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ART
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CALIFORNIA

Capturing the Golden State of Mind



NANCY REAGAN
in the Red Room
at the White
House dressed
for the Inaugural
Ball in a gown by
California designer
James Galanos,
January 1981.

Remembering NANCY REAGAN

First Lady Nancy Reagan was, first and foremost, a great American—but it's impossible not to think of her as a great Californian as well. She moved to Hollywood in the late 1940s and went under contract to MGM, where they trained her—as they did all of their stars and starlets—in the art of dressing, diction, poise and grace, the public-faced attributes befitting a star. They certainly didn't need to train her in the manners department. She'd already conquered that in spades.

"There'll be a return of dignity," Nancy announced as she planned her tenure at the White House, showcasing, among others, California-style gurus including Ted Graber for interiors, Jimmy Galanos for dresses, and David Jones for gardens, flowers, holiday festivals, and tables at her legendary state dinners to which she invited Sinatra, Travolta and Bette Davis. California titans of industry—the "Kitchen Cabinet"—paid a lion's share of

the bills. The result? A legendary dose of Hollywood glamour for all the world to see. Like Jackie Kennedy's East Coast chic before her, Nancy Reagan's West Coast élan defined an era of optimism, prosperity, the triumph of good over evil, and a great America.

After one of many lunches I had with her at Hotel Bel-Air—the chopped salad, named for her, and miniature chocolate chip cookies—Nancy and I walked to the car. We paused on the bridge to see the swans, the gardens, and the beautiful light pouring down—one of those Los Angeles moments that even Walt Disney couldn't have dreamed up. "What a day this is," said Nancy, taking time, quite literally, to smell the roses—and the lilies, agapanthus, azaleas and tulips in full bloom. Arm-in-arm, she looked me in the eye: "How lucky are we to live here?"

• **ALEX HITZ** is an American celebrity chef, cookbook author, socialite, philanthropist and founder of *The Beverly Hills Kitchen*.

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