

ENTREE

AN UNCOMPROMISING
AND CONFIDENTIAL
TRAVELERS NEWSLETTER
• AN INSIDER'S LOOK AT
HOTELS, RESTAURANTS &
TRAVEL AROUND THE WORLD

Spring 2018

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PERMIT US A PRIVATE MOMENT, PLEASE: OUR HOME TOWN OF *MONTECITO* has been through a devastating wildfire and deadly mudslides. Our world has been rocked. Some of our friends are gone forever, many of our neighbors' houses were destroyed. In these challenging times, we pause to count our blessings and mourn for all those who lost so much. One of the unique outcomes of this horrid tragedy was the outpouring of community grief united with a fierce will to rebuild and heal. As we once heard a very smart man say: "Yesterday is not ours to recover, but tomorrow is ours to win or lose."

WHEN THE THOMAS FIRE AND terrible subsequent flood hit *Santa Barbara*, *Belmond El Encanto* opened their arms to evacuees and bent over backward to accommodate them including offering them very special rates. Juggling rooms and working with a tireless staff decimated by the crisis and unable to get to work because the 101 was closed, they valiantly worked 24-7 to meet and exceed guests' needs.



Resort Manager *Shaun O'Bryan* was in total command of the situation and kept the property running smoothly and with great quality despite many hardships. He is an outstanding hotelier.



Belmond El Encanto is a dream of a resort, set high above Santa Barbara in wooded and tropical gardens. We spent hours walking the meandering brick paths, admiring the old stone walls, swinging in a hammock, throwing pennies with a wish into the lotus pool with its graceful arbor. We'd read by the fountains and wishing well. Serving superb cuisine and with a world-class spa, it is a heavenly peaceful escape. We loved the heated infinity pool and work out gym. We loved the piano player at night in the bar. We loved the bright young people working there. We loved dining on the heated terrace at night looking at Santa Barbara's twinkling lights.

Stay in a cottage or elegant room, it's all romantic and special. The hotel's courtesy shuttle will take you into Santa Barbara but, frankly, why would one ever want to leave this gorgeous place? If we could give it six stars, we would!

Room Tip: All rooms and cottages are sunny and quiet...some have ocean views, porches, patios...and fireplaces. One of our favorites: The Hummingbird Suite. Visit: www.belmond.com

ON TOP OF THIS, ENTREE IS IN A VERY BAD MOOD. OVER THE WINTER we've eaten at some of the best restaurants (*The Bear and The Star* in *Los Olivos*, *Cavatina* in *West Hollywood*, *Belmond El Encanto* in *Santa Barbara*, *Spago*, *The Grill*, and *Craft* in *L.A.*, *Aquitaine* and *Campton Place* in *San Francisco*, *Majorelle* and *La Goulue* in *New York*) and some of the worst. And we are astounded by some of the ineptitude we find, even at the highest levels. For example, we're going to strangle the next waiter who opens a bottle of wine, then places in a bucket somewhere we can't reach, then ignores us. And please, fill up the bucket with ice AND water....it does no good to plunk a warm bottle down on plain ice. How about the inexplicable practice of restaurants pushing bottled water on us and then pouring it over ice cubes made in house from ordinary water. We are struck by the fact that there seems to be no agreement on what medium rare is? And we will walk out on any Prosecco masquerading as Champagne at a cheesy brunch. Making perfect eggs Benedict is no longer an art. We remember when a black truffle crowned this delicious dish; today you're lucky to get a sprinkle of chives or dill over this once decadent delight. We often judge a restaurant by how well they prepare this classic and

how they serve a club sandwich as well. The club, you may know, originated for Lotus Eaters at the *Union Club* in *New York City* and, properly made, this sandwich held between two pieces of toast, delivers sliced freshly cooked poultry, fried bacon, lettuce, tomato, and mayonnaise. It is often cut into quarters or halves and held together by cocktail sticks. Modern versions all too frequently have two layers which are separated by an additional slice of bread and anything the kitchen can think of to throw in—roast beef, avocado, hummus, cheese, spinach, mustard—hell, we’ve even seen pickles hiding in some ersatz club sandwiches. Forget it, more is not more; we’ll stick with the classic and keep looking for places that hold its integrity dear. Last but not least, we are bewildered how much to tip or not to tip at all when a waiter opens a bottle of wine by unscrewing it. That takes no special talent. In the good old days a sommelier did some work and earned a gratuity. No longer. Standards are plunging faster than a Bitcoin, dear friends.

LONDON’S *MILESTONE HOTEL AND RESIDENCES* has always set the standard for high style and ultimate luxury in the capital city. Continuing to stay at the forefront, the hotel has recently redesigned a number of our rooms and suites, complete with custom furniture, original artwork and antiques specially selected at the top auction houses from around the country. It’s hard to imagine a more romantic setting in which to luxuriate. Opposite *Kensington Palace and Gardens*, home to Prince William and The Duchess of Cambridge, and recently soon-to-be-married Prince Harry and Meghan Markle, romance is certainly in the air here.



The Milestone’s newly converted *Venetian Master Suite* is the ultimate in luxury. Sleep beautifully in the grand bedroom with custom-made bedspreads and headboard from Italy, relax in the living room amid antique furnishings and get ready to enjoy the city in one of the suite’s two bathrooms and dressing room.

The hotel’s 6 luxury two- and three-bedroom residences are also receiving a makeover, and are due for completion in April. Providing a home away from home opposite Kensington Palace and gardens, these are the ideal private residences for magnificent extended stays.

London’s most intimate historic venue is *The Oratory at The Milestone*, a remarkable place for small events, private dining, celebrations and weddings. The original chapel of the building, The Oratory’s original features are quite spectacular. Steeped in history, there is nowhere better to dine in elegant style

with total privacy and discreet, effortless service. Whether you are entertaining clients, planning the perfect proposal, or celebrating a special occasion with close family or friends, this unique venue lends itself perfectly. Let's face it—romance is in the air in London and we know of no



finer place to tie the knot than the Oratory—which we believe to be one of London's smallest and most intimate wedding venues (their license is for just 8 including bride and groom). Larger ceremonies for up to 30 are also possible on property in the lovely wood-paneled Windsor Suite.

For Spring, enjoy a complimentary third night when you book for two and make the most of what London has to offer. Relax in the Spa and spend more time refreshing and rejuvenating in this new year. The Milestone Hotel and Residences is part of the luxury *Red Carnation Hotel Collection* and the *TTC Family* of brands, as well as a proud member of *Leading Hotels. 1 Kensington Ct, Kensington, London W8 5DL, UK, +44 20 7917 1000, www.milestonehotel.com*

You could also celebrate the royal wedding by staying in style at the *Rubens at the Palace*. Overlooking the Royal Mews, there is no better location to see the regal pomp and ceremony leading up to the wedding of Harry and Meghan in May. With elegant accommodation and exceptional dining, experience palatial luxury in the heart of Victoria this spring.

While a guest, enjoy Royal Afternoon Tea in the Palace Lounge overlooking the Royal Mews. Then, explore the Royal Staterooms. The treasures of Buckingham Palace await you. Discover why the royal residence is a national icon with the hotel's *Live Like Royalty* package, which includes tickets to the Palace, a royal-themed Afternoon Tea and a regal turndown. A Taste of India also awaits. The vibrant cuisine of India in The Ruben's supremely comfortable setting of *The Curry Room* is the latest exciting addition to Victoria's dining scene.



The latest offer from this wonderful hotel gives you a distinguished Royal Mews View Room and four nights for the price of three. Enjoy more of London with this additional night at The Rubens, with their compliments. Visit www.rubenshotel.com.

IN A VERY SHORT WHILE THERE WILL BE ONLY 100 PROTECTED AREAS LEFT IN *Africa* that are greater than 240,000 acres. We learned this alarming fact while attending a party given by *Santa Barbara Travel* for *Luke Bailes*, the dashing owner of *Singita Game Reserves*, the collection that has set the benchmark for opulent safari holidays in *South Africa*.

Singita is the Shangaan word for “Place of Miracles.” In the spirit of miracles, Singita’s enduring purpose is to conserve, preserve, and protect the miraculous places of which they are custodians.



Singita’s evolution from a single-lodge company to one that is now responsible for a million acres of land, operating 12 award-winning lodges and camps in five wilderness regions across three African countries, has always been characterized by a pioneering spirit and a sincere desire to preserve wilderness areas, wildlife populations and economic independence for local communities for future generations.

Its low-impact, high-value tourism model—fewer guests paying a premium for the privilege of experiencing vast open spaces—exists to sustain these wilderness areas and their resident wildlife, while providing an exclusive safari experience. Ultimate comfort, gourmet cuisine, highly trained guides and warm hospitality form the pillars of a Singita experience which we consider a privilege to enjoy.

Singita Grumeti, situated adjacent to the *Serengeti National Park* in *Tanzania*, is



an integral part of the Serengeti-Mara Ecosystem, the home of the Great Migration. Certain areas of the reserve were designated by the Tanzanian government in 1994 in order to protect the path of the annual wildebeest migration and the indigenous biodiversity of this vast and important ecosystem.

Singita Sabora Tented Camp is situated in an untouched wilderness area of Grumeti Reserves, spanning over 350,000 acres in northern Tanzania. The intimate 1920s-style explorer’s camp is permeated by a sense of nostalgic adventure. Steeped in character, Singita Sabora Tented Camp surprises guests with an opulence that is delightfully out-of-place with the rugged terrain of the surrounding savannah plains. Here, guests are immersed in the palpable pulse of the wild Serengeti, with the added thrill of knowing there isn’t much separating the comfort inside from the elements and wildlife outside.

Singita Serengeti House embodies sophisticated safari-living in one of Africa's most iconic conservation areas. Designed for exclusive use, there's a sense of relaxed freedom for families or friends to enjoy shared experiences in nature here. New, casual, living spaces include an eat-in kitchen and media room, a full gym adjacent to the extended outdoor *sala*, and a brand new tented spa suite at the updated tennis pavilion.



Refined yet luxuriously comfortable, this modern-African home on the slopes of *Sasakwa Hill* offers uninterrupted views across the *Serengeti*. Throughout the house, a calming neutral palette of sun-bleached blond, beige and grey bring the grassy plains indoors.

Singita Boulders Lodge sits along the banks of the *Sand River* in Singita's privately-owned reserve within the *Sabi Sand Reserve*. The lodge is a celebration of the tranquility, space, and light which flows throughout this incredibly vast area. Inspired by the geometry of the boulders on which it rests, Boulders Lodge is an inviting oasis where organic interiors integrate seamlessly with the raw African beauty outside. Singita Boulders Lodge is perfectly at home in its pristine setting and whether through walls of glass or open-air areas, the surrounding landscape and animals can be seen and enjoyed from every angle, making for a truly immersive safari experience.

Singita will open *Kwitonda Lodge* in late 2019 in *Rwanda*, an extraordinarily beautiful, small country where more than one third of the world's remaining mountain gorillas live in the high-altitude cloud forests of *Volcanoes National Park*. The presence of Singita Kwitonda Lodge on the park border will help to improve the function of the buffer area between agricultural plots and the habitat of the estimated 320 mountain gorillas that find sanctuary here.

If an authentic, luxury African experience in rare and natural beauty is on your bucket list, we know of no finer options than Singita has to offer. Luke Bailes is committed to a long-term self-sustaining legacy of conservation and total engagement with local communities. He has created a unique world that elevates the best possible guest experience in concert with benefitting the land and its natural habitat.

Travelers choose to stay at Singita because of the expansive space and beauty of the reserves, limited guest and vehicle numbers, extraordinarily consistent game viewing and the exceptional care that is taken of each guest during their stay.

Guests leave a Singita safari being transformed for a lifetime and having made a contribution to the legacy of Africa.

We highly recommend Singita and Santa Barbara Travel to help you find the perfect travel experience in South Africa, Tanzania and Zimbabwe, one that balances indulgent hospitality, disciplined conservation and community involvement, www.singita.com and www.sbtravel.com. (800) 350-9333.

THE EVER-ERODING AIRLINE EXPERIENCE IS GETTING WORSE. THE AIRLINES know we hate them because loyalty programs as we know them are dead. Clouded by money, the airlines' mileage deals are little more than a set of empty promises. Bait and switch if you will. The airlines keep dinging us for incidentals, cattle herding us onto planes, serving us mediocre food (IF you're lucky enough to get food). Truth is, they just don't give a crap about us today. They are the emperors fiddling while Rome burns. They remind us of the last men standing at the top of the a pyramid scheme, insisting that everything is fine. God forbid you get on a flight using mileage what awaits is indifference, delays, the potential of lost bags, cooped up seating, stressed-out flight attendants, and the possibility of being dragged off by your ankles. It's chaos at most airports.

That is why it amused us to hear news of *Munich Airport* and *Lufthansa* testing a humanoid robot in Terminal 2. That's right, "Josie Pepper" will now provide information to passengers. She is 47 inches with sparkling, round eyes and a pleasant voice. Josie will be answering questions for passengers in Terminal 2, whether they be directions to gates or where to shop or eat. Ms. Pepper will look passengers in the eyes and give them a prompt answer.



This is the first-ever test of a humanoid robot equipped with artificial intelligence at a German airport. Josie Pepper will welcome travelers to the non-public area of Terminal 2, which is jointly operated by Munich Airport and Lufthansa. In her initial deployment, Josie, who speaks English, will await passengers at the top of the ramp leading to the shuttle connecting the main terminal to the satellite building. This test phase will be used to show whether Josie Pepper is accepted by passengers. Hell, why not, air travel is seriously broken today and if, sadly, we have to look to non-humans to help fix it, perhaps some progress will be made. It would be hard for a robot to be less charming than so many of today's bleary-eyed airline employees.

THE OPENING OF A GIANT FOOD COMPLEX NAMED *EATALY* IS PART OF *Bologna's* inevitable growth in popularity as the food capital of Italy. However, the best tastes of Bologna are not *tagliatelle al ragù* or *tortellini* which can be found everywhere—but the cuisine of the nearby hills.



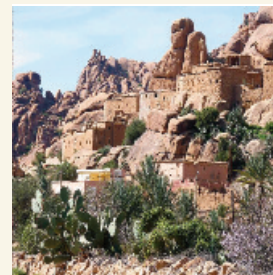
The traditional dishes of the region around Bologna, *Emilia*, are a fine mix of warming mountain dishes with a wintry feel and that delicate awareness of taste and texture that makes Italian cooking so famous. If you take a drive up to the *Antica Hostaria da Badolo*, just south of Bologna, you will find a wide selection of meats alongside pasta dishes with local truffles and other fungi. The traditional meats—deer and wild boar—have a rich, hearty taste that is perfectly complemented by the delicate mushroom pastes and sauces. The standard bread is a basket of *crescentine*, a light, airy pocket that leaves you plenty of room for the main.

If you don't have the time to venture outside the city walls, the newly-opened *A Balus* on *Via del Borgo di S. Pietro* will give you an authentic Emilia experience. They offer two menus: city and mountain. The city menu offers the standard, yet exquisite Bologna cuisine tortelloni, lasagne verdi—while the mountain menu provides the best selection of boar, venison and fallow deer to be found in the city. Don't miss the selection of sliced meats or the local wines: the Sangiovese is cost-effective at under \$30 a bottle, and is a mellow wine that provides a good base for the hearty mountain dishes while not dominating the taste, as you may sometimes find with a Chianti in nearby Tuscany. If you prefer a lighter main, the tagliatelle with truffle will satisfy your every desire, a simple yet tangy dish that is hard to find anywhere else in the world (and certainly not at \$20).

We recommend booking in advance for both these restaurants. A meal will come to around \$60 per person, wine included. During summer, you can see the sun setting over Italian, wooded hills from the *Antica Hostaria da Badolo*. Quite apart from some of the best food you will find in Italy, it's certainly among the more romantic locations.

IN TIMES WHEN FORMER DESTINATIONS OF CHOICE LIKE EGYPT ARE WRACKED by uncertainty, *Morocco* remains a good, safe destination for those wishing to immerse themselves in Arabic culture. From the souks of Marrakech to the Hollywood dreams of Casablanca and the never-ending Saharan sands, there is something for every traveller.

The area to visit right now is *Tafraoute*. A small town in the south, it has sustained enough touristic interest to have a good selection of places to stay and eat at while also maintaining Amazigh traditions (the local people; sometimes referred to as “Berber”). While you may have to be wary of tourist traps in the larger cities or at famous tourist destinations, Tafraoute maintains a charming simplicity and a sense of trust: if an Amazigh offers you tea or dinner, they really just want to enjoy your company. Never turn down tea: it will always be sugary, minty and delicious.



Tafraoute is not a place to visit for public architecture. Nestled in a mountain valley unlike anything found in America or Europe, it is mostly known for the production of argan oil. Other than the Painted Rocks, an art project by Belgian *Jean Verame*, the charm of Tafraoute arises largely from its local culture and mountain environment. The charming square houses are surrounded by beautiful rock formations, from granite pillars to towering quartzite mountain peaks. If you venture along winding roads to the village of *Anneghui*, you will find a verdant landscape with prickly pears, patches of forest and tumbling rivers.

In the town itself, take the time to lose yourself in the daily market. The fruit is fresh and local—try the avocados and small bananas—and if you lose yourself in the stalls, you may find someone tries to sell you magic artifacts. In the evenings, head to *La Kasbah* restaurant for a beef and prune tagine. The food is always fresh, and the restaurant boasts comfortable sofas to lounge on while you enjoy the wine. It speaks volumes about Tafraoute’s character that this is the only place in the town where you will be able to find alcohol.

If you find yourself in Morocco, we recommend going to Tafraoute. If you have time, you can combine it with a trip to the surf destination of *Agadir*, or a longer loop that takes in the *Atlas* mountains, *Todra Gorge* and the famous film studios at *Ouarzazate*.

THE MOST EXCEPTIONAL TEA EXPERIENCE WE’VE HAD COMES FROM *TEA Forté*, whose selection and packaging far surpass anything we’ve ever had from *Harrod’s*, *Fortnum & Mason* and any other purveyor of fine teas. Tea Forté’s gourmet whole leaf teas in their leaf-topped pyramid silken infusers re-define and elevate the contemporary tea experience to the highest levels. Their *Petite Presentation Box* is a perfect way to introduce yourself, or someone else, to the extraordinary experience of Tea Forté. And when entertaining, you will be sure to have something for everyone. The open lid reveals a detailed tasting menu. Each box contains 10 of their unique pyramid

infusers. Our impression of the cherry blossom melds organic tart cherries with fragrant flowers and green tea. Named for the annual Japanese flower viewing festival, each cup invites tea lovers around the world to breathe in, behold, and appreciate the fleeting beauty of spring flowers in bloom. The surest sign of spring is the cherry blossom. The Hanami custom revolves around savoring the specialness of the season while it lasts. Inspired by this lovely tradition, this organic blend is meant to capture the experience of spring in a cup. We also especially enjoyed their Noir collection of deeper steep black teas. Chakra is a spicy steep to encourage warmth, well being and clarity. Tea Forté's Single Steeps black and herbal teas come in Mate Mantra Chai, Vanilla Veda Chai, Ginger Guru, Rooibos Raja and Tumeric Tantra. Noir Black pan-Roasted loose leaf single teas are Blood Orange, Chocolate Rose, Caramel Nougat, Black Cherry, and Peach Brûlée. For an awesome gift, consider their *Tea Duet Set*, an ensemble of teas and accessories for two including lidded cafe cups, tea trays and ten handcrafted tea infusers of their most popular blends handsomely boxed. Visit www.teaforthe.com.



EVEN THOUGH THEY ARE CELEBRATING THEIR 70TH YEAR, *SANTA BARBARA Travel* is no set-in-their-ways, run-of-the-mill travel agency. They are travel planners extraordinaire; you could call them “travel designers”—who do far more than simply book trips. They manage the travel portfolios of their lucky clients with great care and efficiency. They are ENTREE’s top rated travel agency. We recommend no one else because we feel no one gives as much thought to research and mapping out a schedule quite like they do. Be it mother-daughter weekends in the Caribbean, father-son heli-skiing, a romantic husband-and-wife weekend getaway, an elaborate summer trip for the whole family or simply a business jaunt, every detail is dealt with at Santa Barbara Travel with precision. Led by *Charles* and *David de L’Arbre*, they carefully get a read on personal and family dynamics and make suggestions about possible destinations—often places that aren’t even on their clients’ radar. They also do reconnaissance, the better to make recommendations on lodging, tour guides and special excursions. This level of planning and involvement is at the cutting edge of today’s superior travel agency. The de L’Arbres initial meetings with new clients amount to an intake. They aren’t interested solely in where clients would like to go, but in where they have been, their “style” (large hotel or boutique? adventurous or not so much? sedentary or active?), the ages of



their children, the length of time they are willing to spend on a plane, the number of days they have available, is cruising on their list and the money they want to allot to travel annually. It's all about setting people up for travel success, according to Charles de L'Arbre: "There are no do-overs in travel, we have to get it right the first time."

The men and women of Santa Barbara Travel deal in solutions. They have a wealth of good ideas and can easily eliminate the bad ones. Imagine having the opportunity to work with a globetrotter whose profession is wanderlust: Santa Barbara Travel people are these people. They respect the fact that your time is valuable and you need an insider's edge. They can deliver the unexpected. And personalize your trip focused on your special needs. Their association with the prestigious *Virtuoso* group yields incomparable perks and privileges for clients including a hotel program of benefits that we feel is superior to what *American Express* offers, a valuable and unbeatable amenity program and exclusive use of Virtuoso on-site suppliers and destination specialists located in foreign locations. Experience the countless benefits of a superior travel agent with unique connections and enjoy stress-free travel and total peace of mind by contacting the experts at *Santa Barbara Travel/Virtuoso*, 1485 E. Valley Road, Suite 9, Montecito, CA 93108, (805) 969-7746, www.sbtravel.com, e-mail mletcher@sbtravel.com. They also maintain a very convenient office in downtown Santa Barbara at 1028 State Street, (805) 966-3116, contact Erin Zetter (ezetter@sbtravel.com) and an office in Ventura at 3140 Telegraph Road, (805) 650-6999, contact Kathy Reimer (kreimer@sbtravel.com). The Virtuoso program, as well as Santa Barbara Travel's recent membership in *Four Seasons Hotels' Preferred Partner Program* creates a direct pipeline to the hotel and allows each stay to be crafted according to the guests' needs. Santa Barbara Travel Bureau has also created a dedicated Cruise Concierge position to assist their cruise clients in making reservations for shore excursions, spa treatments and dining reservations.

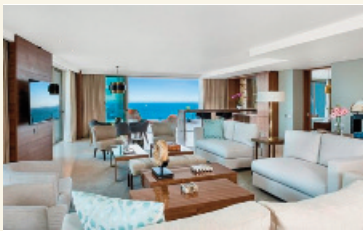


ENTREE COULDN'T HELP BUT JUMP AT the thought of a quick indulgent getaway to *Mexico's* sunny seashore. And there was no question that the *Grand Velas Los Cabos* was just the place to charge ourselves up before the hustle and bustle of summer things to come.



Set on a stunning stretch of ocean, the Grand Velas is everything you would expect from a top flight beachfront resort: pristine sands, pools that stretch infinitely into the horizon, expert staff catering to every whim or fancy and luxurious rooms where we could de-stress to our heart's content. But there's also something different here. An experience that took a few days to master... but now that we have, it's one we won't soon forget.

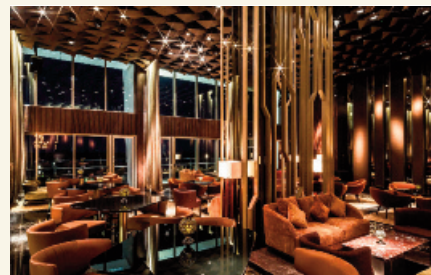
After an easy flight into Los Cabos International Airport, we were quickly swept up, dare we say saved, from the humid chaos of chattering tour guides by a knowledgeable Velas chauffeur. Iced water and cool towels scented slightly of tropical fruit eased us into the carefree. And from the moment we arrived on the property, the Grand Velas Resort teased with warm breezes and signature cocktails. An expansive lobby greeted us as whispering bougainvillea petals danced in the wind...a staple of the Grand Velas landscape that we would come to cherish almost as old friends.



We were ushered to our room, which was a bit of a walk. But, oh, was it worth it. The stunning suites are everything the lobby promised. Cool colors and billowing draperies. Opulently-appointed bathrooms and expansive views of the Cabo shoreline, of crashing waves and an ever-expanding tourism corridor. It's clear that the buzz has begun, as hotel after hotel frame dot the coast. And it's no wonder. Situated directly between the charmingly authentic town of *San Jose Del Cabo* and the younger and more adventurous *Cabo San Lucas*, there's something here for everyone.

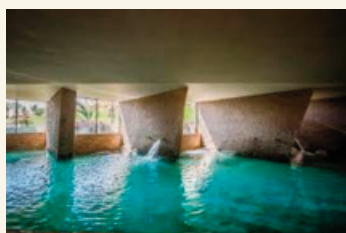
The layout of the resort is unconventional. Different elevators are required for accessing different floors. We found ourselves wandering a bit on our way to the pool for the first time. But when we finally arrived, archways opened upon a stylish oasis. Once we got the lay of the land, the property quickly began to feel less like a resort and more like a sprawling home, vast and yet oddly cozy. This is due, at least in part, to the simple and elegant design of the buildings, which we're told were astonishingly built in only nine months. Kudos to the Vela brothers for creating such a property without cutting corners...a testament to the construction certainly, but more so the brand's attention to detail and luxury. And while the property is young, it doesn't succumb to so many of the obvious pitfalls of new construction. It feels classic...like a towering staple of the coastal-desert landscape.

The property boasts seven restaurants, many named after pioneering artists of the cuisine's culture. *Edith*, for French with its foie gras lollipops. *Frida*, for Spanish with exquisite rabbit mole. But the star, without question in our eyes, was the *Cocina de Autor*. Lavishly designed and lit, and helmed by two Michelin star Head Chef *Sidney Schutte*, the experience from start to finish exceeded not only our expectations of a world class all-inclusive resort but really our expectations of global fine dining. And this is exactly where the Grand Velas makes its mark. This property has tapped into a niche market for the accomplished traveler—the ease and effortlessness of everything in one place with the trappings and exclusivity of the highest caliber luxury travel. We've never experienced anything quite like it. To say, "all-you-can-eat" in the same sentence as "two Michelin stars" is something we never even fathomed we could be missing. And now that we've experienced it, a new box has been checked on ENTREE's bucket list. To be clear, the meal at Cocina de Autor was pre-fixe and not a buffet—*Azul Restaurant* provides for more casual dining of the sort—but still we watched as patron after patron requested additional plates, another helping here, two more short rib and veal tongue there.



Our experience at the spa involved new age rituals amidst intricate, handmade bougainvillea art and soft edges. We especially loved treatments influenced by the indigenous Mayan people: Nik Te Ha Aquatic Massage and Pixam Kan Massage.

The Nik Te Ha Aquatic Massage (80 minutes) is a unique water massage that helps relax muscles, increase flexibility and create harmony between the mind and



soul. This massage—which gets its name from the Mayan words for “water flower”—can help with chronic fatigue, insomnia, irritability, stress, migraines, mood swings and depression. Tea Forté's antioxidant Green Mango Peach tea is served following the treatment.

The Pixam Kan Massage focuses on results from seaweed and the sacred Mayan Jade. Jade is said to bless whatever it touches so the native tribes of Mexico, Central and South America carved it into deity masks and ritual artifacts, even casting it into wells as an offering to the water spirits for fresh and plentiful water. In the Pixam Kan Massage, the Jade quartz helps balance the chakras and lift suppressed emotional issues bringing them to light for resolution. It also helps reduce electromagnetic energies produced by digital devices. Proteins, vitamins, minerals and lipids that easily soak into the skin add moisture, the seaweed also

helps to eliminate toxins from the body. Available for both 50 and 80 minutes, this treatment includes an optional dry exfoliation with a Henequen loofah made from the indigenous agave.

We would be remiss if we didn't mention *Cabo Adventure Tours*, a fun and kitschy company based in the Cabo San Lucas Marina. Offering any number of adventure activities, we opted for a day out on a small sailboat. With the sun on our backs and the margaritas flowing, we spent an afternoon seeing the sites and swimming with fish. The staff was friendly, and the waters pristine. A lovely way to pass the time.

We must describe a moment, sitting in the hot tub, as the sun ceremoniously set, that captured the magic of the Grand Velas best. Our margarita was, proverbially speaking, half full. In a seamless sweep, the glass was taken from our hands and replaced with a fresh libation. The sun finished, and we moved on to dinner. But the gesture wasn't lost. It was precisely this attention to detail, this exceptional service that, more than anything else, set the Grand Velas apart. There's no sacrifice here. All-inclusive in the description almost does a disservice.

The Grand Velas isn't without its growing pains. While an under-booked property can at times feel private and upscale, when situated fifteen minutes from town, having few other guests can be lonely. On the other hand, this is a relatively new concept, just a little over a year old. And like any good innovation, it will require a bit of getting used to. In ENTREE's opinion, it won't be long before this gem of the Cabo coastline sparkles at its most brilliant. Don't wait. Go now. Melt in. The Grand Velas is a dream. www.grandvelas.com

ENTREE FLEW DOWN SOUTH THIS WINTER TO REVISIT THE HISTORIC CITY of *Charleston*. The buzz was simply too loud for us to ignore: Here's a town where having a bad meal is practically impossible. So we checked into the wonderful *Belmond Charleston Place*, a grand-dame American hotel in the truest sense from a company we admire. Black-tied revelers and live jazz piano spilled out of the bar area of the hotel's restaurant, *Charleston Grill*, as sharply-dressed families squeezed between Christmas trees for photos and to watch an elaborate train set circle a miniature alpine village. From the traditional shoe shine off the lobby to the Club Level lounge where we'd idle over Benne Wafers and bourbon in the evening, we were charmed thoroughly by the hotel's timeless halls and pronounced Southern hospitality. We spent our downtime in the Presidential Suite, a large two-bedroom spread with a



king size bed, wet bar, and Italian marble bathrooms, which also provided wide views of the skyscraping steeples that have earned Charleston the nickname, “the Holy City.” *Charleston Belmond Place*, www.belmond.com/charlestonplace.

Leaving the comfort of this well-tailored apartment behind, we had our first dinner at *Slightly North of Broad*, one of the city’s most legendary and elegant restaurants. There, we enjoyed an excellent, regionally-sourced dinner that included local flounder on famous Carolina gold rice, steamed clams (from a local clammer named *Dave*) with garlic cream, tilefish caught that day and oyster mushroom tamales with red wine-braised oxtail.



Our servers gave us the kind of attention we pine for at restaurants back home. Wine glasses were ever-filled, and the chef even sent out a dish he prepared specially for the youngest member of our staff, drawing envy from adult diners. If you’re seeking a place to wear your Billy Reid blazer or silk dress while dining on exalted Low Country cuisine in a room of eminent southerners, Slightly North of Broad is the refined, but far-from-stuffy, restaurant for you. *Slightly North of Broad*, www.snobcharleston.com.

Considering it is absolutely unacceptable to venture to the South Carolina coast and not gorge oneself on shellfish, we made our next reservation at *The Darling Oyster Bar*. A bright, buzzing dining room on one side and a more atmospheric, royal blue study on the other, we appreciated the restaurant’s eclectic mix of materials, as well as the Clash, Dinosaur Jr. and the Cure playing over the speakers. We dove into a dozen shucked-on-the-spot oysters, bivalves we’d yet to have the pleasure of meeting prior to this stop, and every one of them among the very freshest we’d tasted. Here, we chased a gleaming shellfish tower with a rich recipe of shrimp and grits and a titanic, delicious lobster-King Crab roll. We loved the experience so much, we ditched our lunch plans to return a day later. *The Darling Oyster Bar*, www.thedarling.com.

ENTREE’s sleeper hit meal of this journey to Charleston was found at *Henrietta’s*, a sort of Southern brasserie operating from the ground floor of Downtown’s *Dewberry Hotel*. With a charming Gallic aura of re-purposed pews at the bar, mahogany panels and bistro tile in the dining room, we occupied a romantic corner to dine on elaborate presentations that merged French-and-Southern U.S. cuisine. Among our favorites were an early offering of chicken liver-filled *gougères*, pickled shrimp with vegetables a la Grecque, rosemary-smoked oysters, deviled eggs studded with trout roe, steak frites and a local

seafood stew. While many, possibly almost every, restaurant in this city seems to be obsessed with elevated Southern comfort in the style of *Sean Brock*, Henrietta's French-Dixie marriage was enlivening, most notably as the dishes were flawless. *Henrietta's*, www.henriettascharleston.com.

Walking back along the stately homes and unique shops of King Street, resplendent in its Christmas best, we stopped at a bar on our last night for a nightcap of local sweet tea-bourbon, codifying the memories of all the biscuits, grits, shrimp and crab we spent our days sampling. Should you desire a trip that brings U.S. history and genre-pushing cuisine together in a charming, picturesque, and very walkable city, book that flight to Charleston today.

WE CAN BARELY COUNT THE NUMBER OF times that we've covered RV parks in ENTREE's history. Because we're pretty sure we haven't ever. Maybe we

were just yet to see one as enchanting as *CreekFire Motor Ranch*, a new, 150-acre lakeside development about 20 miles from Downtown *Savannah, Georgia*. After a quick check-in over complimentary cookies, we drove past a secure electronic gate and through a tranquil campground of high-end RVs and the occasional tent set-up until we arrived at our accommodations. Fans of the tiny house craze would go gaga over this place, a small, picturesque shotgun cabin with a sleeping loft, kitchen, bedroom and bathroom unobtrusively folded into its frame.



We instinctively poured ourselves some wine and took to our porch to look out on the large, man-made lake across from us, as it steamed in the chilly dusk. In every direction, dense forest surrounded us, the air clean and quiet save for the symphony of singing birds. After a lovely night serenaded by a pounding Southern rain atop our rooftop, we enjoyed a long stroll around the lake, looking for any signs of the gators we were encouraged to avoid.

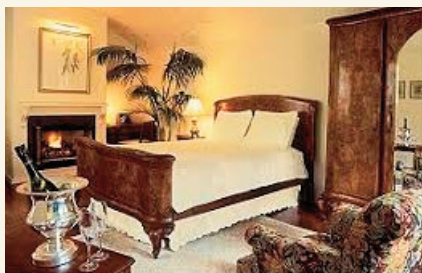
On a sunnier day, we might be out on the lake ourselves, taking advantage of the resort's offered fishing boat, canoe and kayak rentals. Still, the setting and accommodations at CreekFire worked their magic on us, providing a beautiful, safe and banjo-free way to see the countryside that makes Georgia such a gorgeous destination. We promised ourselves we'd be back to experience this restorative property in full bloom. As in the months to come, more accommodations are being constructed on the property for the coming summer crowd, with the future

additions of a clubhouse with games, a lazy river with waterslide, waterfront bar and restaurant to make sure all needs are met. *CreekFire Motor Ranch*, www.creekfirerv.com.

WE ATTENDED A LOVELY HOUSE PARTY IN old *Palm Springs* and want to tell you all about it. The weather was perfect. Our hostess, *Harmony*, greeted us and we were swept to our room at *The Willows Historic Palm Springs Inn*, an elegant Mediterranean villa dating to 1924. Harkening back to the graceful, gracious days of the early 20th century, today The Willows is an intimate luxury hotel that offers a step back in time to the glamour of that bygone era. The past is present but improved under the loving care of its current owners, *Tracy Conrad* and *Paul Marut*. Having been carefully restored with a perfectionist's attention to detail and an obvious love of The Willow's history, we thoroughly enjoyed falling under its spell. On arrival we were immediately drawn into the atmosphere of a relaxed but elegant house party. Music from the past enveloped and the invitation for wine and hors d'oeuvres was accepted and served in the Great Room, which centers around a carved limestone fireplace circa 1925, a piano, and a terrace. We knew it was the mood we wanted.



Our room, *Loft*, was reached by a winding staircase and located between and above *Einstein's Garden Room* and the *Marion Davies Room*. Before drinks, we



slipped into pristine white robes and drew our bath. Not just any bath, but an inviting claw foot tub with a view to a waterfall. The Willows is tucked into the base of Mt. San Jacinto and a cascading, bougainvillea strewn, 50-foot waterfall provides the Inn's backdrop. The exquisite tiles, limestone, carved fireplaces, mahogany woods, antiques, music, and history all combine to add to its essence and allure. Fascinating and glamorous owners and guests from the past and present mirror the individuality of The Willows. Clark Gable, Shirley Temple, Marion Davies, Diane Keaton, Robert De Niro, Quentin Tarantino, past Presidents, Einstein, and and and...are all a part of its history. Unique the guests and so, too, the rooms. Einstein's Garden Room is Art Deco inspired with French doors opening to a private balcony and the sights and sounds of the waterfall. The Marion Davies Room, named for the actress and paramour of William Randolph Hearst who owned and resided here during one grand period, is a front guestroom with a *Romeo and Juliet* balcony. The spacious, beautifully tiled bathroom is complete with a swooning sofa, which is necessary as one comes to

quickly understand how an extended soak in yet another one of the Willow's claw foot tubs could necessitate a languish. The Library room is lush with antiques, a large fireplace, an ornate desk, rich woods, and a coffered ceiling. The name of each room aptly describes its individual décor: *The Acanthus room*, *The Palm room*, *The Waterfall room*, and *The Rock room* complete the eight very distinctive accommodations.

The influence of The Willows on its guests was noted when arriving for drinks in the Great Room, we appreciated the flowing entrance of the current guest of the Marion Davies room resplendent in a very dramatic caftan. Perfect. Like attracts like and conversations were up to the ambiance. Fascinating and thought-provoking.



Speaking of thoughts—on our first morning, we awoke early to walk the path behind the waterfall. Destination? Einstein's bench. Einstein was a frequent guest of his good friend *Samuel Untermyer*, who owned the villa during its first incarnation. Mr. Untermyer was at this time the world's highest paid attorney and the first to command a fee of one million dollars. He used The Willows as his winter estate and often entertained Einstein, who, when visiting, would sit on this particular bench with its panoramic views, where, we choose to think, he contemplated profound thoughts, of course. We decided to take a seat on his favored bench and think profound thoughts, too. Our thoughts? Why, it would be a most excellent idea to return back to the villa for a delicious three-course breakfast. This thought, though perhaps not profound, proved true. It was *Gordon*, our morning host, who greeted us with a smile and warm, "Good Morning." We were served on exquisite china with silver service in a room filled with antiques, which opened onto the dramatic waterfall. A Spanish fireplace opposite boasted original tiles. We picked up some newspapers, but quickly chose conversation with Gordon, who is one of those people you immediately want for a best friend. Other guests strolled in and the easy conversation of a weekend morning continued.

We gently explored Palm Springs and dined at *Le Vallauris*. Steps away and opposite The Willows, we needed only to cross the street. As we were still unwinding from a very busy week, Le Vallauris was a perfect choice. Think classic, like their Grand Marnier soufflé, and familiar. No need to assume the perfect diner posture and demeanor as is often the case in many French restau-

rants. It is French but inclusive of Mediterranean and Californian influences. Nightly specials are handwritten on a board and presented on an easel for your perusal over a cocktail, or we'd suggest, wine. Chateau Petrus, Latour, Lafite-Rothschild, Margaux, or maybe Patz & Hall or Frank Family are a range of possibilities. Our blackboard menu was headlined with Petrossian or Kolikof Russian Ossetra Caviar. The staff is seasoned, knowledgeable, and very relaxed. No edge, no attitude, nor over familiarity, just right for the easy mood of our weekend. We dined in the cosseted patio of Le Vallauris under a canopy of softly, beehive-lit ficus trees. Romantic as in "it's our special place" sort of way. **Tony**, the brother of owner **Paul Bruggeman**, moved easily from table to table to offer that "looked after" feel. We were happy and comfortable. Some dinner choices were the ever expected roast rack of lamb, Caesar salad, crispy half duck, house smoked salmon, but many surprised with an interesting twist: baked Maine lobster, vanilla butter, and corn lobster bisque; asparagus with quail egg caviar and chervil crème fraiche; *tourte de canard* in a truffle Cabernet reduction; roasted branzino with turmeric, garlic, lemon, olive oil over eggplant puree and tomato concasse; or duck foie gras truffle crème brulee, baby frisee and dry figs.



Dinner is served from 5:00 to 10:00, lunch is served on Friday and Saturday from 11:30 to 2:00, and brunch is served on Sunday from 11:30 to 2:00. Executive Chef **Jean Paul Lair** and Pastry Chef **Laurent Dellac** are continuing a series of cooking demonstrations on the second Monday of the month until May.

The Palm Springs Art Museum is a next-door neighbor of The Willows and should be your destination stretch after a late brunch as it opens at noon. Good for the body, better for the soul. We found it a calm and quiet oasis. It felt like ours. We quite liked the feeling of having most of the 150,000 square feet to ourselves. With a very easy flow and expansive environment, we visited every gallery and had some interesting conversations with the museum's docents. We wandered past Chihuly, Chagall, Picasso, Rauschenberg, Warhol, Lichtenstein, Calder, Moore, and more. This wide though not deep collection of modern and contemporary art, glass, photos, and American and Western art has been loaned or donated by many of Palm Springs prominent residents. Art lovers we, the museum was an enchanting surprise. We added retail therapy to our list and purchased unique baubles in the museum's gift store. Now the question was, where, oh where to wear our new purchases to lunch?

We power walked back to The Willows and hopped in a golf cart. Decorated in our new arty pieces, we decided on *Spencer's* (located at the historic *Palm Springs Tennis Club*) for lunch, where we valeted our cart and entered. Spencer's is old school, tried and very true. Unpretentious. We were in keeping as were the guys sporting shorts on the patio. American cuisine with Pacific Rim influence, Spencer's continued our "easy does it," relaxed theme. The menu was predictable, but in the good way. Some choices were: crab cakes, lobster pot stickers, tuna tartare; soups as in three onion soup and chilled gazpacho with Maine lobster; and salads such as Cobb, Greek, and chopped. Garnering a Best of Award of Excellence 2016 from Wine Spectator, it was their wine list that we focused on: French Bordeaux from Lafite to Petrus, Opus One in magnum, Montrachet "Marquis de Laguiche" Drouhin, or for dessert? Chateau d'Yquem. To understate, in a tennis club kind of way, "nice."

Our next stop was *The O'Donnell House* which is also known as "Ojo del Desierto" or "Eye of the Desert." This Mediterranean Revival-Monterey home is today a registered historic site. Perched mountainside, above and behind The Willows, it is a perfect venue for weddings or events for up to 125 people with its large terrace offering stunning desert vistas. All rooms faithfully restored to the authenticity of its 1930s past, it is also available for guests to sojourn. A meander down the same path we had used earlier to reach Einstein's bench will find you back at The Willows. As the O'Donnell House and The Willows are adjacent, sister properties together, they provide 12 very unique guestrooms for the occasion of your choice: weddings, holidays, fundraisers, or just because you can. We think it a splendid place to recreate parties celebrating bygone eras.



In a perfect world (and why not?) one should take over both locations invite bffs or family members holding favored status and do so concurrently with one of Palm Springs special events.

Borrowing from the Palm Springs Villager in 1948, "It's lovely here" and borrowing again from a book found in our room, EINSTEIN DREAMT HERE, "What was true then remains so today. Truly it is lovely here." Yes, The Willows was a lovely choice for our lovely, albeit too brief, Palm Springs weekend.

The Willows Historic Palm Springs Inn: (800) 966-9597

Le Vallauris Restaurant: (760) 325-5059

Palm Springs Art Museum: (760) 322-4800

Spencer's: (760) 327-3446

The O'Donnell House: (800) 525-7634

For visitors to get information: *Palm Springs Bureau of Tourism*, www.visitpalm-springs.com or *Greater Palm Springs Convention & Visitors Bureau*, www.gpscvb.com

WINES NOT TO BE IGNORED: *CALIZA COHORT 2013*, A POWERFUL RED blend of Syrah, Petite Syrah, Mourvèdre, and Primativo, inky dark and bursting with fruit, www.calizawinery.com, excellence from *Paso Robles*.

Purlier's 2014 Napa Valley Cabernet is seamlessly built and a model of precision and strength. This Cabernet has already stockpiled 94 points from Robert Parker, who alerts the wine is a “real knock-out” and a “superb example” of Napa Valley Cabernet. We found an enthrallingly addictive perfume of wild blackberries, sweet mulberries, burning embers and chocolaty espresso that puts an instant smile on your face. This phenomenal wine is made by *Julien Fayard*, who learned his craft at *Chateau Lafite Rothschild*. About \$95 a bottle.

2014 Le Pich Cabernet Sauvignon is the second label for Purlier and represents a tremendous value, a great gateway to the very top end of Napa Cabernet. For about \$50, you will swoon over aromas of black plum, blackberries, black cherry, lilacs and graphite, a full-bodied, 100% Cabernet Sauvignon rich and beautifully balanced with flavors of fully ripened black fruit, floral notes, and melted chocolate, leading to an explosively long finish.

Super French Rhones from *Chêne Bleu*. Their Syrah blend, *Héloise*, or *Abélard*, a Grenache blend, are wines of stunning grace and freshness made with uncompromising passion and persistence.

BECAUSE LIFE IS WAY TOO SHORT TO BE DRINKING BAD coffee, we strongly endorse the *Coachella Valley Coffee Company*, roasters of small batch artisanal coffee roasting. These people are passionate about what they do. Their works helps improve working conditions for coffee farmers, protects the environment, and promotes sustainable practices and their amazingly sumptuous coffee provides daily



pleasure to discriminating coffee lovers around the globe. If you really do love great coffee go to www.coachellavalleycoffee.com for the perfect cup. You'll get primo whole roasted beans. Choose from their Desert Sunrise or Sky Mountain Blend or beans from Nicaragua, Colombia, Guatemala, Mexico, Sumatra, Nicaragua, Ethiopia, French Roast or Decaf. They also have a nice selection of loose leaf teas and a few unique spices that you might enjoy as well.

GARDEN-IN-A-CAN FROM *BACK TO THE ROOTS*. The story: two guys who turned down the corporate world after college to instead become full-time urban mushroom farmers.

Along the way, they started asking about where the rest of our food comes from and created Garden-in-a-Can to hopefully inspire all of us to ask the same question. Using Biochar technology, their amazing invention allows you to grow organic dill, basil, mint, basil and cilantro right out of a can. Just pop the top and add water, it is 100% guaranteed to grow. Harvest for many months right out of the can. Experience the adventure of growing your own food, visit www.backtotheroots.com. Their mantra—"Food we grow, food we know"—resonates now more than ever. And if you share a photo of your growing plant, they'll gift one to an elementary classroom of your choice. A four pack herb set is \$24.99. They also offer a clever organic mushroom farm for \$19.99 and a winter garden—a self-cleaning fish tank that grows plants on top—for \$99.99.



HIGH POWERED SPIRITS OF MERIT: *KOSKENKORVA VODKA*, A VERY HIGH quality clear vodka from Koskenkorva in *Finland*. Distilled over 250 times (no not an error), this potion is produced from glacier water and barley from the distillery's own fields, resulting in an exceedingly pure vodka.

VIVA XXXII Tequila was founded by *Yvonne Niami* out of her passion to bring a premium sipping tequila to the market at an attainable price point. VIVA XXXII contains two varietals, a *Joven Tequila* and a *Reposado Tequila*. The Joven is an estate-grown, 100% blue agave blanco, meticulously blended with 3-year-old extra anejo. The Reposado is also estate-grown but rests for 6 months in new American oak barrels. Both are very smooth, hinting of agave, with flavors dominated by smoked oak, vanilla, caramel, and spices. VIVA XXXII not only separates itself from the pack with taste and price point, but also with their philanthropy. *Dog Phil* on the side of the bottle, represents 10% of net proceeds the company donates to animal abuse prevention. VIVA XXXII Tequila is an

inspired brand led by a forward thinking founder; a brand for those who believe in challenging the status quo. While respecting their roots in Mexican culture, VIVA XXXII is a tequila that proudly evolves tradition to focus on the now.

IF YOU ONLY HAVE TO BUY A COUPLE OF BOOKS THIS SPRING, ONE WE WOULD suggest is *HAUTE BOHEMIANS*, published by *Abrams*. This handsome and hefty book by *Miguel Flores-Vianna*, one of the world's most fashionable photographers of interiors and lifestyle, reveals the original taste of 20 contemporary bohemians. Who, exactly, is a haute bohemian? Leave it to the discriminating eye of photographer Flores-Vianna, who enjoys an international, cult-like following. He has journeyed through four continents to capture an extraordinary group of fashion designers, landscape architects, artists and art historians, potters, and interior designers, wherever they live—in country cottages, beach bungalows, canal-side lofts, and East Village apartments, as well as assorted estancias, chateaux, and palazzi. Some spaces are grand, others are modest, but all are original, stylish, charming, and above all authentic, in the sense that they reflect their owners' unique cares and tastes. As the readers of his column in *Architectural Digest* know, Flores-Vianna is as gifted a writer as he is an observant photographer. Here, Flores-Vianna's work is introduced by *Amy Astley*, editor of *Architectural Digest* and a longtime friend.

Another blockbuster book is *HENRI SAMUEL: MASTER OF THE FRENCH INTERIOR*, published by the eminent house of *Rizzoli*. Written by *Emily Evans Eerdmans* with forewords by *Jacques Grange* and *Eva Samuel*, this grand tribute to the most preeminent of French interior designers of the 20th century records his life, his career and the luxurious interiors he created—rooms that look as fresh and alive today as they did when they were first arranged.

DIVING DEEP INTO NORTHERN CALIFORNIA'S crown jewel, *Mendocino* delivers a fetching experience that's both easy on the wallet and hard to replicate. This is the land of ancient redwood groves, natural oddities and awe-inspiring attractions; an earthy blend of maverick farmers, cutting-edge brew masters and personalities with a passion for the offbeat. Just two hours north of San Francisco, Mendocino County is the true call of the wild, effortlessly mixing wine, waves and wilderness. Linger on the Lost Coast, break a sweat at Bowling Ball Beach or dive deep into flights of award-winning Alsatian wines. We've just returned from a Spring jaunt to



Mendocino and are happy to report their legendary 90 miles of prime Pacific coastline, Anderson Valley wine region, 24 state/national parklands and key tourism areas of Fort Bragg, Mendocino, Little River and Point Arena Lighthouse are as beautiful as ever. We merrily drove scenic coastal Highway 1 and Mendocino County's "Inspiration Highway" 101 taking in hotels and attractions between many wine tastings. We ambled to key visitor sites including the cities of *Ukiah* and *Willits* as well as the nearby attractions of the *City of 10,000 Buddhas*, *Ridgewood Ranch* (home of *Seabiscuit*), the *Skunk Train*, *Vichy* and *Orr Hot Springs* and the ancient redwood forests of *Montgomery Woods State Reserve* remain as they always were and will welcome you with warmth. We happily tasted fine wines at *Lula Cellars*, enjoyed blissful nights at the breathtaking oceanfront *Inn at Newport Ranch* and the remarkable cathedral of eco-salvaged redwood *Brewery Gulch Inn*, had an excellent lunch at *Trillium Café* and splendid dinner at the classic Victorian *Little River Inn*, visited the *Mendocino Coast Botanical Gardens* and had fun riding the scenic *Skunk Train* crossing some 30 bridges and trestles and through two deep mountain tunnels. The options for adventure are splendid and endless in Mendocino; we urge you to go now. For more information, www.visitmendocino.com.

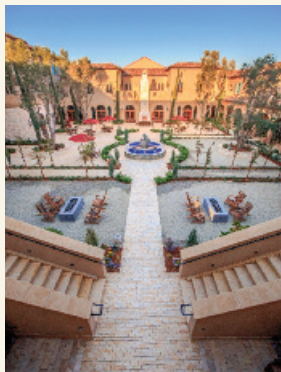
THE ALLEGRETTO VINEYARD RESORT, PASO Robles' first wine country destination resort is a very special place, the vision of owner Douglas Ayres, whose affection for humanity and its quest for the divine is manifested in each design choice, from the resort's footprint and layout, down to the placement of each piece of art.



The Tuscan-inspired resort offers guests exceptional spaces, experiences, services and amenities along the path of life's journey. Allegretto is inspired by wine country and European hospitality, set amongst 20 acres of vineyards, gardens and fruit-bearing orchards on Paso Robles' serene east side. The resort is a world unto itself with 171 guest rooms and suites, locally farmed and foraged cuisine at



Cello Ristorante & Bar, a tasting room featuring the resort's own private wine label, ballroom, intimate meeting spaces, over 40,000 square feet of event space, full-service boutique spa, pool and cabanas, manicured gardens, walking paths, 12,000-square-foot piazza, French-inspired abbey, curated art and artifacts along with inspired vignettes that evoke that luxury, warmth, and the beauty of the good life.



With origins in multiple centuries, cultures, faiths and wisdom traditions, over one hundred objects of art and artifacts fill the hallways, grounds and walls of the Allegretto Vineyard Resort to serve as windows into the human experience, highlighting what is common between us through time and space. The work of Russian and California impressionists is displayed alongside sculptures such as a two million year old concretion mined from the Fontainebleau shores of France, and a slice of Sequoia tree that dates back to 214 B.C., fill Allegretto.

Allegretto is proud of their wines and well they should be: their wines are produced from eight acres of vines that surround the resort, along with grapes from hillsides in the revered *Willow Creek District*. These wines have quickly been recognized for their superior quality, winning 2017 Gold Medals for the 2013 Willow Creek Cabernet Sauvignon at the San Francisco International Wine Competition (92 points) and the California Mid-State Fair, and a 2017 Double Gold Medal (95 points) for the 2013 *Tannat*, to name a few. The Willow Creek Tasting Room, located within the resort, is open Wednesday through Sunday from 11 a.m. – 7 p.m. or by appointment Mondays and Tuesdays, for guests to explore Viognier, Chardonnay, Malbec, Zinfandel and Cabernet Sauvignon, among others.

A day or a week here is restorative and inspiring, a superb experience of quality and excellence. The Allegretto Vineyard Resort is located at *2700 Buena Vista Drive* in *Paso Robles, California, 93446*. For more information, visit *AllegrettoResort.com*, or call (805) 369-2500.

THE BOXWOOD IN WEST HOLLYWOOD'S LONDON HOTEL IS A RELAXED and open restaurant, filled with natural light, stunning views of the Hollywood Hills and a kitchen that will knock your socks off. Located just off the very smart *London Bar*, which was inspired by English country house conservatories and orangeries, albeit with a heavy dose of L.A. opulence, this very pretty dining room is devoted to culinary bliss. Executive chef *Anthony Keene* brings an ambitious cooking style to Boxwood, inspired by the seasonal ingredients he creatively blends into playful-yet-sophisticated dishes.



Keene's personal style pairs classic British favorites with bright California flavors, creating a one-of-kind culinary destination. We found a menu filled with surprises and superbly served by a bright team of young professionals.

We swooned over the starters: tai snapper crostini with arugula, tangerines and yuzu dressing; chicken ginger meatballs with house pickled cucumber, lettuce and ponzu; roasted marrow toast, sweet crab gratin with green papaya and seaweed; and Nantucket Bay scallops with deviled butter, green lentils and pork belly. Each dish was nicely nuanced, masterfully balancing acidity and earthiness while never detracting from the main ingredient.



But there was much more in store for us: braised cod and baby clams in a broth of coconut milk with snap peas and shrimp fried rice, Maine lobster risotto with black winter truffles and Brussels sprout, and a modern surf & turf masterpiece with uni butter supporting a dazzling combination of prime New York steak and lobster agnolotti.

Those with less adventurous tastes can opt for terrific renditions of Dover sole, grilled salmon fillet, roasted chicken, bone-in Black Angus and petit filet, all on the menu and nicely paired to sides of a Belgian endive salad, Caesar salad, hand-cut triple cooked fries, sprouts and cauliflower fritters.

The chef even has some old standards like tuna melt, cheeseburgers, chopped salad and scrambled eggs on offer, which in his hands become elevated to heavenly heights.

On hand at Boxwood is a wiz of a mixologist whose métier is the art of the cocktail: Using only fresh juices, fruits, botanicals and purees, we drifted into reverie with such delights as the Bond Girl, the Full Monty and the Oh My Gourd. Boxwood also has a nice selection of draft and craft beers and the wine list is varied and could break the bank.

All in all, this is a restaurant of excellence. It has risen from the ashes of the former chef, irascible and rather rude *Gordon Ramsey* and quite honestly far surpassed this savage television personality.

Boxwood at The London West Hollywood is a true find, a refined place where your comfort is paramount, service is very attentive and the cuisine crafted with a rare combination of American whimsy and rigorous finesse. *1020 N. San Vicente Blvd., West Hollywood, CA 90069*; reservations: (866) 282 4560.

IN NEED OF SOME MUCH-DESERVED SUN, SEA AND SAND, ENTREE DECAMPED to *Puerto Vallarta*, one of our favorite Mexican escapes. With its abundance of outdoor activities, dining and nightlife, it's little wonder that "PV" was recently named by *Condé Nast* as the #1 safest beach destination in Mexico.

Just 10 minutes south of downtown and the Romantic Zone, lies the enchanting and unpretentious *Costa Sur Resort & Spa* where we spent peaceful, glorious days and evenings basking in the sun and making the most of its privileged location on a spotless beach. All of Costa Sur's 200 rooms are ocean-facing, permitting all guests to be mesmerized by the view of the sea by day and lulled to sleep by the gentle roar of the waves at night.



Costa Sur has been a favorite for visitors for over 30 years and are making it even better with a recent \$1 million renovation, and plans to spend another million on the next round of improvements. Rooms are spacious and walls thick in traditional Mexican style. We loved their clear bottomed kayaks and having *Los Arcos National Park*, just a paddle away. Costa Sur's unique location allowed us to easily visit the waterfalls in the mountains nearby and then go for a Pacific Ocean



sunset swim in the hotel's private lagoon. The lagoon is a snorkeler's dream come true with many species of colorful tropical fish. We even saw an enormous blue whale breach spectacularly while breakfasting poolside. Yes, even the pool has an ocean view.

We loved the fast (and free) Wi-Fi, and were charmed from day one to departure by the resort's charming, attentive, and friendly staff. A full-service spa provides relaxing treatments. Costa Sur is an ocean lover's paradise, yet it's close enough to town to easily take in historic old Vallarta, and maybe sneak some bird-watching in, too, all before getting back to that sunset swim in the tranquil, tropical waters of Banderas Bay.

Costa Sur Resort & Spa, Km. 4.5 Carretera a Barra de Navidad, Puerto Vallarta, Mexico, book online at www.costasurpuertovallarta.com/en/ or call toll free from U.S. (844 670-4549); international callers: (+52) 322 2268050

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WE WISH YOU A HAPPY SPRING AND REMEMBER TO TRAVEL NOT TO escape life but for life not to escape you.

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