's set to keep getting bigger and better.

BY ELIZABETH SILE

ESPERANZA
The adults-only pool overlooks the Sea of Cortez and El Arco in the distance.

At the southernmost tip of Baja California, not far from Los Cabos International Airport, a well-maintained road is flanked by the Sierra de la Laguna. The mountains are greener than usual because of recent rain, and in their shadow, cardon cacti fill the desert. A cow stands off the road watching cars turn onto Carretera Transpeninsular, the highway that runs the length of Baja California—1,063 miles—from Tijuana to Cabo San Lucas. “We have many problems in Mexico but not here,” my driver says as the royal blue Sea of Cortez appears to the south. This contrast, where ocean meets desert, has welcomed travelers for decades.

But soon, the familiar scenery is interrupted. Ten-foot-tall signs advertise empty lots. Suntanned men carry ladders and two-by-fours to half-constructed buildings, one after another, as I enter the Tourist Corridor (yes, unfortunately that's its official designation), the 20-mile stretch of beaches, resorts, and golf courses that connects Cabo San Lucas to the west and San José del Cabo to the east. Collectively the area is known as Los Cabos, or Cabo for short.

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the Pacific Ocean. The Pacific side, which has rougher water, has remained largely undeveloped, but that is changing. In 2017, Nobu will open its first hotel in Mexico, with 200 rooms, and farther north the Mexican chain Solmar Group will debut the 460-room Grand Solmar Rancho San Lucas, with a Greg Norman golf course (his second in Cabo).

For now, though, the only place to stay is at the **Resort at Pedregal** (rooms from \$675; Camino del Mar 1; 52-624/163-4300), where the dining and 12,000-square-foot spa are the draws. The former Capella property closed for four months and underwent a \$20 million renovation post-Odile, then reopened as an independent hotel. (The jury is still out on whether the service compares under new ownership, but I found it warm.) The redone interiors evoke a Spanish hacienda. Book suite 930, with three bedrooms and views of Pedregal Beach from the tub. The Luna y Mar Spa is Cabo's most dramatic; it resembles the inside of an oyster, with eight treatment pods.

If you tire of fine dining, Cabo San Lucas, while very touristy, has some fun, laid-back cantinas. Los Tres Gallos serves traditional Mexican dishes like chicken mole. Smoked-marlin tacos are what to order at Los Claros. Bar Esquina, at the Bahia Hotel & Beach Club, is more upscale and serves excellent nontequila cocktails (try the Farmers Mark) for when you just can't have another margarita. As you leave town, stop at no-frills Asi y Asado for shredded beef tacos and watermelon water.

SAN JOSE DEL CABO: OFF THE BEATEN PATH

The area's cultural capital is the older and smaller San José del Cabo, with 18th-century colonial buildings, a 1730 Jesuit mission, and a central plaza. Small streets like Calle Boulevard Antonio Mijares and Calle José María

Morelos are lined with art galleries, shops, and taco stands. Locals recommend Thursday night's Art Walk, from November to June.

Cabo is no Mexico City, but San José has a few galleries worth visiting. Among the dealers is Patricia Mendoza, whose namesake gallery

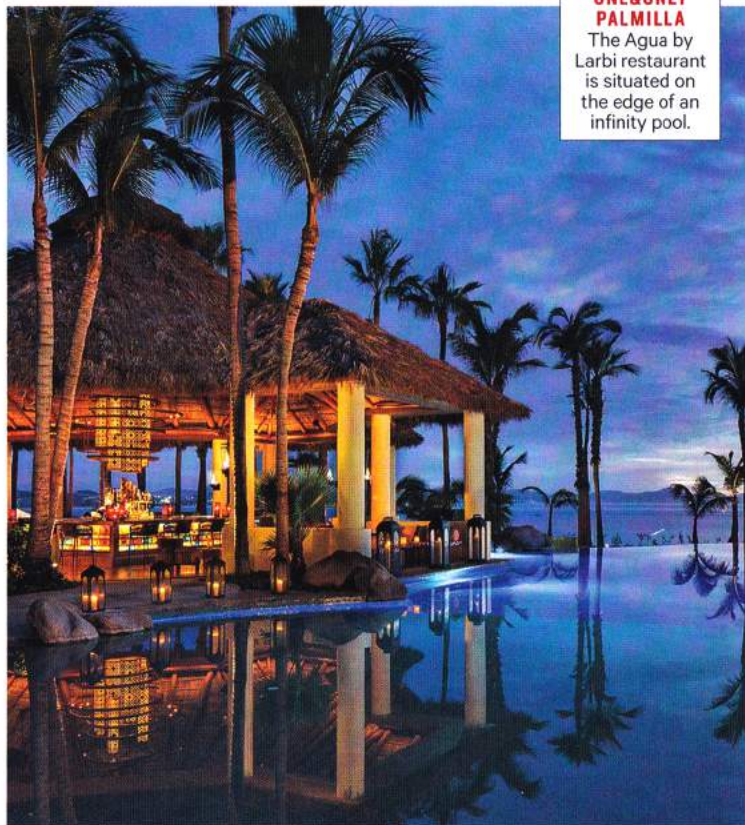
hotel with 69 rooms and a recording studio. Farther east is a 299-room **JW Marriott** (rooms from \$460; Fraccion Hotelera FH5-C1, Subdelegación de la Playita; 52-624/163-7600), which opened in November (book one of the 49 rooms in the Griffin Club, a "hotel within a

hotel"); its Café des Artistes restaurant is worth a visit for its duck confit chilaquiles. Ritz-Carlton is building 124 Reserve residences, east of the JW Marriott, by early 2017. To the west of Puerto Los Cabos is a stretch of beach called the Zona Hotelera. The new hotel there is the year-old ultramodern Mar Adentro. Farther afield, Four Seasons will open a 145-room resort 45 miles northeast of San José in a development called Costa Palmas in 2018.

The hotbed of organic dining in Cabo is happening a 20-minute drive north of the mission, down a dirt road where three farm restaurants grow over 25 acres. All do organic, vegetable-heavy cooking. Huerta Los Tamarindos and Flora Farm are more rustic, with pizzas, pastas, and grilled meats, while design-minded Acre is more modern, with a crudo of the day and tomato carpaccio. Locals and longtime Cabo regulars point me to Flora's Field Kitchen. The property has a dining area, small market, and fields of produce. California expats Patrick and Gloria Greene have built ten sold-out culinary cottages on site, with

three more on the way, where owners get unlimited produce. It's hard to imagine that just two years ago, the rows of multicolored cauliflower, snap peas, and tiny carrots were decimated.

The sun goes down and the string lights come on, twinkling under the night stars. The breeze is cool. At my table, there's coppa to start, bread and fresh butter, farm fettuccine dyed purple from beets, wood-fired mesquite chicken, a creamy corn salad that tastes like *elote* without the crema, and maybe one too many pink-hibiscus margaritas. The dishes, and then the hours, pass in a satisfying blur, as they can only on a perfect evening in Cabo. ♦



By the end of 2017, 3,000 rooms
will have been built in new hotels in
Los Cabos.

specializes in contemporary artists such as sculptors Jorge Marín and Julio Martínez Barnette. She's still reeling from the hurricane. "I'm paying for it. I lost artists," she says. "But for the first time, I think we're recovering. People are coming back to Cabo."

The problem with San José is lodging. But luxury development is happening outward from the town's center, in an area called Puerto Los Cabos. Here, a golf course by Jack Nicklaus and Greg Norman was completed in 2008 (nine more holes are expected by 2017), and a new marina was built in 2007, with 200 slips. On the marina itself is El Ganzo, a boutique