

LODGE

AN INDOORSY TOUR OF
AMERICA'S NATIONAL PARKS



MAX HUMPHREY
WITH KATHRYN O'SHEA-EVANS

PHOTOGRAPHS BY DAVID TSAY AND ROB SCHANZ

FOREWORD BY KEN BURNS

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MAX HUMPHREY



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THE AHWAHNEE

Yosemite National Park, California

When I was working on this book, everybody grilled me on which lodge was my favorite—an impossible ask. Each one had something that set it apart from the rest of the pack. Lake Quinault was easily the most fun; Crater Lake the most inspiring (those stars!); the Oasis at Death Valley a total and luxurious surprise. But if you could only ever visit one lodge in your life, it has to be The Ahwahnee. It's the full package.

The journey to get here is part of the draw. To reach the legendary hotel, which sits tucked near the Merced River in Yosemite Valley, you drive through a series of actual Ansel Adams photographs: winding through the Sierra Nevada mountains, pulling over often to ogle 130-million-year-old Half Dome and Yosemite Falls. (Even though you can't wait to get to the lodge, you can't not stop.) We were there during an annual phenomenon called "firefall," when the setting sunlight hits 1,575-foot-tall Horsetail Fall in such a way that it makes the water glow like a bonfire as it bounds over the eastern granite face of El Capitan. And then we finally saw it—The Ahwahnee.

Opened in 1927, the Y-shaped lodge composed of rough-cut granite and concrete was meant to echo the cliffs surrounding it, and it does. Then-director of the National Park Service Stephen T. Mather was a bit peer-pressured into constructing something grand when socialite Lady Astor rolled up to the Sentinel, Yosemite Valley's only hotel, and deemed it "primitive."

Designed by Los Angeles architect Gilbert Stanley Underwood, The Ahwahnee is anything but unrefined, by design. Take the 24-foot-ceilings in the Great Lounge, with hand-painted beams and floor-to-ceiling windows that embellish the already showstopping view with their intricate stained-glass panels. Or the chandelier-lit dining room, where a gable-roofed ceiling reaches a 34-foot-tall peak and sugar pine roof trusses nod to the surrounding forests.

The Ahwahnee is almost an optical illusion. The scale of it is nothing less than ginormous when you're within its walls. But when you step outside, the lodge feels absolutely dinky compared to the monolithic granodiorite mountains surrounding it. It's no wonder its name—*ah-wah-nee*, a word of the indigenous Ahwahneechee, who lived here for centuries—means "land of the gaping mouth." Standing in Yosemite Valley, you can't help but to let your mouth fall open in awestruck wonder. Say it with me, "Aaaah."

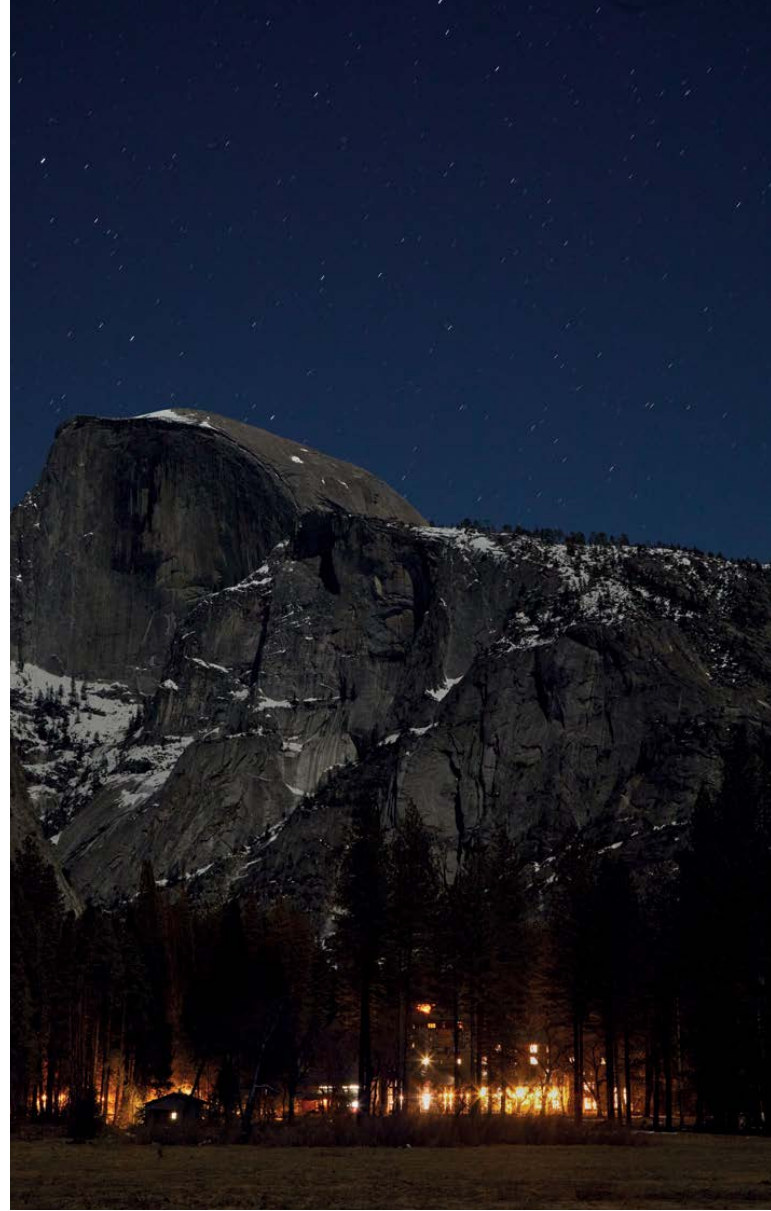
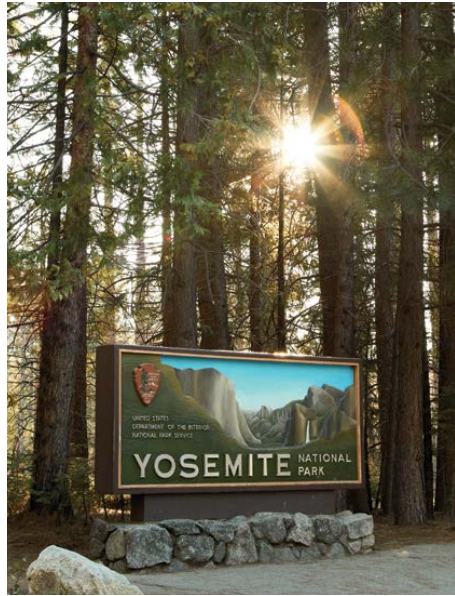




One of the cottages on the grounds of The Ahwahnee.

Back in the day, California artist Robert Boardman Howard painted these linen-lined walls with Yosemite fauna, alongside a hand-hammered copper fireplace hood. It's in the Mural Room, which feels like you're in a time capsule. It's totally indulgent—not the type of room most of us normally get to sit around in, reading books and sipping hot cocoa.





The clean palette and simplicity of materials is so modern.



Being at Curry Village is like being dropped off by your parents at summer camp. Only here, you'll find things like custom scenic bedspreads in lieu of your old bedroll.



Stick-style railings and skyscraping cedar columns lend a woosy gravitas to the lobby.





↑ After nightfall, the intentional asymmetry of the lodge becomes even more apparent.

→ Exposed log scissor trusses ornament the ceiling of the dining room. Old Hickory designed the Old Faithful Inn dining chairs and shipped hundreds of them here in 1904. Architect Reamer considered them the finishing touches, and he was right; they're still being used more than 115 years later.



