Wilbur Hot Springs: An Eco-Resort

Wilbur Hot Springs offers massage treatments, yoga classes, guest-chef weekends, and world-renowned natural hot mineral springs. The 17-room historic hotel, built in 1915, is surrounded by an 1800-acre private nature preserve in an area considered a top destination for viewing California wildflowers, as well as numerous species of birds and dragonflies.

The original hotel and springs, purchased by Doctor Richard Miller in the 1970s, was approximately 300 acres. In 1999, Dr. Miller purchased the surrounding 1500 acres and designated the area as a nature preserve.

In 2006, Wilbur began working with range ecologist Craig Thomsen from UC Davis to restore native plants to the area, and combat invasive species. Thomsen's work continues currently, with Wilbur participating in raising grant money, and providing lodging in trade to guests who work with Craig (five hours per day).

Wilbur is 100% off the grid, powered entirely by solar panels and propane. Renovations and improvements are performed using eco-conscious building materials and practices.

The solar panel array was installed in the early 1990s. Up to that time, the Wilbur hotel had been lit with kerosene lamps. The transition to solar-powered lighting was completed in 1991.

The stoves in the kitchen, and the fireplaces, which heat the hotel in winter, are powered by propane. The fleet of guest refrigerators is currently transitioning from propane to solar-powered, a process that should be complete by August 07.

The new Sunfrost refrigerators are specifically designed to run on solar power. They are more efficient, and colder, than the propane predecessors, and produce less waste. The Sunfrosts use approximately one-third the power of "normal" consumer refrigerators, which is what makes them optimal for solar power use.

"Closedown" is the two weeks every August when Wilbur is closed to the public in order to do major maintenance and renovations. During Closedown 2007, Wilbur may be adding solar panels to boost the current power supply, plus a second swamp cooler system for third floor – a swamp cooler that was installed in the apartment in 2006 during that closedown has proved very effective. (Both the apartment and the third floor were additions to the original concrete hotel, and so do not benefit from the same efficient cooling properties of the concrete walls as the second and first floor rooms do.)

Wilbur has been in the process of exploring hydroelectric power as an additional option. Plans to install such a system are not yet in place.

Wilbur uses compact fluorescent light bulbs and low-flow toilets. Cleaning products are eco-friendly.

Wilbur's hot springs flumes are non-impact, meaning that the water is simply diverted from the geothermal source, held temporarily in the "flumes," and then returned to the creek. No chemicals are added to the flumes, so no chemicals are being added to the water table.