

Living it up at the at the...



HOTEL CALIFORNIAN

By Elyse Glickman
Photos by Elyse Glickman & The Hotel Californian

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e're in a time of transition, and like other prime travel destinations around the world, Santa Barbara is in the throes of it. At the moment, the area south of the tracks and the freeway—a.k.a. The Funk Zone—is the most fashionable neighborhood and perhaps the most “Southern Californian” in terms of what it offers, what it looks like, and how it makes you feel when you're in the thick of it. It's an area where the sporty, the beachy, the artistic, and an Old Money/Old Hollywood past co-exist. And in the heart of it, there's the Hotel Californian (consisting of the main The Californian Building, The State Building, and The Mason Building) looking as grand as ever and, yet, feeling as fresh as the breeze coming off the beach a few blocks away.

The property, built in 1925, is doing its part to keep the Santa Barbara dream alive. While the town is definitely not your grandmother's Santa Barbara, the hotel offers cinematic views of the ocean, mountains, and a sort of behind-the-scenes look at how the Funk Zone is propelling the city's evolution with the influx of stylish and quirky winery tasting rooms, an increasingly global dining scene, and specialty retail. It's also reassuring that Stearns Wharf, the state's oldest working wharf, remains a constant anchor to the city's long-standing status as a quintessentially California weekend destination.



The Hotel Californian,

in its current iteration, opened its doors to great fanfare in 2017. In 2023, it remains at once a visual representation of what Santa Barbara was in the 20th century and what it will become in this one. A lot of the buzz with the hotel's re-opening came from the transformation executed by interior designer Martyn Lawrence Bullard, who juxtaposed the Spanish Colonial Revival architecture of the era with smart Moroccan influences. Bullard recognized that the hotel was a product of 1920s Hollywood, setting the scene for stars and elites to enjoy exclusive access to peak California culture. To keep it relevant for discerning travelers a century later, he made a conscious decision to avoid the familiar Santa Barbara blue/white/seafoam hotel color scheme and opt for mostly black, white, gold, and bright earth tones and Art Deco-inspired accents and fixtures to connect the two 20s decades.

Bullard's procurement of over one million handcrafted tiles from Morocco got a lot of attention, but interiors remain fresh because of the curated furnishings, fine amenities, top-tier bedding and sheets, and restraint with the occasional “pops” of color. What makes it so inviting in 2023—even as the city evolves—are exclusive features from a perfectly appointed fitness room to the Majorelle Spa's inclusion of a Moroccan hammam, a rooftop deck, and pool in the second building, and Djinn, the lobby-adjointing Moroccan-inspired library lounge serving up craft cocktails and evening entertainment. The star attraction at Djinn is Devon Espinosa, who refined his cocktail crafting technique at West Hollywood's innovative The Church Key bar.



As Santa Barbara

remains a wine lover's paradise, the Hotel Californian's location is not only ideal for exploring the many tasting rooms of the Funk Zone... it's a part of the action. At the corner of the main building, the hotel's own The Society: State & Mason regularly offers pours and flights of wines from the extensive Foley Family portfolio along with small plates from Executive Chef Travis Watson. While full-service restaurant Blackbird has become a guest and local favorite, as well as a bigger showcase for Watson's talents, the hotel and restaurant stage regular wine dinners with Foley's better vineyards and winemakers to dive deeper into the nuances of the vineyards' bounties and terroir.

The hotel's Moroccan theme of the property continues across the street on Mason with the Goat Tree restaurant, which mixes Santa Barbara's eternal coffee house culture and baked goods with a rotation of oven-fresh pastries and baked goods, cold-

pressed juices, and a full breakfast menu that includes a hearty and authentic shakshuka (a skillet breakfast with poached eggs in a rich, spicy tomato sauce than can be stopped up with fresh pita), a fresh spin on the classic smoked salmon entree, and other surprises.

The hotel also boasts unique packages above and beyond its romantic weekend offerings, outdoor-focused experiences, and an immersion into Majorelle Spas' wellness indulgences. Two of the most distinctive includes a wellness "survival" experience to carry the guest through Mercury Retrograde and an offering through its partnership with Corc Yoga, which includes a made-in-Portugal Corc Yoga Renew mat to take home, daily private fitness classes by a well-known fitness instructor, daily breakfast, and a welcome bottle of wine from Foley Family Wines.

However, it is safe to stay that simply staying in one of the 121 rooms (Almeria,

Sevilla, Granada, Sestina, Cordova, and Tangerinn) or suites (Magellan, Alcazar) will do wonders for a guest's sense of well-being and state of mind. In addition to Bullard's custom furnishings and appointments, the rooms include incredible mattresses and exquisite sheets, along with a Nespresso coffee maker, high-definition television, Malin & Goetz toiletries, free wifi, and access to other amenities such as the hotel's tech & game library, Tesla & standard EV car chargers, and usage of custom Hotel Californian bicycles during the stay. Special event and meeting spaces are equally impressive, ensuring your gathering's attendees feel like the original VIPs who patronized the hotel.

Rooms begin at \$747 per night. ₪

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