

The Beverly Hilton: A Star is Born – August 1955

- **Bursting onto the Scene:** The icon of The Beverly Hilton is a starburst – a symbol of space and freedom. Originally mounted over the grand staircase in the main lobby, this symbol was personified by a magnificent sculptured Starburst weighing 500 pounds and stretching to 15 feet, created by famed artist Bernard Rosenthal. Today, a portion of the original sculpture remains on display in The Oasis pool area of the hotel.
- **Silent Night:** As the team worked to perfect The Beverly Hilton throughout the building process, Arthur Elmiger, the hotel's first general manager, would not give the rooms the final "okay" until he had lived in and tested each room personally. The management team even went so far as to scientifically test the guestroom wall construction, hiring scientists from UCLA to measure the partition between every room electronically for complete soundproof assurance. In addition, to further ensure guests received an excellent night of sleep, the Hilton executive team tested mattresses in their homes before they were approved to be ordered for the hotel.
- **Turn Back Time:** A year after the groundbreaking, when the hotel reached the seventh floor, Conrad Hilton and his team lowered a stainless steel-lined time capsule into a concrete vault below the lobby. Intended to be opened in 2054, the capsule contained a:
 - 1954 Almanac
 - Beverly Hills phone directory
 - Sears Roebuck catalogue
 - Copy of *Beverly Hills Daily News Life*
 - Recordings of the five most popular tunes that week
 - Written history of Beverly Hills
 - Prayer written by Conrad Hilton.
- **Going Up:** The Beverly Hilton was the first hotel to install high-speed elevators with then new technology called "Amplidyne" which regulates the flow of power so that the elevators function so smoothly that movement is "barely perceptible."
- **California Wonderland:** The hotel's ground-floor night club, the Bali Room (now the International Ballroom), was so versatile that its beautiful jeweled stage and dance floor could be converted to an ice skating rink when the occasion called for it.
- **A Dining Experience Like No Other:** The Beverly Hilton's eighth-floor opened as the fine dining restaurant, L'Escoffier, and was instantly classified "the most exclusive restaurant in the world." While much of this was due to the fact that Conrad Hilton flew in three chefs from France to cook and train his restaurant team in European service and food preparation, another contributing factor was the lack of prices on the restaurant's menu. Waiters handed guests a hand-written list of the evening's specialties (although it was rumored that with appropriate notice, the kitchen would make anything guests desired), and at the end of the night the waiter would leave the guest a bill with one figure: the total cost of the meal. This created such a buzz among guests and media that the restaurant had an entire skit dedicated to its lavishness on the nationally televised *Jack Benny Show*.
- **Speaking of French Service...:** In 1955, the room service staff (which included two captains, 30 waiters, five bus boys and six order girls) were instructed to give guests a completely luxurious

experience. As such, the order takers were asked to adopt French “stage names” and answer “Good morning, room service, Gigi speaking.”

- **Ordering the Weather:** As the first luxury hotel to have air-conditioning thermostats in each room, guests were abuzz with the power to “control the weather” during their hotel stays at The Beverly Hilton.
- **King of the Road:** Two buses, donned the “Golden Starburst Special,” greeted East Coast media who came in for the grand opening celebration in true luxury. En route to the hotel from the airport, travelers were served champagne while a guitarist (one for each bus, of course) provided lively entertainment. Throughout the week, the buses regularly transported guests to different festivities, including trips to Conrad Hilton’s Bel Air home.
- **A Toast: Beverly Hilton Style:** On August 8, 1955, approximately 400 members of the press became the first individuals to taste the “Starburst Cocktail,” a signature drink created specifically for The Beverly Hilton. The bartenders were instructed to serve this cocktail “very dry and ice cold,” as the guests looked out over the Hollywood Hills from the Star on the Roof, one of Beverly Hills’ first roof top bars. Today, the hotel has a similar signature drink served at special occasions called the “Startini.”
- **Swimming with Stars:** Esther Williams, film-star and swimmer extraordinaire officially inaugurated The Beverly Hilton’s Aqua Star Pool (the largest in Beverly Hills) by swimming through white gardenias with three of her swim students. The pool was also named the site of the Esther Williams Swim School, a partnership with the Nursery School for Visually Handicapped Children, where Williams offered lessons to the children with impaired vision.
- **Falling Stars:** The night before the official opening, Conrad Hilton hired the Goodyear Blimp to float above The Beverly Hilton and nearby communities with the lighted inscription “Welcome Golden Starburst – Gala Grand Opening – The Beverly Hilton” blazing from the sky. The blimp attempted to sprinkle small golden starbursts onto the community below, however, the concept did not actually work – the pieces of confetti got stuck together. This blazing blimp was still a hit for community onlookers.
- **The Big Night:** On the night of the opening gala, uniformed Harold trumpeters greeted guests with a regal fanfare as pink-painted elephants, escorted by bathing suit beauties, circled the main entrance of the hotel. At the end of the evening, the hotel team tossed pink rose petals along the path of the departing guests.