

# Linsk and the 'singular appeal' of 'Poolside Gossip'

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Slim Aarons photographed wealthy socialites in their lavish homes in the choicest spots all around the world, often by the pool. His seductive pictures were romantic and stylish, evocative of a casual elegance enjoyed by the effete and elite. Considering his images in glamorous places like Acapulco, Antibes or Antigua, that his arguably most famous image would turn out to be that of an old friend, and her assembled neighbors in Palm Springs, is as remarkable as the woman in the picture.

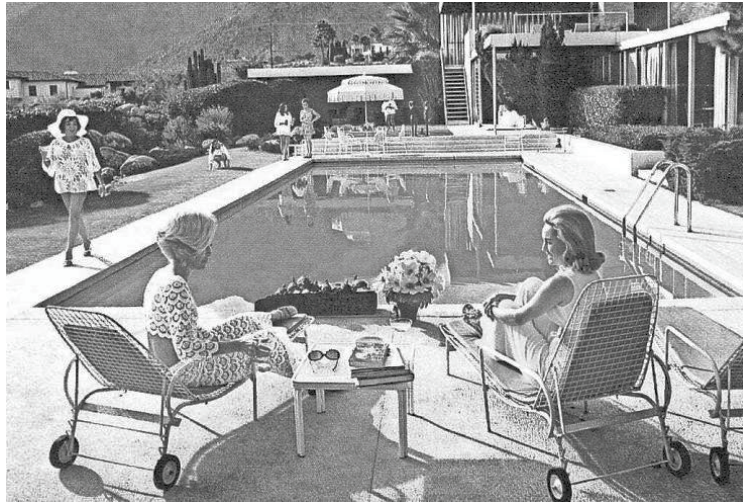
Nelda Linsk is fabulously glamorous. Growing up gorgeous in Texas, she worked in fashion as a model and eventually took a job as a buyer for Linsk of Philadelphia, a top manufacturer of women's wear. She ended up marrying the boss. The couple had a country place and one of their neighbors, down the road, was society photographer Slim Aarons.

Joe and Nelda Linsk escaped from a cold New York winter in 1963 to the sunshine of Palm Springs.

Explaining in a Palm Springs Life interview with David Lansing, "I'd never been here. We flew into L.A. and then rented a car and drove to Palm Springs. We stayed at The Racquet Club. That was the place to be. Even in New York everyone knew about The Racquet Club. I remember waking up the next morning and it was just magical. The air, the mountains, the smell of the citrus blossoms. I'd never experienced anything like it. I fell in love with Palm Springs immediately."

They began to return regularly and decided to buy their own place.

"Our Realtor kept wanting to show us the Kaufmann House but we weren't interested. We didn't want a place with high maintenance." Built almost 20 years earlier in 1946 for the princely sum of \$300,000 by Edgar Kaufmann, the Pittsburgh department store magnate, and designed by Richard Neutra, the



**"Poolside Gossip," an iconic image from photographer Slim Aarons, features well-known Palm Springs resident Nelda Linsk. SLIM AARONS/GETTY IMAGES**

house was unique and required lots of repair and maintenance by the early 1960s.

But the undaunted Realtor brought over a book with the now iconic black-and-white photos by Julius Shulman, insisting that Joe and Nelda should really have a look at the place.

"So we decided to go take a peek, just for fun. I remember when I walked in the gate and saw all of that flagstone and that upper loggia with those incredible views, I said, 'This is it, Joe. This is our house.' They paid \$149,000 for the Kaufmann House, 'which was a lot of money in those days,' says Nelda with a laugh."

But, as Lansing points out, a lot less than Kaufmann had paid to build it.

Now spending more time in Palm Springs, Nelda and Joe became part of the local community and were regulars at the Racquet Club. Many Hollywood stars and moguls owned homes in the area. William and Mousie Powell would hold court on Tuesday nights. Dinah Shore played tennis there. Barbara Marx, who would later marry Frank Si-

natra, staged fashion shows by the pool. And Charlie Farrell would preside over the whole party.

Kirk and Anne Douglas, Mary and Jack Benny, Natalie Wood and Robert Wagner, Tony Curtis and Janet Leigh, Lucy and Desi, Dinah Shore and George Montgomery, and Nelda and Joe Linsk would make the scene at the Bamboo Bar, the Chi Chi or Ruby's Dunes. Columnist Gloria Greer famously observed that it wasn't a party until she showed up, but it wasn't a great party until Nelda arrived. Palm Springs in the 1960s meant glamor and Nelda.

When Slim Aarons arrived in Palm Springs in 1970 eager to snap some pool pictures, he called his friend. "We had a house in Bedford Village, and Slim had a place right down the road and we were friends...he happened to be in Palm Springs and called me up one morning and said he wanted to do some swimming pool shots..." He told me to call up a few of my friends. I called up Helen (Dzo Dzo,) of course, and a couple of other friends." Those friends were Arthur El-

rod, and Raymond Loewy and movie actress Lita Baron. "Slim came over about an hour later with a tripod and his camera. There were no assistants, no make-up artists, no hairstylist, nothing. We just put on the clothes we had in our closets. Very casual. In fact, if I'd known then what I know today, I might have dressed up a little more.' The whole thing, says Nelda, took about an hour."

Slim Aarons took hundreds of photographs of gorgeous and glamorous women poolside during his career. But this shot, named "Poolside Gossip" has become iconic. The reasons are ineffable. The rich hues of an exuberant and seemingly carefree time are captured in glorious color. The stunning architecture is juxtaposed with the awesome nature. The attractive subjects are admirable and somehow still accessible. It defines an easy elegance, now synonymous with the best of desert living.

In 2015, when Helen Dzo Dzo Kaptur and Lita Baron were still around, local preservationist Gary Johns had a brilliant idea. In service of Modernism Week and of history itself, he wanted to recreate the famous image, photographing them again as they had been in 1970. Nelda was game. And for Modernism Week events, interviewed by Johns, she began reminiscing for posterity about Palm Springs in front of delighted audiences.

Musing about the original image, Johns noted, "That photo has taken on a life of its own. And it's not just in Palm Springs. You see it in homes in Dubai and Paris and the Hamptons — it's everywhere." Nelda has been quoted in the New York Times and Palm Springs Life explaining the singular appeal of the image. Slim Aarons called her up once while at a book-signing party in New York and asked her why the image was so enduringly popular. "I told him because I was in it!" she says, laughing. Then, she reflects, "I think it was our lifestyle. The mountains, the sun, the pool, the relaxed atmosphere — everybody could look at that photo and think, Oh, that looks like fun." Indeed.