

Paradise Valley

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BILTMORE ARCADIA

L I F E S T Y L E

*Expressions
of
Art*

COLLECTING THE WEST
MASTERWORKS OF MODERN ART
WONDROUSLY WHIMSICAL WIND BELLS

A tall saguaro cactus stands prominently in the center of the frame, its ribbed surface catching the light. The desert floor is covered in low-lying shrubs and dry grass. In the background, more cacti and distant hills are visible under a clear, pale blue sky. The title 'Desert Bells in the Wind' is written in a large, elegant, white script font, with the words 'Desert Bells' on the top line and 'in the Wind' on the bottom line, partially overlapping the cactus.

Desert Bells in the Wind

Cosanti Honors the Legacy
of Founder Paolo Soleri
with Exquisitely-Curated,
Custom Goods

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Cosanti is a world-renowned foundry, and studio of Paolo Soleri, nestled in the heart of Paradise Valley. But you probably don't know the first thing about this hidden treasure.

"Cosanti is well-known around the world," says Roger Tomalty, director of Paolo Soleri Studios. "But often people that are living in Paradise Valley are the least informed about it."

It's not hard to see why, either. A single blink-and-you'll-miss-it sign on the side of Doubletree Ranch Road is all that informs drivers that it's there. But you'll want to make time for this place.

Park on the gravel road and be prepared to experience a feast for the senses. Soleri's famed wind bells—not to be confused with wind chimes—line just about every inch of the foundry. You'll see them immediately at the entryway, hanging from the trees.

When you enter the main building—the structures were all designed by Soleri—they're strung up from the ceiling and are quite striking. Cast out of bronze or ceramics, the bells are usually shiny gold or green in color with intricate shapes etched onto them. Also hanging from many of the bells are thin sheets of bronze in triangular shapes. The bells can be less than a pound or up to a few hundred, depending on the additions to them. The look is industrial yet warm,

and the bells are instantly recognizable to anyone who's familiar with Soleri, who lived at Cosanti until his passing at age 95 in 2013.

The short version of the artist's story goes like this: Italian-born Paolo Soleri moved out to Arizona so he could apprentice under Frank Lloyd Wright. Soleri then decided to strike out on his own. He married the daughter of a client who commissioned one of his first works and returned with her to Italy for their honeymoon. While there, he was commissioned on a whim to build a ceramics factory, which got him started on his best-known creations.

After returning to Arizona, Soleri set up shop on a five-acre plot of land in Paradise Valley, where he designed all of the U-shaped, dark, Earth-colored buildings that now line the property. He then began inviting students to the foundry to apprentice under him, and although he passed in 2013, his legacy and practice still lives on today.

"It's hands-on learning by doing," says Tomalty of the students who come to study at Cosanti. On a recent visit, we watched students in heavy-duty gear pour bright orange liquid bronze into sand casts—Cosanti churns out about 250 bells per week, or about 13,000 to 15,000 per year, and each is a one-of-a-kind piece.

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"Those ceramics took on a desert, earthy feature," says Tomalty, who has worked at the studio for 45 years. There are 25 to 30 different bell shapes, all originally designed by Soleri.

"Each bell has a pattern, but the designs are going to change the surface. All of the designs you see on the surfaces are done by hand by the foundry workers. Hence, we call the bells Cosanti originals."

Although the workers etch the designs into the bells, they're created with a distinct look in mind.

"We very carefully train the new people so that the designs fall within a range that is recognizable as Cosanti Originals Paolo Soleri Bells," says Tomalty, speaking over the near constant din of the property's furnace.

The shape of the bells and position of the clapper—a cross-shaped device that's inside the bell—determine the sound each one emits. Although many buy and place them outside, you also can spot them at Sky Harbor airport, the Mayo Clinic and the bridge at Scottsdale and Camelback.

Although best-known for their bronze bells, since they last forever, visitors will also find ceramic bells, coasters, hot plates, vases and cups for sale too.

Besides a learning environment, the foundry also serves as a community gathering place. The five-acre plot of land has been the site of numerous weddings, high school student workshops, receptions and dinners.

Cosanti's next major project? Olive oil culled from the property's trees that will be sold in ceramic jars crafted at the foundry.

"It's a place that has to be experienced," says Tomalty. "Everywhere you turn and look, there's something profound and beautiful."

For more information, please visit Cosanti.com.