

THE INNOVATION

Story and Photography by Yvonne Gordon



Flower Power

An eco-friendly resort's solar ambitions are in full bloom



It's early morning at Sorrel River Ranch in Moab, Utah, and against the backdrop of red rocks there stands a large black flower soaking in the sun's rays. This 16-foot-tall blossom isn't anything you'll find in nature; it's the SmartFlower, a solar device that unfolds its petals at sunrise and closes back up at sunset, slowly turning to face the sun throughout the day like a real sunflower to maximize efficiency. The resulting power output—4,500 to 6,200 kilowatt hours per year—can be up to 40 percent more than that of a fixed solar panel.

Developed in Austria, the SmartFlower started cropping up across America last year, in locations including the Detroit Zoo, the Western Kentucky Botanical Garden, the Florida

State University campus, and the sustainable Sorrel River Ranch (which became the first hotel to install one last December). "If we can self-generate a little bit more of our energy and be a bit less reliant on outside resources, I think that is great for our ranch and also for our guests and the world," says Sorrel River Ranch general manager Ron Morin. "I see how much sun is out there, and if we're not using solar panels to collect it, we're wasting energy every day."

Indeed, Sorrel River Ranch has been so pleased with the SmartFlower that the resort installed a second one, on the banks of the Colorado River, to power a processing plant that supplies the ranch's water.

THE DETAIL

A Singular Spa Ceiling

It's common to step inside a spa and have the scent of fragrant oils or candles overwhelm your senses—in the best possible way. That's almost exactly what happens at the spa inside the new Cartesiano Hotel, in the colonial city of Puebla, Mexico. The difference? Here, that intoxicating smell comes from the check-in area's ceiling, which is covered in stunning cloud-like bunches of purple mullein (*gordolobo*, in Spanish). "Our ancestors used this gentle herb for medicinal purposes, including drinking it in tea," says spa director Claudia Cuesta. "It has relaxing effects and can aid in fighting respiratory problems." The blossoms, which are switched out every three months, come from nearby Atlixco—a city that's famous for its flower industry—and are purchased just a few blocks from the property, at Mercado la Acocota, which is worth a visit for its fresh produce and traditional *poblano* food. *Treatments from \$35, hotel cartesiano.com*
—Brooke Porter Katz

Kenny Viese (spa)

