

INSIDER'S GUIDE TO
SPAS

Planting Powerful Seeds for a Regenerative Future

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PHOTOGRAPHY COURTESY RANCHO LA PUERTA



As Rancho La Puerta celebrates its 85th anniversary this fall, the pioneering destination spa is marking the occasion not with nostalgia, but with bold vision. From September 27 to October 4, 2025, the storied sanctuary in Tecate, Baja California, will host *Women in Sustainability Week*—a landmark gathering of intergenerational activists—thought leaders, farmers, and artists—dedicated to shaping a more just, regenerative future.

The week reflects Rancho's deep-rooted commitment to environmental stewardship and social impact. From the resort's commitment to land conservation and clean beauty to its innovative water treatment systems and organic farm, Rancho has modeled what it means to care for both people and planet. In a time of accelerating climate crisis and fractured systems, this grand convergence feels not only timely—but essential.

I recently sat down with Sarah Livia Brightwood Szekely, the visionary president of **RANCHO LA PUERTA**, to learn more about her passion for regenerative leadership—and how this special week came to life.

Mary Bemis: How did the idea for *Women in Sustainability* take root?

Sarah Livia Brightwood Szekely: Like so many things at Rancho La Puerta, it began with a bit of Ranch magic. Every week, I host a community lunch to talk about our local environmental and educational work—things like water issues, youth programs, and river restoration. About eight months ago, a remarkable woman named Pat Mitchell came to one of these lunches. Later, over a shared meal, she told me more about Project Dandelion, her enormous network of women who are doing incredible work. She talks about leadership in ways that feel both ancient and urgently new: regenerative, radically inclusive, grounded in community. I was absolutely astonished—and we said, “Let’s make some good trouble together.” That was the spark.



Sarah Livia Brightwood Szekely

At the same time, Roma Maxwell, our VP of Marketing and Communications, had been thinking about a special way to mark Rancho’s 85th anniversary. She met another extraordinary guest at the Ranch—Gay Browne, author of *Living with a Green Heart*—whose book is full of deeply practical, everyday things people can do to align their homes and lives with a healthier planet. When I met Pat and Roma connected with Gay, we realized we could weave these visions together.

“As we celebrate 85 years, we want to create space for conversations that inspire action and nourish both the Earth and the people working to protect it.”

Mary: What makes this gathering distinct from other sustainability events?

Sarah Livia: This is more than a speaker series. It's a convergence of brilliant, passionate women—from climate activists to chefs to musicians—sharing practical advice and visionary leadership. During the day, there are hands-on sessions and deeply useful workshops. Then in the evenings, we hear from incredible speakers who are working on the front lines of climate change and social justice.

What's unique is the range and richness of voices. We have elders and emerging leaders. For example, Xiye Bastida, a climate justice advocate in her early 20s who's already addressed the UN and co-founded the Re-Earth Initiative, will speak alongside women like Pat, who's in her 80s and has been a fierce advocate for women's leadership her whole life. That intergenerational thread—how we share ideas, wealth, leadership, and support across age and experience—that's a vital part of the conversation.

Mary: What has it been like collaborating with Pat Mitchell?

Sarah Livia: Pat is a force. She's a catalyst. She's also deeply non-hierarchical. When Pat sits at a table, you feel the collective energy. One of her quotes that really stayed with me is: *"Strategy and compassion must coexist."* I think that's the counterbalance we need in the world right now. We can't just change the technology—we have to change how we relate to one another, how we share resources, how we build trust and belonging.

Mary: Tell me more about some of the other women participating.

Sarah Livia: I'm thrilled to welcome so many incredible women. Norma Meza, a Kumeyaay elder from Tecate, will lead herb walks and speak about ethnobotany. She doesn't speak English, but we always have a translator—it's so powerful to hear her knowledge of the land.



Rancho La Puerta

Chef Sheyela Alvarado, whose restaurant Lunario just received a Michelin Green Star, will host cooking classes at our farm kitchen, *La Cocina Que Canta*, and lead a celebratory dinner. She'll talk about reducing food waste, rethinking packaging—things that touch our daily lives.

We also have folk singer Amber Rubarth, a Ranch favorite, who curates our annual folk festival. Jocelyn Lyle from the Environmental Working Group (EWG) will help us make educated decisions as consumers to protect

our health and the environment, and Kat Taylor—who runs the TomKat Ranch and co-founded Beneficial State Bank—will talk about economic relationships and regenerative systems. Every single woman brings something meaningful and necessary.

Mary: What are your hopes for the week?

Sarah Livia: Honestly, I hope people leave feeling empowered to engage, to be part of a movement that is making positive changes in communities all over the globe. I hope they think differently—about the climate, about themselves, about community. The Ranch has always been a place for transformation, starting with my father's pioneering ideas about sustainability and wellbeing.

We've been at this for decades—preserving wildlands, building a zero waste, biological water treatment plant, restoring the Tecate River. But the work continues. As we celebrate 85 years, we want to create space for conversations that inspire action—conversations that nourish both the Earth and the people working to protect it.

For more information about Women in Sustainability Week, visit this [LINK](#).