

# SBLS

*Santa Barbara Life & Style Magazine*

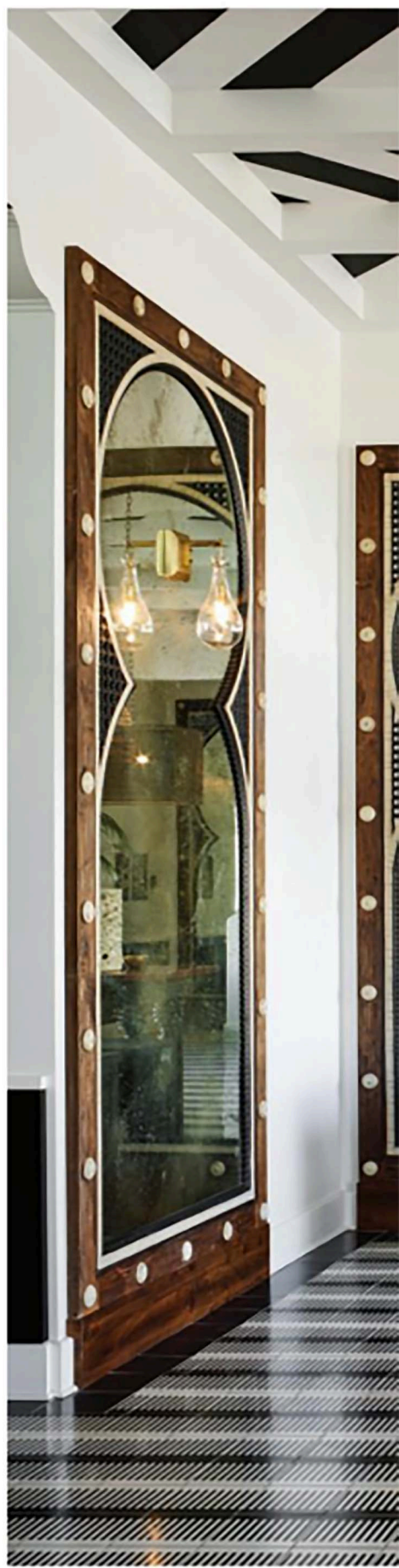
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FIFTH ANNIVERSARY ISSUE

*Living it up at*

# HOTEL FORNIA





Written by Amy Dong



W e all have those weeks where the only thing on your mind is a getaway; ideally on a beach somewhere miles away from worries and wifi. But recently I had a bit of a revelation; you don't need to go away to get away. With my latest discovery in mind, I planned an escape to Hotel Californian; waterfront views, innovative cuisine, and several friends begging me to try it made it the obvious choice.

On the day of check-in, James, my boyfriend and fellow staycationer, and I awoke brimming with excitement. It helped that only a ten minute drive separated us from our twenty-four hours of bliss. Upon arriving in the heart of downtown, we take a moment to survey the neighborhood. State Street, Santa Barbara's quintessential area, separates Hotel Californian's buildings which cover three corners of the intersection that sits just one block from the water. We stroll past the Dream Plaza, gifted by the hotel's owner Michael Rosenfeld to the Dream Foundation, an organization that grants dreams to terminally-ill adults, offering inspiration and comfort to them and their families.

At check in, we experience our first taste of the rare and uniquely refined style that adorns the property. The exterior of the hotel honors Santa Barbara with timeless Spanish architecture, however, a plethora

of eye-catching Moroccan tiles, lavish modern seating, and vibrant colors illuminate the interior—think *Gatsby* with a Turkish twist. Our room is nothing short of exquisite; high ceilings, a bold neutral color scheme, emerald green accents scattered throughout, and a balcony facing the Pacific to top it all off. At this point it is clear, every detail of the space had been thoughtfully and meticulously selected (by celebrity designer Martyn Lawrence Bullard no less). Each piece is rich and purposeful, weaving different cultures and time periods together, to create a work of art.

For the rest of the afternoon, we roam aimlessly through the Funk Zone (only two blocks away—major points for convenience), wandering through art galleries, wineries, and everything in between. The settling sun cues our appetite and we make our way to Hotel Californian's fine dining experience, Blackbird, with its red and black marble floors, elegant bar, and subtle hints of 1920s glamour.

We open with an eclectic charcuterie board made up of mouthwatering pork pate and smoked seafood, garnished with date mustard and paired with freshly made flatbread—we are off to a very good start. From there we move on to spring greens and octopus. The octopus is the most tender I have ever tasted and is paired eloquently with sauteed swiss chard—my childhood enemy but my current

ally. Blackbird's commitment to seasonal ingredients rings true with the spring greens; succulent artichoke, roasted hazelnuts, and spiced wheat grains fuse to create exactly what I imagine spring to taste like. I sit back to survey our empty plates, beyond satisfied, but ready for the next awe-inspiring dish. Moments later, two beautifully crafted seafood entrees are placed in front of us; king salmon for me and branzino for James (we love fish can you tell?). I'm infamous for eating off of James' plate and spend the next twenty minutes lost in smoky branzino and perfectly seasoned salmon.

We return to our room in a satisfied daze. Any residual stress had been melted away by a glass of 2014 Kita T'aya. We settle into our cloud-like bed and drift off to sleep with our balcony door open; letting in the light ocean breeze and the soft sound of crashing waves.

As early risers, we wake up with one thing on our minds: coffee. Luckily the nearest locally-brewed caffeine fix is just downstairs at Goat Tree, Hotel Californian's more casual, yet equally delicious, dining spot. After reading about the history of Goat Tree (yes, there are actually goats in Morocco that live in trees), I take in the rest of the space. Countless caramel colored tiles, rich leather seating, and a few, you guessed it, goat related pieces of art, curate a comforting and eclectic atmosphere. We are immediately impressed by the menu. Although Santa Barbara has no shortage of brunch, this one is certainly a gem. My eyes wander between chia seed custard, avocado toast, and Moroccan inspired dishes like Shashuska (poached eggs baked in a skillet swimming in tomato sauce and feta). We settle on gluten-free banana bread french toast topped with citrus yogurt, a flawlessly crafted acai bowl adorned with a plethora of colorful seeds, a creamy oat milk latte, and a replenishing green juice. After finishing every last bite (and drop of coffee), we decide to spend our last few hours at the hotel's coveted rooftop pool. As the elevator doors draw open and we step out into the sun, we stand in silence taking in the three hundred and sixty degree view from the rooftop. The Santa Ynez Mountains, illuminated in the morning light, sit just above the historic Riviera. To our right, the Mesa and in front of us lies Stearns Wharf paired with uninterrupted views of East Beach.

Perched above Santa Barbara, soaking in our last hour of staycation sunlight, I realize the true value of rest & relaxation. The brief and memorable pause from our day-to-day has us reframing our perspectives. And just think, all it took was single day of staycation. Hotel Californian has officially proved my theory; you don't have to go away to experience something completely new; the inspired Moroccan decor, distinctive and diverse dining experiences, and sweeping rooftop views made me feel miles away from home. ✱

*Hotel Californian*  
36 State Street, Santa Barbara  
[thehotelcalifornian.com](http://thehotelcalifornian.com)  
805-882-0100

