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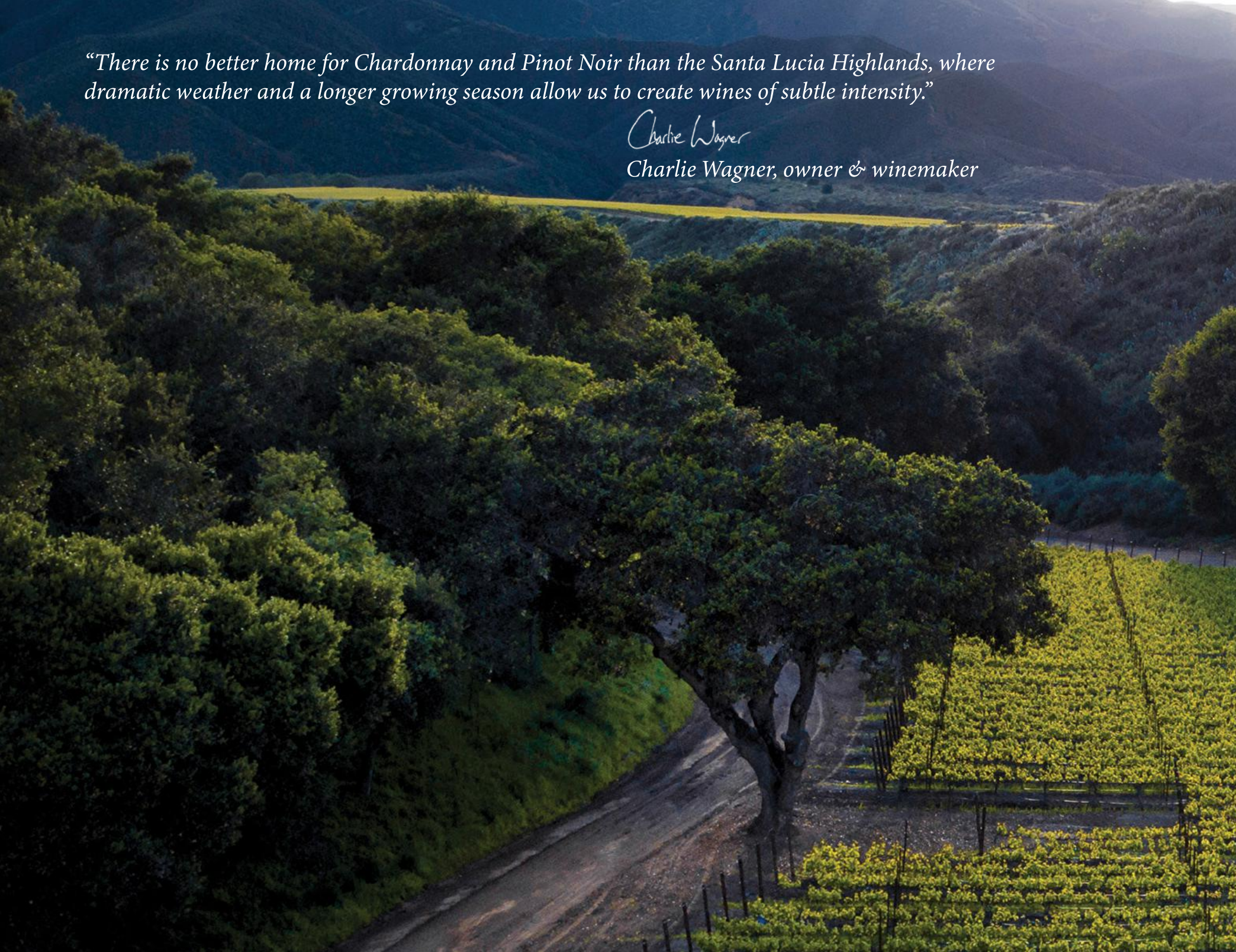
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COMMUNITY

From a Single Act of Kindness

By Kimberly Horg

WINERY

Offbeat Wines, Laidback Style

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EAT

Paradise Found

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STAY

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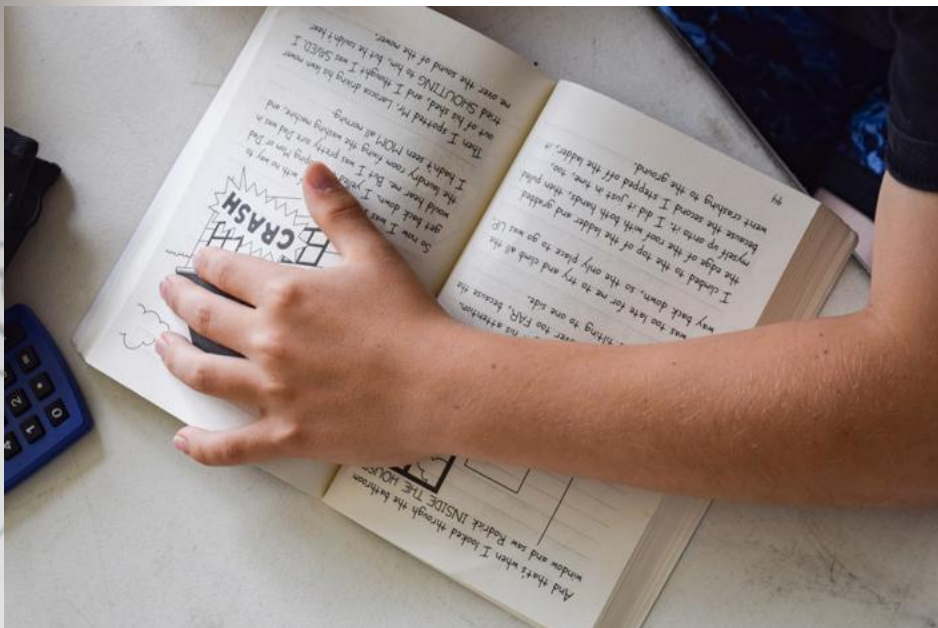
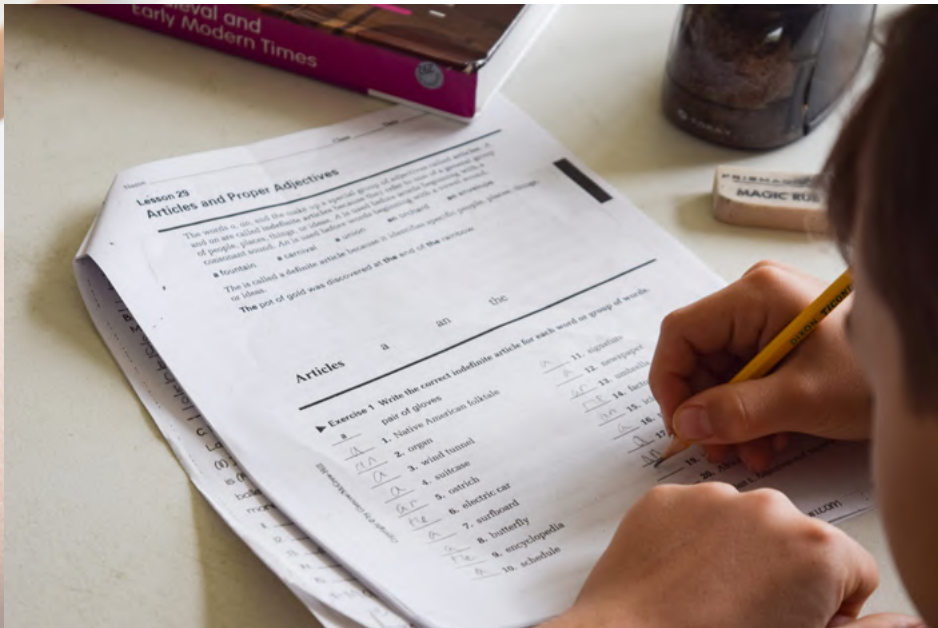
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From a Single Act of Kindness

By Kimberly Horg | Photos Courtesy of They Are One

It started with a single thought—which turned into an action and grew into something beautiful and life changing. A group of friends wanted to support a friend who was adopting a child in Africa, so they made the long journey with her, for moral support. After visiting the orphanage, in 2012, and seeing firsthand its need for assistance, the six women formed the group They Are One (TAO), its name inspired by Mother Theresa's words: "Just begin—one, one, one."

The women, all mothers, met with the orphanage's director in South Africa, launching eight years of friendships to date and international and local partnerships. After that meeting, TAO started addressing the large homeless population in their own community by volunteering time at the Salinas Warming Shelter.

"We asked the mothers in the shelter what they wanted the most, and the feedback we received didn't involve money," says TAO cofounder Michelle Chisum.

Many homeless women in the shelter indicated that their children need someone to help them with homework—as many as 36 children on a given night. In response, the shelter started a homework club in 2017. Typically, three adults and three high school students assist in this effort.

Chisum says that one high school volunteer especially inspires her. The teenager used to be on the receiving end of assistance, and now she offers her time helping other children. "The sense of accomplishment that the children show after completing an assignment or project fuels

my motivation to give more of myself each time I sit down to help them with homework," says Chisum.

Students not only receive help with various assignments but also assistance with school projects and purchasing supplies. Moreover, because the homework club doesn't cost money, the organization uses some of the funds to send children to YMCA camp. Chisum says that because camp is a safe, controlled environment, it has become a goal to send more children to camp in the future. Other future goals include giving children the opportunity to participate in sports by awarding scholarships for sports equipment and uniforms.

TAO now supports a school in Haiti, where 28 ninth-graders are assisted in their studies. The initiative involves employing teachers and staff. After traveling to Haiti for eight weeks to volunteer, Chisum says that she learned more about the people and culture than during her previous two-week stay. The language in Haiti is Creole, and Chisum had a translator to help her while she was there. She learned a great deal about her assistant, and now TAO assists with his tuition while he is in his third year of college.

TAO's 10 board members currently host three major fundraisers a year in Salinas: a chili dinner and a raffle, a large rummage sale, and a family fun run.

For more information, to volunteer, or donate, visit www.Theyareone.org.



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Interweaving Architecture and Spirit

By Nora Heston Tarte | Photos by Manny Espinoza

Jayson Fann built his first nest, a large, interactive sculpture, at his childhood home in Omaha Nebraska at age eight. He constructed the piece out of driftwood gathered from a nearby river, dragging the large chunks into his house to create a meditation space in his bedroom. The structure became the inspiration for Fann's most recognizable works, which are made from eucalyptus branches and sometimes from driftwood, vibrating messages of sustainability and connectedness to nature and others.

Because Fann started working with spatial concepts and design at a young age, he has considerable experience building large-scale pieces. He currently has works on display throughout the Central Coast, including the Tannery Arts Center in Santa Cruz and the Post Ranch Inn and Treebones Resort in Big Sur. He is constructing a memorial piece for a girl who attended the River School in Carmel, working with nearly 100 of her classmates to sand down beautiful pieces of repurposed redwood.

Fann's artwork varies in size. The largest nest piece Fann has ever built, when completed, will be 150 feet long, 25 feet tall, and created from over 100,000 pounds of repurposed wood. It will take eight months to complete.

Fann sources his materials from Big Sur and surrounding communities, choosing woods that are overly abundant, even invasive. As a result, his pieces do not adversely affect the environment. Most of what he uses would otherwise end up in a landfill, as the city of Santa Cruz alone puts over 100,000 pounds of driftwood into its landfill annually. A piece he built at the San Rafael Civic Center was made in partnership with local state parks, where officials were looking to remove much of the invasive eucalyptus to reduce fire threat.

"A lot of the influence of the nest has to do with the language of nature and the patterns of nature," says Fann. He chooses eucalyptus—his most used

material for his oversized endeavors—which is rarely used in California, because of its pliability, availability, and role as a sustainable resource. "It's also a very beautiful wood; it's very sculptural," he says. "I started to notice, in the branches and in the limbs, [that] eucalyptus has its own language." By using sustainable materials, Fann hopes others will see their potential and integrate them into home design and residential and commercial building.

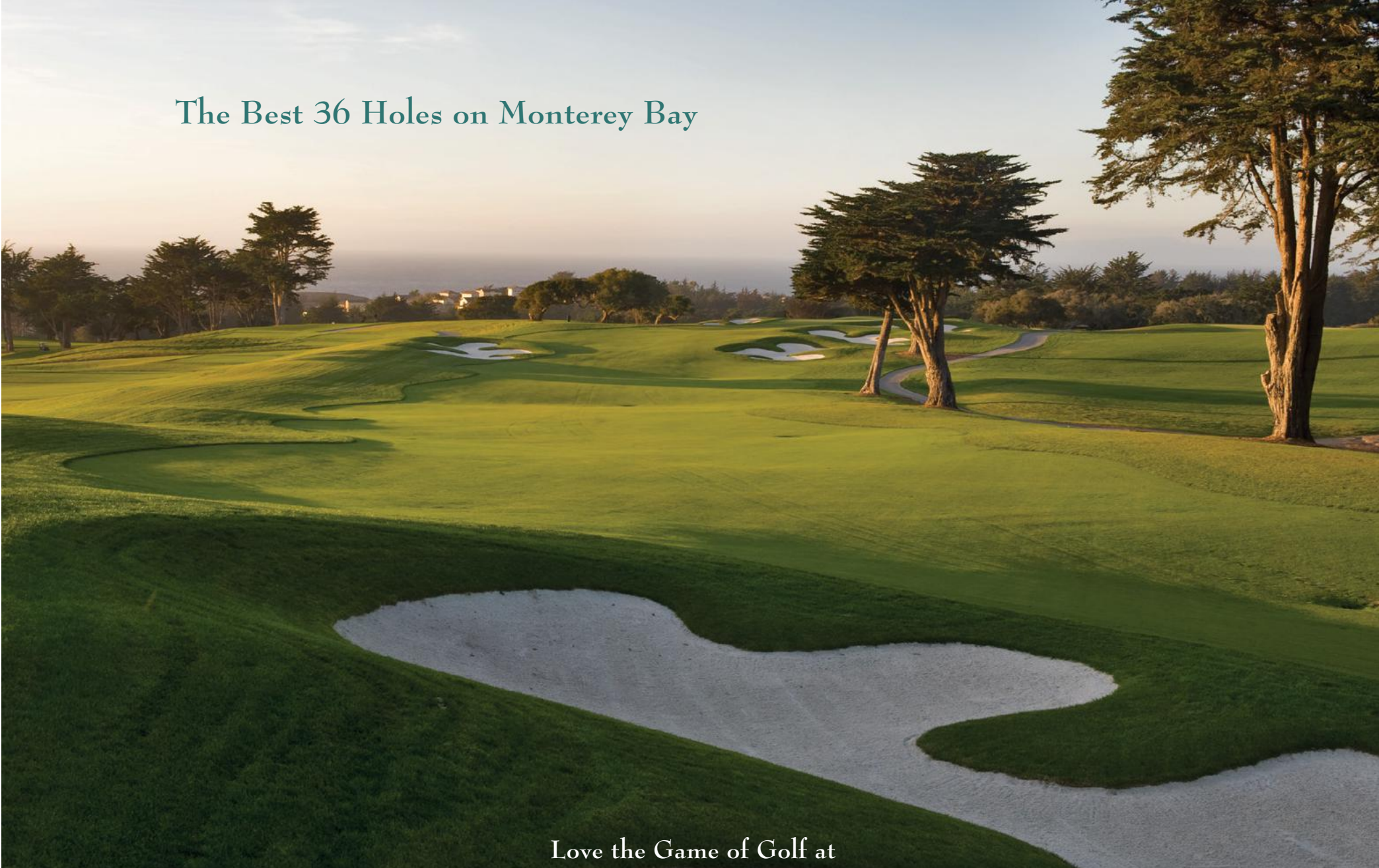
Nests are just one of Fann's artistic efforts. The interdisciplinary artist and designer teaches throughout Monterey County, through the Artists in Schools program, and has been featured at numerous arts and cultural centers around the world. He's appeared in several documentary films, hosted art and music festivals, performed around the world as a musician, and built a sculpture garden in Big Sur, the Big Sur Spirit Garden, where he's curated over 400 concerts.

Much of Fann's work is influenced by his time spent in Africa. He attended the University of Ghana and studied indigenous architecture, focusing on how different people create spaces with what they have on hand. One of his most important influences was Nigerian musician Babatunde Olatunji, who inspired Fann artistically and musically. Over the years, Fann has toured as a visual and musical director with playwright and actress Akuyoe Graham, performed with composer John Wineglass as a soloist in his composition *Big Sur the Night Sun*, and toured over 30 countries with Nigerian singer and poet Iyeoka Ivie Okoawo.

For Fann, whose first form of creative expression was dance, it's all connected. "The movement of those branches reminded me a lot of movement in dance," he says. "I'm not trying to force the material or bend the material into a particular shape; I'm focused on what already exists in the medium."

For more information, visit www.SpiritNestCreations.com.

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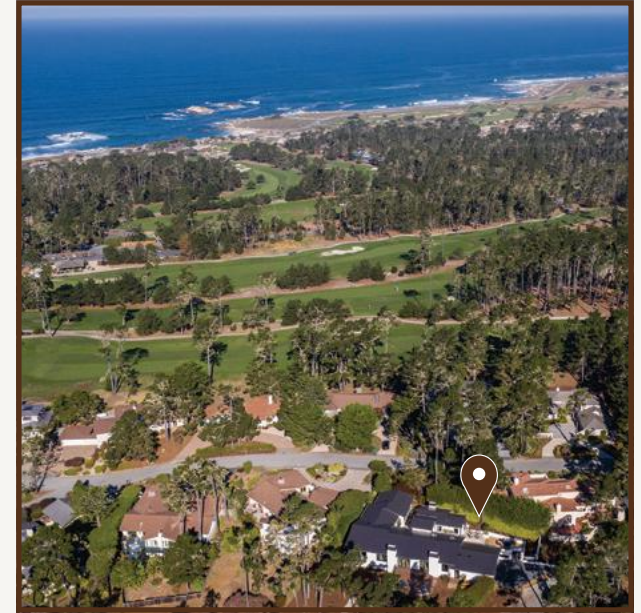
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65° FAVORITES







Playground for All Ages

By Fran Endicott Miller | Photos Courtesy of Carmel Valley Ranch

The name Carmel tends to evoke images of storybook cottages and sandy beaches. But there's another side to Carmel—one that is warmed by a sun that often evades its coastal cousin, one that is a bit more casual but equally as luxurious. It's Carmel Valley, a sublime pastoral hollow in the heart of the Santa Lucia Mountains. Graced with rolling hills blanketed by lavender fields, ancient grape vines, and chaparral, it's framed by hiking and biking trails, championship golf courses, working ranches, and a 4,000-acre regional park. At its heart is Carmel Valley Ranch, a playground for all ages, offering plentiful activities to please every interest.

The perfect spot to create family memories or simply escape for romantic rest and relaxation, Carmel Valley Ranch's 500-acre property features an incredible array of recreational opportunities. Learn, for example, how to make cheese with the resort's resident master cheese maker. Create fun, fizzy bath bombs with natural ingredients that include essential oils distilled from the resort's own lavender. Play with endless aromatherapy possibilities by creating customized candles in a beeswax and essential oil candle-making workshop. Or, with a paintbrush in one hand and a glass of wine in the other, learn to capture on canvas the beauty of simple objects found within The Ranch. Discover geocaching with the help of a naturalist and find tiny treasures hidden throughout The Ranch. Try out archery, falconry, or the newest craze, hatchet throwing. A weekly activity calendar details all of the fun offerings.

Golf and tennis have always been the star features of The Ranch. The resort's Pete Dye-designed par-70 course offers dramatic elevation changes and stunning scenery and is ranked amongst the country's best. So is the resort's tennis program. The Ranch's trained coaching staff provide stellar instruction on six hard courts and two Har-Tru® clay courts.

If serenity is the goal, then Spa Aiyana, nestled under a canopy of oaks, will provide the perfect space to relax and recharge. From body treatments to sleep therapy to clinical-grade skin care, the staff at Spa Aiyana (Aiyana is the Ohlone Costanoan Esselen word for eternal blossom) curate experiences for individual needs. A eucalyptus steam room, an outdoor saltwater pool, and an infinity hot tub further serve to induce tranquility.

The Ranch's suite accommodations feature expansive private decks, fireplaces, large bathrooms, Nespresso® coffee makers, cozy robes and slippers, and aromatherapy bath amenities featuring products that take advantage of The Ranch's acres of lavender. For even more indulgence, schedule the resort's bath butler to create the perfect in-room soak, complete with Champagne, bubble bath or salts, and a rubber ducky. Set a romantic mood by arranging for rose petals to be strewn about your candlelit room. For the wee ones, arrange a Teepee Time package complete with indoor teepee, milk and cookies, and stuffed animals.

All of this fun requires fuel, and The Ranch's award-winning Executive Chef Tim Wood and his crew of cooks, pastry chefs, and artisans provide plenty of it via the multitude of dining options. Their handcrafted, homegrown approach uses resort-grown ingredients and highlights locally made wines.

From arts and crafts to garden and farm adventures to fitness, Carmel Valley Ranch provides play for all ages. Few resorts in California provide the plethora of activities found within these bucolic Carmel Valley hills, the gateway to the good life.

Learn more at www.CarmelValleyRanch.com.





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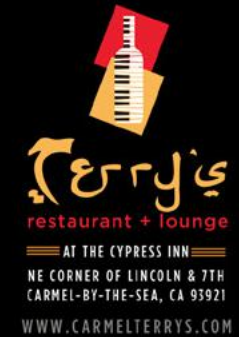


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Just Getting Started

By Jennifer Moulaison | Photo by Manny Espinoza

In a small town about an hour outside of St. Louis, Missouri, one of Carmel's premier real estate moguls got her start. There, in a uniquely industrious community, Kim DiBenedetto and her twin sister were raised to believe that success had to be earned. The Midwestern transplant's success story depicts tenacity that cultivated a rewarding career.

Growing up, DiBenedetto was active and drawn to roller-skating. Her first job was as a floor guard at a local roller rink. Her hobby-turned-passion wasn't easily acquired, however. "My grandparents were a big influence, and everything had to be created from something," says DiBenedetto. "When my sister and I decided we wanted roller skates, my grandmother made us have a garage sale in order to buy them," she recalls. In college, DiBenedetto pursued her bachelor's degree in business administration and international business through an evening program while working full-time, managing a small retail shop called Graphic Traffic. Eventually, DiBenedetto was offered the opportunity to head out west, managing the retailer's new location in Carmel-by-the-Sea. Though it meant putting her degree on hold, she felt she could learn more about international business in a location rich in tourism and leapt at the opportunity. "It was such a warm embrace and felt so familiar," says DiBenedetto of making the move. "It's such a world-renowned destination, yet Carmel is a lot like my hometown in that it's a very close-knit community and cultivates a small-town feel."

Eventually, DiBenedetto completed her bachelor's degree at Monterey Peninsula College by way of three semesters of Japanese. "It turned out to be an invaluable skill, as I was able to speak with customers and bridge that communication gap," says DiBenedetto. "I don't use it much these days, but I've retained enough to be dangerous in a sushi restaurant," she jokes. When she went to work for Augustina's, another retailer in Carmel-by-the-Sea, DiBenedetto met the man who is now her husband through

a mutual friend. They now have a 29-year-old daughter. After marrying, DiBenedetto continued pursuing her career. "I always knew I was going to be successful, I just didn't know where exactly I'd find that success," she says. "Since Carmel has somewhat limited industry, real estate made the most sense to me."

While the idea came easily, the work itself took some time to balance out. "I quickly discovered this wasn't something one could do part-time, and I had to commit myself and learn to weather the ebbs and flows," she says. Today, DiBenedetto is a force to be reckoned with in Carmel's real estate scene. She also notes the interesting aspect of competition with other agents.

"We all compete but we all have to work together. You have to support each other and cultivate great relationships."



DiBenedetto serves on the Women's Council of Realtors and the Board of Directors for the California Association of Realtors, and is Federal Political Coordinator for the National Associations for Realtors. This year she's chairing the Issues Mobilization Political Action Committee, whose primary mission is to influence state and local political issues on behalf of the California Association of Realtors. "It's an honor to chair a committee for the state like this," she says. "It affords me knowledge of the industry but also helps develop relationships with people both local and statewide."

Keeping ties to her hometown, DiBenedetto remains close to her family and makes time to visit her sister, an associate circuit judge for her local county, and two nieces. "Looking back, it was such a long way from home, and I still can't believe I made the leap. I'm still grateful every day I ended up here," she says. As for the future, DiBenedetto hopes to remain active in her community and considers herself a Carmel resident for life, stating, "I'm just getting started!"



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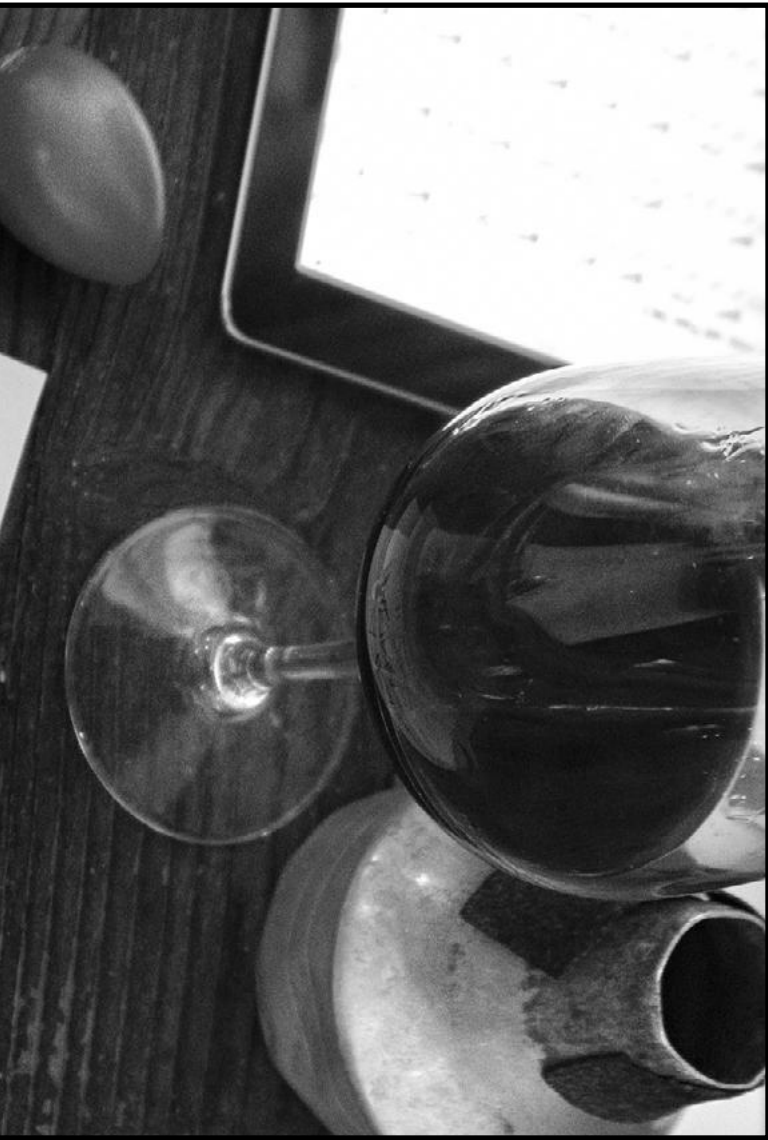
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ODONATA



Offbeat Wines, Laidback Style

By Nora Heston Tarte | Photos Courtesy of Odonata Wines



A hidden gem in Monterey County is Odonata Wines, located on a vineyard property in Salinas, where winemaker Denis Hoey and his family live and work. Hoey, the man behind the label, has a mission to produce sustainable wines that are funky and fresh, blending old-world and new-world techniques to create what the industry calls “nouveau-style wines.” His first foray into wine making, a petite sirah he created in 2005, when he was 21 years old, is indicative of his hardworking nature and desire to succeed. Odonata Wines currently turns out more than 6,000 cases of small-lot, local wines per year.

It’s a far cry from where he started, working three jobs while learning winemaking as an apprenticeship to Jeff Emery from Santa Cruz Mountain Vineyard and a dream to become a full-time winemaker. Despite being young, Hoey had a vision, so every year he turned out new vintages under his personal Odonata Wines label. Slowly, he built up bigger runs before taking the plunge in 2014, when he purchased his own vineyard property and opened a tasting room. He currently offers 32 products, all living up to his focus on clean, balanced vinos. The portfolio includes four methode Champanois bubbles, spicy and dark sangiovese, and a balanced zinfandel. “My winemaking is a constant evolution, always open to new ideas and some that are being dragged up from the past,” says Hoey.

For Hoey, winemaking is a thought process and belief in the craft. Before making each new wine, he asks himself how and why. Without answers to these questions, he won’t move forward—it’s a practice he developed early under Emery’s tutelage. “My philosophy is to be the eternal student, always on a quest to better myself and what we are doing,” he says. “With that mindset, you can be open to just about anything.”

Sold mostly online and through the winery direct-to-consumer, Odonata Wines may be best known for its sangiovese and sparkling rosé of sangiovese, the latter of which lives up to Hoey’s desires to play off the beaten path and revel a bit in the funky, brandishing notes of strawberries and cream with crisp acidity and a clean, long finish. Syrah is another big draw at the winery. Newer to the scene, Odonata is working to create a more robust profile of syrahs out of the winery, with its Santa Lucia Highlands Syrah currently in the works. If you want to taste the winery’s unofficial flagship, however, you’ll need to order the Sangiovese Red, the hottest seller and a crowd pleaser. It’s complex, loaded with fruit, spice, and texture. Every wine you taste, while experimental in its process, will undoubtedly live up to Hoey’s desires to respect both terroir and varietal character.

Hoey’s attention to detail at every phase, intricate blending techniques, and risk-taking practices clearly set his wines apart in Monterey County. And it doesn’t go unnoticed that his dedication to sustainability and crafting with local ingredients are part of the results. He selects grapes from Monterey vineyards and works with local growers as well as on his own two-acre property (which provide 30 percent of his production grapes). “The soul of a wine is expressed through how you handle the fruit as it comes in,” he says.

To taste Hoey’s bounty, step into Odonata Wines, open 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. daily. Every tasting room employee has an apparent love for wine, and the passion is contagious, whether you’re there for a casual tasting experience, a spur-of-the-moment tour, or a patio picnic.

Learn more at www.OdonataWines.com.





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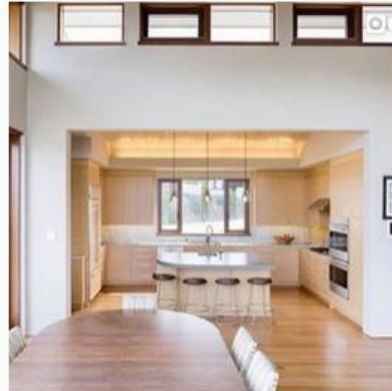
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Paradise Found

By Jennifer Moulaison | Photos by Manny Espinoza

On a brilliant, sun-drenched Saturday, Enzo Pagano, owner of Enzo Ristorante Italiano in Carmel-by-the-Sea, hiked near Fort Ord with his four-legged companion, Ciccio. While enjoying the morning, he discussed his journey from Southern Italy to becoming firmly rooted in what he calls a beautiful life here on the Monterey Peninsula.

Born and raised in Diamante, a town located in Italy's Calabria region and whose name translates to diamond, Enzo was accustomed to living among beauty. He spent earlier years of his life traveling from one exciting destination to the next. Experiencing locations like Paris, London, Rome, Milan, and Athens, Enzo was thoroughly enjoying all that Europe has to offer and was in Crete when he met his future wife, Caroline. The two were married in Paris and lived there for a time before making their way to San Francisco to be closer to Caroline's family. It wasn't long before the Peninsula's magnetic beauty drew the couple further down the coast, where they set down roots, grew their family, and built lasting friendships.

"We would host our friends for dinner often, and I have always loved to cook," Enzo explains. "It was Nico who, little by little, made me realize my passion for food, and we eventually went into business together," he continues. Enzo's partner of fifteen years and former restaurant's namesake went on to pursue other projects, and Enzo renamed the restaurant Enzo Italiano Ristorante.

A close-knit team of family and colleagues helps Enzo craft this authentic dining

experience. Enzo's cousin, Italo Martinetti, serves as executive chef and Piero Carusi is the restaurant manager. Both Martinetti and Carusi are natives from the same region of Calabria as Enzo. Carusi brings nearly 40 years of restaurant experience to the table. His resume includes running successful eateries around the world, from Italy to Southern California and Telluride, Colorado. "When it came time to come back to California, I knew I wanted to be farther from the bustle of Los Angeles, and the Carmel region was ideal," says Carusi. "Then I met Enzo, and there was an instant connection."

"My philosophy is great ingredients, quality, and uniqueness," explains Enzo. "Most, if not all, of our produce is organic and locally sourced. Of course, it's more expensive, but you can do it, or you can do it right. Zero Kilometers is an Italian term, which means it's from the region, which is something we strongly believe in." says Enzo. For Carusi, the focus is on offering a superlative experience through service. He explains, "Good service is paramount. My goal is always to please the customer."

That focus is precisely what guides the future of Enzo Italiano Ristorante, according to Carusi. "We're continuing to go up, up, up with quality and service. We serve a discerning community, and our service and offerings must deliver," he says. As for Enzo, he feels fortunate to be able to enjoy both his passion for food and family here in this unique destination, stating, "When you find paradise, you stay there."



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Evoking a Story

By Jennifer Moulaison | Photos by Sherman Chu

At 24 years old, Sherman Chu connected deeply with the concept of storytelling through photography. Today, Chu has cultivated a unique way of telling stories as a wedding and corporate event photographer. He focuses on capturing candid moments as they happen rather than contriving staged images: “I view myself as a witness to an event with a camera.”

Chu strives for an unobtrusive approach, including capturing his subjects without the use of a flash so as not to make the subject aware that they’re being captured. In fact, according to Chu, the camera acts as an extension of his body: “Using the professional Canon bodies with the fastest lens allows me to shoot in low-light situations, which are the circumstances I most frequently encounter. Like any other profession, one shouldn’t have to think about the technical aspects of their job in order to get the job done. However, it’s so important to know the techniques.”

When capturing weddings, Chu leverages authenticity and knows what type of shots should be taken. “I’m not a fan of Pinterest weddings or working off a photo list,” he admits. Chu prefers to work with mature subjects who are aware of what type of images will genuinely reflect the feeling of their day. Sincere moments are the cornerstone of authentic photography. “If I see one more shot of bridesmaids in matching robes sitting on a bed popping Champagne, I’m going to be sick. It’s really about the people and the feeling,” shares Chu. “Whatever the moment is . . . it’s my job to make that image touch the viewer.”

Whether it’s using a longer lens and blending in with the crowd or flexing his creative muscle and having the freedom to be artistic, Chu’s well-honed technique and intuitive approach produces photos that evoke emotion.



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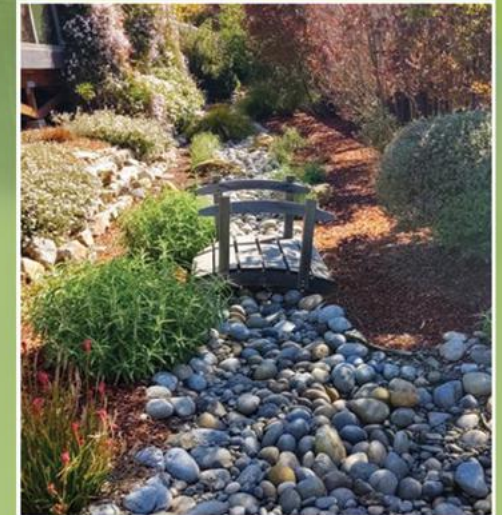
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SFB Opening Night Gala 2020:
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By Jennifer Moulaison

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Cover Photo: Bob McClenahan



Cover Photo: Renee Corpuz-Lahne

PUBLISHER'S NOTE

By Rich Medel

Happy spring, everyone. Although we are all laying lower than usual right now, we still have much to be grateful for. Here in Carmel-by-the-Sea, we are surrounded by beauty—maple, pine, and cypress trees dance in sea breezes carried in from the nearby Pacific Ocean. Coastal fog hugs us on sleepy mornings until sunlit skies cut through the damp blanket.

In this issue, we're especially excited to share uplifting stories that demonstrate the spirit of our coastal communities.

In Salinas, one organization is changing the landscape for vulnerable children at home and abroad. They Are One provides several services, including tutoring and kids camp. Their name is inspired by Mother Theresa's words, "Just begin—one, one, one."

In Carmel, Ricky Mena of Heart of a Hero shares his love of superheroes. His mission is to put smiles on the faces of children who need it most.

Monterey Peninsula interdisciplinary artist, designer, and teacher Jayson Fann is enlivening the world with his

sustainable nests. He shares his passion and skills with students and audiences all over the world.

You'll also read about more amazing people as well as some of our favorite locales, including restaurants, wineries, and resorts. We have a lot of great stories in this issue thanks to our loyal advertisers. There are no words that can express

our appreciation for their support in this time. We'll be paying it forward to them. We encourage you to keep local businesses in mind in these odd times. Many of them are still open and have expanded or modified their offerings, including to-go, delivery, free shipping, and virtual services.

We take comfort in knowing that although we may not see much of one another these days, the fabric of our beloved cities is still woven tightly by a passionate movers, shakers, artists, and makers. The Monterey Peninsula, San Francisco Peninsula, and Napa and Sonoma Counties need our support now more than ever. Hold up your neighbor, be generous within your means, and remember, you are not alone.



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57°

THIS IS THE CITY

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Art of Renewal

By Olivia Boynton | Photos by Bob McClenahan

At the crossroads of technology, creativity, and innovation, the Napa Lighted Art Festival lit up the community on January 11-19. The City of Napa Parks and Recreation Department connected seven international artists, four domestic artists (two from Napa), art students from New Tech High School, and community members to celebrate the theme of Renew through art and light-based technologies.

Eleven art installations were seen throughout downtown and the Oxbow District, using the beauty of historic buildings as lightscapes. Installation sites included the Napa Opera House, Goodman Library, and the Napa Historic Court House, which has been under renovation since the 2014 earthquake. "Similar to many of the buildings that are installation sites for the festival, it is symbolic of our community's resilience, our ability to rebuild and restore our spirit after great adversity and disruption," says Meredith Nevard, public art coordinator for the Parks and Recreation Department, of the Court House site.

On January 17, the community united for a lantern parade, in which participants brought their own lantern creations and promenaded together through the streets, bobbing in luminescence. During weekend evenings, the Festival showcased Night Bloom, a hot air balloon show, which lit up the Oxbow District night sky.

Napa Parks and Recreation partnered with artist The Projection Studio and New Tech High School's digital design lab students to create Elementa, a video mapping projection on the AT&T building. The Projection Studio mentored the students over Skype, helping them create a high-quality animation installation. Students' artworks were displayed with the featured international and regional artists. Ten students from the class acquired their Adobe® Premiere certification based on software proficiency developed while working on the digital installation.

The Napa Lighted Art Festival 2020 ushered in the year with a sense of and lightheartedness, renewal, and joy.





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Greater Than Each of Its Lauded Parts

By Fran Endicott Miller

Farm. Restaurant. Inn. Each of SingleThread's three entities represents the highest echelon of its respective industries. Its five-acre farm, located seven miles from its downtown Healdsburg eatery, is an agriculturalist's dream. The restaurant is a three-Michelin-starred dining destination. The five-room inn that hovers above the dining room and kitchen is a haute yet homey haven. To indulge in a SingleThread dinner and an overnight stay is to have a luxurious experience that is greater than each of its lauded parts. Practicing a hospitality philosophy called *omotenashi*, SingleThread's proprietors, Kyle and Katina Connaughton, regard both restaurant and inn customers as guests. Individual needs and requests are a priority, and comfort is paramount.

Perhaps best known for its celebrated eatery, SingleThread was awarded the coveted three Michelin stars just two years after opening. Executive Chef Kyle changes his small plate, eleven-course menu daily, based on master farmer Katina's harvest from the farm, where she oversees an heirloom fruit orchard, vegetable and flower beds, olive trees, beehives, and chickens. The farm's bounty also provides Katina with the organic goods for her artistically designed tablescapes and dish presentations. To source purveyors for SingleThread's array of seafood items, Chef Kyle journeys six times a year to Japan, his adopted country that also serves as inspiration for his acclaimed donabe clay pot cooking techniques and for SingleThread's elegant, serene dining room interior. Every SingleThread item, be it menu ingredients, utensils, paired wines, sound system, or furnishings, has a story and has been thoughtfully curated by the Connaughtons.

The same is true of their five-room inn, whose attributes make it as destination-worthy as the restaurant. This warm, welcoming haven is much more home than hotel. Each room features large picture windows with urban

views. Graceful, minimalist furnishings fill the high-ceilinged spaces.

The luxurious 700-square-foot Master Suite features a living room, bedroom, private balcony, and kitchenette area, as well as 14-foot ceilings with redwood beams, exposed brick, and a gas fireplace. Four additional guest rooms (one is ADA compliant) are each 450 to 500 square feet. Guests are welcomed with amenities, including a bottle of wine from a rotating list of Sonoma producers, sparkling waters and Pliny the Elder beer, house-made sweets from the SingleThread pastry team, and artisan ice cream. A bountiful full-service Japanese or English breakfast is also included—both traditional and playful offerings reflect Chef Kyle's time in kitchens throughout the world. Those staying a second night are offered the option of a unique, multi-course donabe dinner featuring selections from the farm, the best available seafood, sashimi, a choice of communal hot pot dishes, and a dessert reflective of the season.

Kyle's culinary career and interest in Japanese culture began during his high school years, when he apprenticed at one of Southern California's oldest Japanese restaurants. He later attended the California Sushi Academy and Sushi Chef Institute. In 2003, he received a job offer in Hokkaido, Japan, where he and Katina lived and worked for three years. During their stay, Katina immersed herself in farming and garden work in Hokkaido's agricultural epicenter.

With SingleThread, the Connaughtons seek to evoke and share the authentic experience of their own wine country lifestyle as well as their experiences living and working abroad. A meal at the restaurant and a stay at the inn provide a peek into their world, and what a lovely world it is.







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Rustically Refined

By Fran Endicott Miller

Sonoma, one of California's most eclectic counties, is home to forested mountains, verdant vineyards, and ocean waters. The diverse landscape meets the varied desires of all travelers, as does the area's offerings of overnight accommodations, ranging from rustic to refined. Visitors can find a flawless combination of the two at Farmhouse Inn. Decidedly on the refined end of the curve, this boutique hotel in the Russian River Valley's bohemian enclave of Forestville serves as a sumptuous yet casual home base for area exploration.

Proprietors Joe Bartolomei and Catherine Bartolomei-Smith, who are brother and sister, grew up in Forestville. Together, they have created a six-acre hospitality gem featuring 25 farmhouse-chic rooms that vary in size and a Michelin-starred restaurant. The pampering begins with the offer of a glass of wine at check-in and continues through the entire stay, thanks to attentive service and indulgent extras.

Those extras include a lobby-located, serve-yourself bath bar with selections of brown sugar scrub, bath salts, and organic soaps. The lobby also features a serve-yourself gourmet s'mores bar with all the artisanal makings for the gooey treat. Two poolside fire pits provide a convivial space in which to toast, construct, and enjoy. And if a sweet tooth persists, freshly baked chocolate chip cookies delivered at turndown will satiate the craving.

Each room also includes complimentary snacks (artisan crackers, cheese, cashews, and organic tortilla chips). Sodas and sparkling water are also gratis. Join other guests every afternoon from 4:30 to 5:30 p.m. for wine tasting held in the Inn's newest meeting space, The Grange, where local vintners take turns pouring their best while sharing vinous histories. Guest rooms also offer for purchase a selection of six full-sized varietals all from nearby wineries.

From cozy Farmhouse King rooms above the property's original farmhouse building to charming cottages, to sumptuously large King Luxury Suites with a separate, barn-door-divided sitting area, each room is designed with upscale, farmhouse-chic flair, including fresh flowers and a personalized chalkboard welcome. Rooms feature gas- or wood-burning fireplaces, several of which are double-sided for interior and patio enjoyment. Bathrooms here are reason alone for a stay. Large, jetted soaking tubs overlook oak-tree-studded hillsides. Heated floors provide soothing comfort, and steam showers sooth aching muscles.

The proprietors purchased the Farmhouse premises in 2001, when the property was known primarily as a restaurant and was flanked by six guest rooms. The siblings refined and refurbished the Inn portion and, with Executive Chef Steve Litke, reimagined the restaurant for which accolades have since poured in. For nearly 20 years, Litke has maintained the restaurant's one Michelin star rating. His ever-changing menu relies exclusively on what is fresh and seasonal. Three-, four-, or five-course options allow for mixing and matching menu categories—first, second, main, and dessert. Many ingredients come directly from the nearby Bartolomei ranches or from local Sonoma County sources.

Guests can enjoy going to the Farmhouse Restaurant for a meal by strolling to and from guest rooms on gravel paths fronted with roses, espaliered fruit trees, and vegetable-filled raised garden beds. If staying for more than one night, they can ask the front desk for additional dinner suggestions. The staff are local, know the area well, and have forged strong relationships with nearby restaurants and wineries. A stay at Farmhouse Inn affords insider access.





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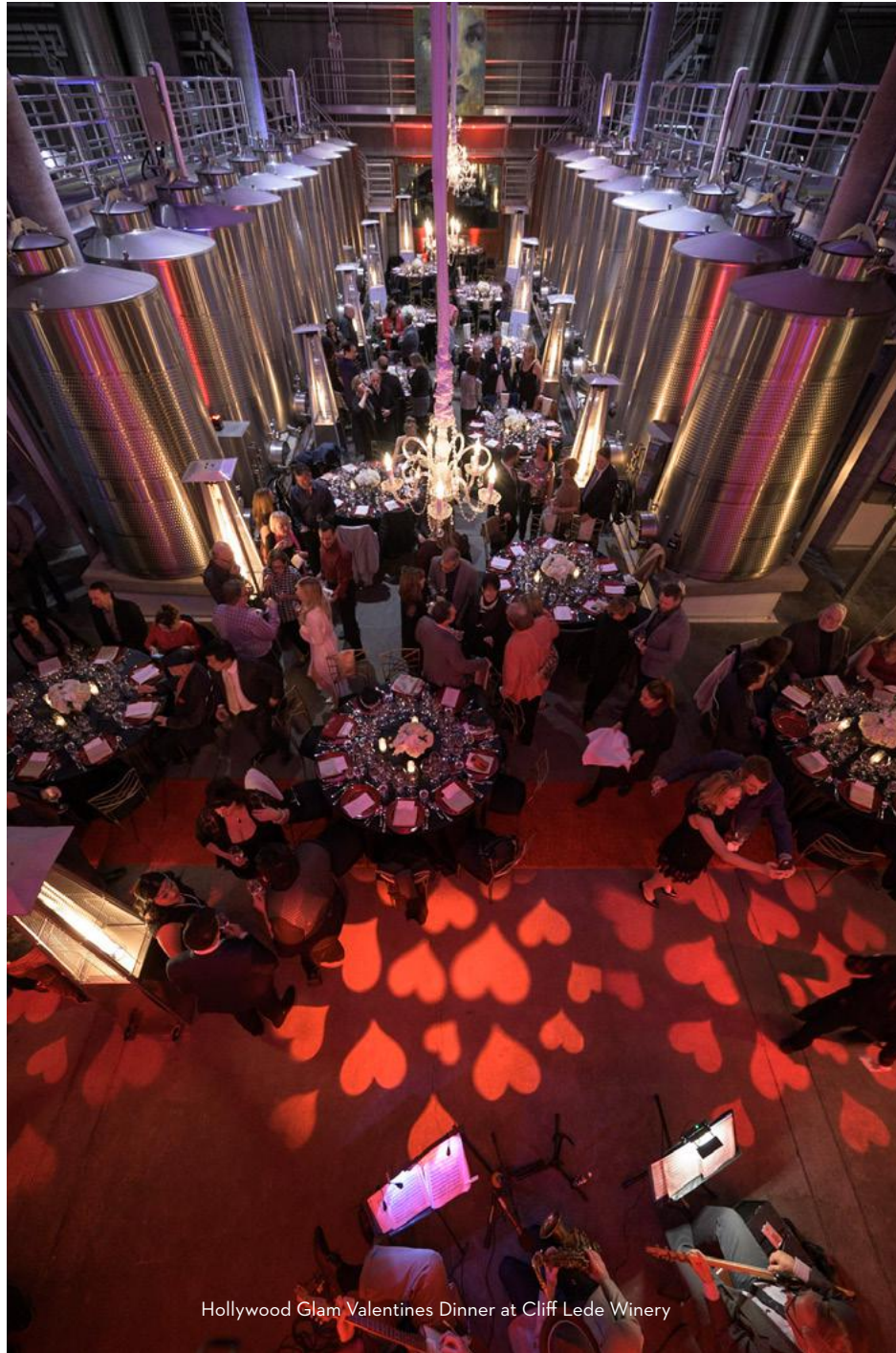
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Healing Grapes

By Nora Heston Tarte | Photos by Darren Lovecchio

A fourth-generation grape grower, Kathy Ervin inherited her love and knowledge of the craft from her family as she grew up in Lodi wine country. A love of winemaking, however, is not the only trait Ervin shares with her extensive family—her father has 32 cousins. Her family also has a propensity for cancer. Several forms of the disease have inflicted more family members than Ervin can count, and in 2000, after undergoing genetic testing, she was given a 40 percent lifetime risk of developing ovarian cancer and a 70 percent chance of getting breast cancer.

In 2005, the first wave hit when the mother of two was diagnosed with breast cancer. Her youngest daughter was two months old. The invasive ductal carcinoma, a five-centimeter tumor in her left breast, required multiple surgeries, chemotherapy, and radiation before she entered remission. “Usually dropping one’s child off at the first day of kindergarten is bittersweet,” says Ervin. “I remember feeling happiness and gratitude, because I was not always sure I would live to see that day.” In 2009, the cancer came back, and this time doctors told Ervin it was inoperable due to the position of the tumor close to her carotid artery.

Ervin started chemotherapy to try to shrink the tumor, and eventually found a surgeon willing to operate. She has been in remission since 2010. “While the cancer experience was excruciating in many ways, it did bring some much-needed clarity, mostly about living a purposeful life and honoring the gift of life I’ve been given,” she says. That’s why she decided to launch her wine label, Miracle Hill Vineyards, growing a single-vineyard, small-lot premium syrah on her rocky, hillside home located in the Lovall Valley area of Sonoma.



For Ervin, cancer taught her to live life with purpose. “Prior to cancer, I looked at work in a mostly practical way,” she says. “After cancer, I needed to find some way to bring greater purpose to what I was doing and to hopefully become part of the good that I saw and experienced.” Ervin sells her wine online, direct to consumers, and to local restaurants and stores. She donates 15 percent of her profits to the fight to find a cure.

Ervin’s two daughters are in high school now, and they often talk about cancer. They are resilient, having learned young just how hard life can be. In just a couple of years, they too will undergo genetic testing to determine if they carry the BRCA1 gene that could affect their likelihood of developing cancer. “Although it is difficult to think of what the genetic testing results will tell us, we all know that knowledge is power, and there are things that can be done to mitigate risk,” says Ervin.

Unfortunately, it’s not a task Ervin is unfamiliar with. Ervin’s family became the largest family tree that the University of California San Francisco has documented in its genetic research, starting back in the 1990s. And regrettably, many of the hospital’s predictions have come true.

Along with heartache, however, good things can come. “I think for many people, when they get on the other side of difficulty, they look for a way to bring purpose to their experience,” says Ervin. “The experience I had makes it much easier to not sweat the small stuff, to appreciate where I am, and to see, experience, and be the recipient of the good that is out there in the world.”

Learn more at www.MiracleHillVineyards.com.

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Much Richer Tasting Experience

By Fran Endicott Miller | Photos by Los Heffernans Photography

Named for the Anabatic winds that sweep over Sonoma's Carneros region, Anaba Wines was founded by Chicago-born John Sweazey, who desired to craft Rhône-style blends and graceful chardonnays and pinot noirs that had once captivated him during a European sojourn long ago. Opened in 2006 on 16 breezy acres, Anaba recently unveiled its stunning new Vintners House tasting room and visitor center, a space befitting the delectable varietals in its portfolio. Fans of Anaba Wines can now enjoy their favorite pour in the manner the Sweazey family always intended—surrounded by gracious, uncomplicated hospitality.

Comfortable and elegant, the Anaba Vintners House is a reflection of the Sweazey family's relaxed vibe and commitment to land and resource stewardship (the goal is for the winery to use 100 percent renewable energy this year). There, guests can escape and unwind, viewing the estate vineyards and the distant hills. Private seating areas allow for leisurely, personalized wine exploration. The space also includes a long communal table and bar for casual tastings and a light-filled room with cozy, intimate seating areas for in-depth wine education. The color palette takes inspiration from nature, evoking fog, water, earth, and even the Anabatic winds.

Designed to harmonize with its rural surroundings, the building is an amalgam of new and old-world design that complements the 120-year-old farmstead that originally served as Anaba's tasting room and administrative offices. "From the beautiful custom lights to the raw metal fireplace, to the richly-textured sofas, we were very intentional about every design element," says Sweazey's son, John Michael, who serves as general manager of the winery. "My parents even added artwork from their own home. We wanted the room to echo the beauty of our natural agrarian surroundings and to be very personal."

Beyond the landscaped courtyard, a bocce ball court encourages lighthearted competition, and an adjacent soon-to-be-completed paddle tennis court will become a focal point for club member gatherings. "We've long desired to create a place for visitors to completely relax and escape," says Sweazey. "This is an extension of our family home, and we want everyone to feel that same warm, inviting atmosphere. We're now able to offer a much richer tasting experience and create lasting memories for our guests."

Anaba's wines are crafted by collaborative and exacting winemakers Ross Cobb and Katy Wilson, who joined Anaba during its 2014 harvest. The duo sources grapes from the Anaba estate and from exclusive, preferred vineyard partners. Meticulously farmed rootstocks and grape clones are carefully selected, based on each vineyard's soil to assure that each variety is suited to its environment and yields exceptional fruit.

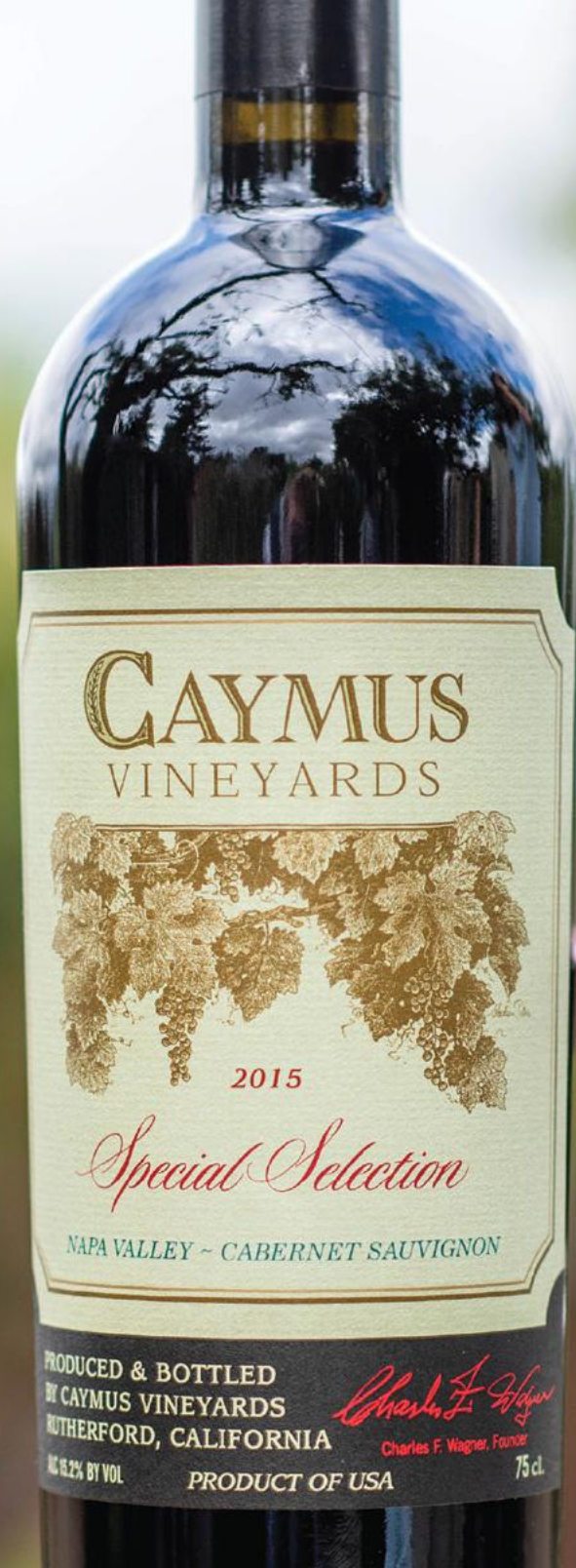
Visitor experiences include the Classic Flight, an introduction to Anaba Wines, the Estate Flight, featuring six single-vineyard selections, and the Vintners Reserve Flight, an educator-led comparative tasting of Anaba proprietors' favorite small-lot wine selections, each of which was inspired by their travels throughout the wine regions of the old world, particularly Burgundy and the Rhône Valley. Reservations are encouraged and are required for parties of six or more and for the Vintners Reserve experience.

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Sausalito Happenings

By Karen Aiken

Volunteers are the lifeblood of Sausalito. This community of 7,000 residents has over 276 active nonprofits. Numerous causes benefit from efforts of organizations including the Youth Sailing program, Nepal Youth Foundation, Operation Diana (an elephant advocacy group), the Marine Mammal Center, and Call of the Sea, the tall ship ocean educational program now in Mexico. Opportunities to volunteer are abundant.

Sausalito is a diversified community, and its citizens love to live locally and on a global scale. Fundraising events this spring include the White Party Gala sponsored by the Sausalito Woman's Club and the



Rotary Club. The local rotary club and the Viña del Mar Chile Rotary Club are partnering to sponsor the first marine animal hospital in the southern hemisphere, modeled after the highly successful Sausalito Marine Mammal Center. The Southern Marine Animal Center will be located on the coastline of Sausalito Sister City Viña del Mar, Chile, and is founded by the Susan Roe Foundation.

This year, the Youth Sailing Exchange, sponsored by the Sausalito Yacht Club Youth Sailing Foundation and the Sausalito Sister City Program, will be in Cascais, Portugal. Paula Espejo—who represents Chile in the 2019-2020 eXXpedition Round the World, in which 300 women cover 38,000 nautical miles, taking water samples and studying plastics and toxics in the world's oceans—is coming from Sausalito's Chilean sister city. Her trip is sponsored by the Sausalito Yacht Club and the Sister City Program.

In June, 12 Japanese youth from sister city Sakaide will stay with Sausalito residents for a week to experience the local lifestyle. On May 6, the Discovery Museum's open house at Fort Baker promises fun for the young'uns on May 6. And art is alive and well with the Artists Faire on Princess Street on April 18 and open studios all over Sausalito May 2-3 and 9-10.







SPELLBOUND

Celebrating Helgi Tomasson's record-breaking 35th year as Artistic Director and Principal Choreographer of San Francisco Ballet, SF Ballet's Opening Night Gala, *SPELLBOUND*, featured three world premieres by Val Caniparoli, Yuri Possokhov, and Myles Thatcher, as well as SF Ballet premiere of Dawson's *Swan Lake* pas de deux.

Chaired by Patricia Dale Roberts, the event began with a cocktail reception and black-tie fundraising dinner at San Francisco City Hall followed by the evening's performance. The show featured 12 pieces. "For the first time in 30 years, I decided to ask three choreographers to create new pas de deux or pas de trois for opening night," says Tomasson. "What connects these choreographers is that they are all close members of the San Francisco Ballet family, and they each represent a different generation of dancemaking."

Caniparoli, choreographer of the internationally-sensational *Lambarena*, joined the Company in 1972 before being appointed Principal Character Dancer in 1985. Yuri Possokhov, SF Ballet's current Choreographer in Residence, danced with SF Ballet for 12 years before transitioning to choreographing full time, and now creates works for companies around the globe from the Joffrey to Bolshoi Ballet.

In 2015, Myles Thatcher, a current member of the corps de ballet, became one of the first corps members in at least three decades to choreograph a new work for SF Ballet's subscription season. He's since created a handful of works for the Company, including *Ghost in the Machine* and *Otherness* for 2018 *Unbound: A Festival of New Works*.



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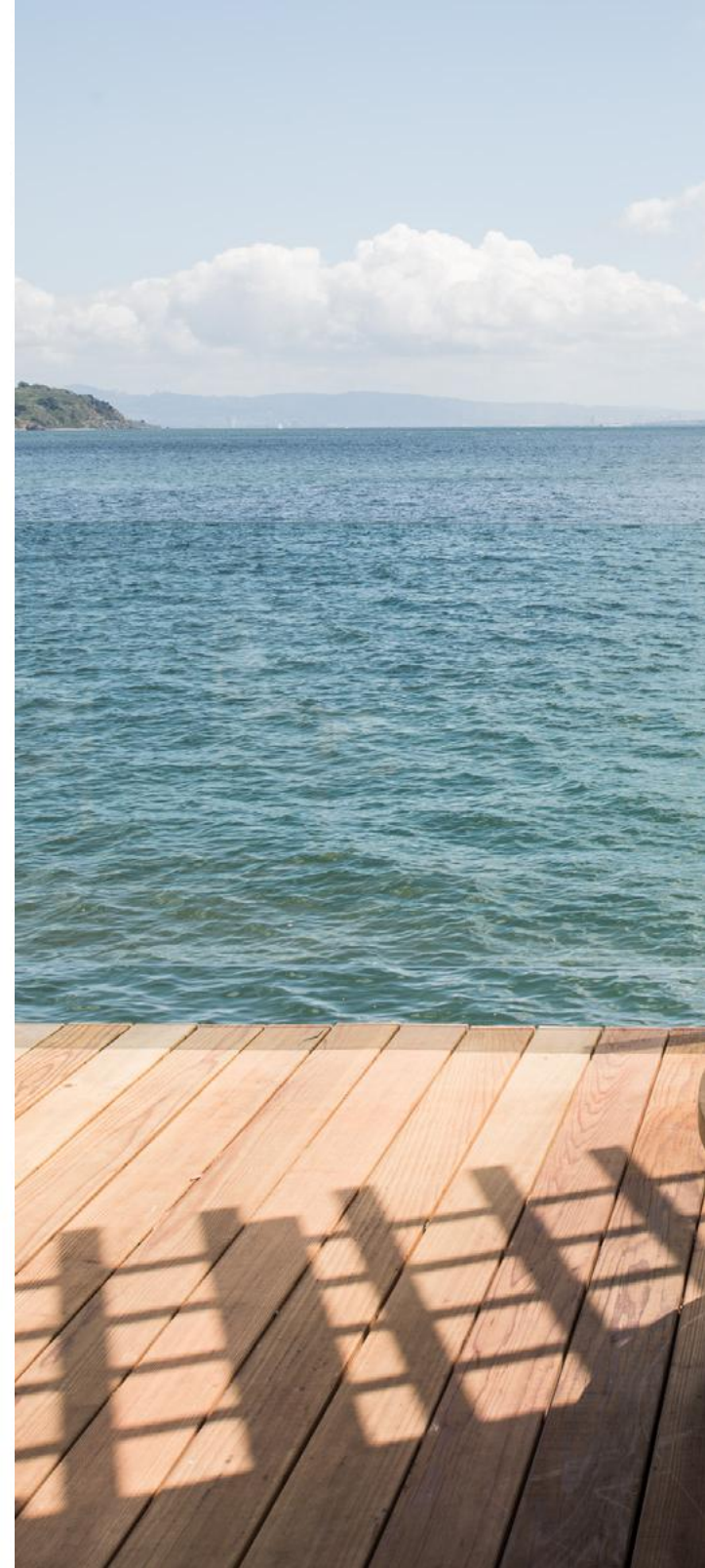
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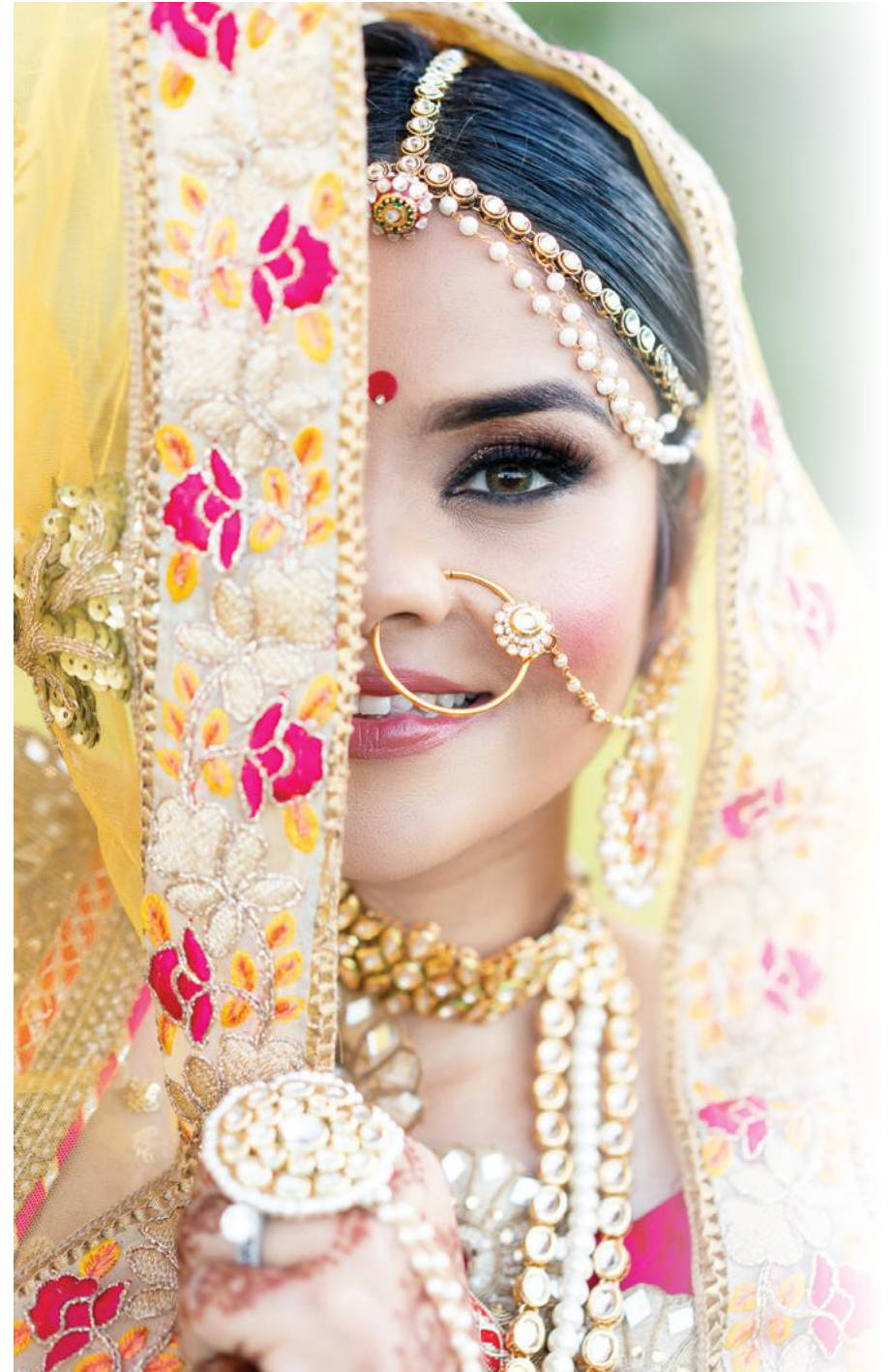


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Authentic Image

By Jennifer Moulaison

Since she was young, Paulina has always had a camera in her hand. Taking pictures of anything and everything, the owner of Paulina R Photography has shaped her passion into a rewarding career. Though she fills her free time shooting all manner of subjects and scenes in the world around her, Paulina's professional expertise lies in capturing timeless memories.

She began her career in front of the camera rather than behind it, as a professional model in Europe. Modeling provided the perfect foundation for her in becoming a skilled photographer. "I was able to build a deep understanding for image composition as well as posing and how to move and behave for the camera. These are skills I rely on heavily today when working with clients," she explains. Using natural light, humor, and attention to detail to capture candid moments, she is also thoughtful in her picture taking. "Many photographers take hundreds of shots, snapping away. I prefer to take my time setting up a shot and take only what's needed to create an authentic image," she says.

Paulina feels fortunate to be able to travel. "Growing up in Germany, traveling was as simple as hopping on a train and ending up somewhere amazing like Amsterdam in a matter of a couple hours," she says. While many of her travel experiences have been exceptional, Paulina relishes the opportunity to return to her home here on the peninsula. "I'm always so inspired by the natural beauty of this area," she says. "I never tire of working here and having the opportunity to capture such special moments with spectacular backdrops like Pebble Beach."

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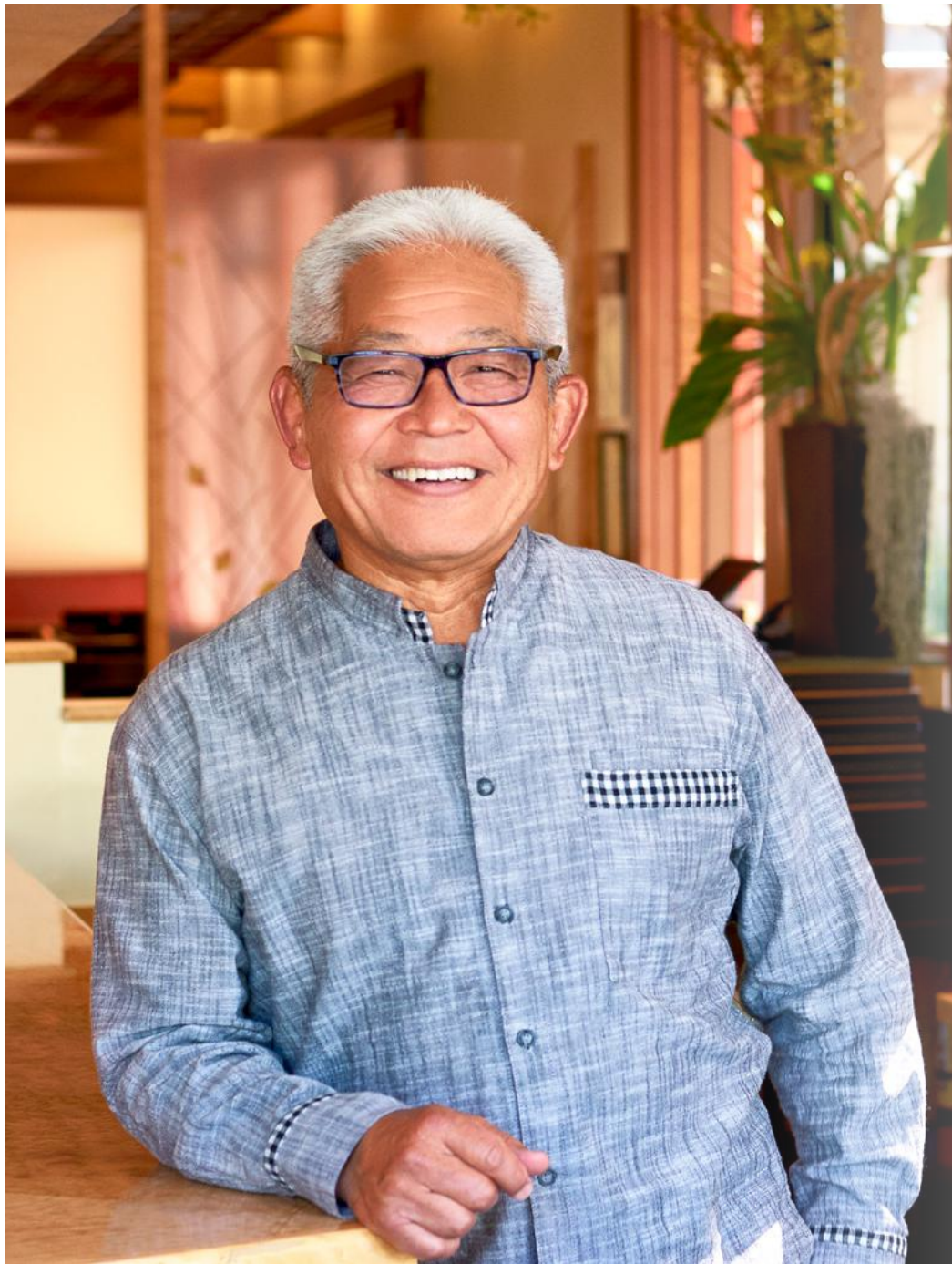
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Internationally Recognized, Locally Beloved

By Fran Edndicott Miller

Known as one of the best sushi restaurants in the nation, Sausalito's Sushi Ran has been a favorite of locals and visitors for more than three decades. Key to its success is a combination of authentic food, prompt service, and impeccable hospitality, according to owner Yoshi Tome, who has greeted guests there personally each day since 1986.

More than a restaurateur, Tome is part diplomat and part culinary ambassador. He is recognized as such by his longtime Marin County community as well as by the Japanese government, for whom he consults on culture and cuisine. The Okinawan native fell in love with the United States in 1981, while serving in a yearlong teacher exchange program. He later relocated to Sausalito, where for three years he managed the restaurant he would later buy and rename Sushi Ran.

Situated on a quiet side street, Sushi Ran routinely receives accolades from Zagat, Michelin, *Travel & Leisure*, *USA Today*, and regional periodicals. Tome opens 70 percent of the restaurant to reservations but saves remaining seats for locals and regulars, such as Lois and Artie Feld of neighboring Tiburon, who for ten years have dined there every Friday night and entrusted Tome to make their dinner selections. "It's the best sushi in Northern California," says Lois.

Tome regularly visits Tokyo's iconic Toyosu Market to select the purveyors who provide him with the premium fish used to make Sushi Ran's stellar dishes. They know that the discerning Tome and his chefs (who regularly place at the top in international sushi competitions) accept only the highest quality provisions. The kitchen is a laboratory for innovation, and the staff thrive on creating new ways to present the best seasonal ingredients. Sushi Ran's menu features a fresh, eclectic blend of classic Japanese

sushi, innovative Pacific cuisine, flavor-intense vegetarian dishes, and a selection of beef and chicken options that satiate non-pescatarians.

The menu also features over 20 domestic and international wines by the glass as well as an exceptional 200-bottle wine list. But Tome takes particular pleasure in introducing guests to the joys of Japanese liquors: whiskey, *shōchū*, *awamori* (an Okinawan-specific spirit that he is the first in the country to carry), and, of course, sake, one of the most purely made alcoholic beverages on the planet. It contains no sulfites, tannins, or unnatural ingredients. Tome features, by the glass, 30 sakes of varying styles, served in a classic wine glass rather than the traditional ceramic sake cup. "The better to appreciate the aromas," says Tome. In other firsts, he offers a rosé sake, which contains red yeast, and a sake and cheese pairing.

Long committed to giving back to his community, Tome has served as a director with the Sausalito Chamber of Commerce, was a five-term president of the Japanese Restaurant Association of Northern California, and is a key member of the Asian Chef's Association. He is one of the founders of the Sausalito Sister City program with Japan's Sakaide. In response to the 2011 tsunami disaster in Japan, he and his wife, artist Suzie Buchholz (whose paintings grace Sushi Ran's dining room walls), organized "Hope To Japan," raising funds for disaster relief. An avid athlete, Tome is an active practitioner of yoga, hiking, and cycling.

By bringing what he loves most about his culture—hospitality, cuisine, and sake—to the San Francisco Bay Area and continually innovating, Tome pays homage to his heritage, celebrates his California community, and shares all of it with his guests.

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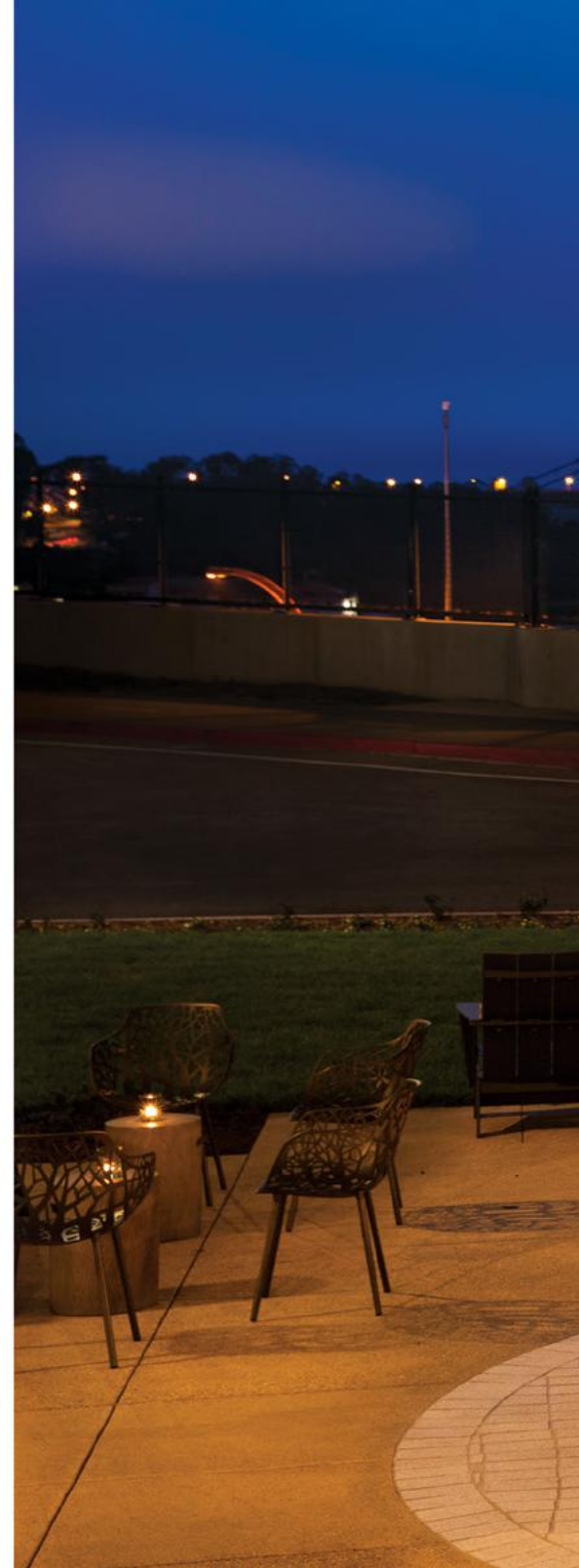


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Experience for the Senses

By Jennifer Moulaison | Photos by Darren Lovecchio

It goes without saying that grapes are synonymous with wine. But what about something a little stronger—vodka, perhaps? Not a radical idea for the Hanson family, who, through a collaboration with nearby Ceja Family Vineyard, turned it into a lucrative family operation.

“Vodka is interesting because, unlike other liquors, the determining element of vodka is how high it’s distilled rather than what the base product is,” says Alanna Hanson, head of public relations, marketing, and social media for the Hanson of Sonoma Distillery. According to Alanna, her brothers’ concept of an organic, grape-based vodka was largely inspired by the region. It took over 155 formulas and enlisting the expertise of renowned mixologist Tony Abou-Ganim to create the perfect product, which has won prestigious awards in the industry and served as the base for the distillery’s mouth-watering all-natural infusions.

The preceding generation of Hansons, Alanna’s father Scott, supported himself as an artist while attending the University of California Berkley. Eventually he opened a

small gallery in San Francisco. He and his wife, Judy, went on to own 23 galleries across the United States and Europe. “About 12 years ago I intended to retire, selling all but our Sausalito gallery, which has always been very special to us,” says Scott.

Retirement didn’t come easily for Scott, who oversees production as the CEO for Hanson Spirits. Eventually, the concept of pairing art with spirits came about. “Both are art, really, just one is consumable,” says Alanna. The Hanson Gallery Fine Art in Sausalito now serves as a tasting venue for their unique spirits. The tasting room’s general manager previously worked with Thomas Keller, famed chef and restaurateur and the genius behind the Yountville restaurant Ad Hoc. Collaborating with vendors such as Chris Kollar Chocolates and California Caviar, the gallery offers a truly customer-based experience. “That’s really what we love most,” says Alanna. “Having a direct connection with both locals and tourists while supporting the exceptional vendors in the community is the most satisfying thing we’ve accomplished so far.”



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Breathtaking Vantage Point

By Fran Endicott Miller

Since its 2008 opening, Cavallo Point Lodge has served as a favorite spot for those who know that San Francisco is sometimes best enjoyed from afar. Nestled at the foot of the Golden Gate Bridge in Sausalito on what was once the Fort Baker military base, the resort provides unparalleled panoramic views of the orange icon and the San Francisco skyline. And with a fleet of Vintage Electric Cafe bikes at guests' disposal, both are a just a short ride away.

Rows of strategically placed Adirondack chairs are scattered throughout the large property to offer views of the Bay. The resort's two main building verandas feature lineups of sun-facing old-fashioned rockers, which provide the perfect spot to enjoy the complimentary evening wine hour and complimentary morning coffee and house made pastries. Lofty blankets are provided for when the inevitable fog rolls in under the bridge.

Cavallo Point Lodge honors its Fort Baker roots by using the fort's 24 Colonial Revival buildings, which were built between 1901 and 1915 and take full advantage of the breathtaking Bay scenery. The buildings house the Lodge's two restaurants, administrative offices, and meeting rooms. Former officer's quarters serve as the resort's historic rooms and suites, each featuring expansive foyers, fireplaces, and front porches. The sleek, contemporary rooms and suites feature sustainably designed windows that emphasize the stunning view. Construction of these quarters helped the resort to earn a Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) gold certification.

On any given day, Cavallo Point is host to couples of all ages, families, wedding parties, corporate retreaters, and well-behaved dogs. Dog-friendly amenities include beds, food, water bowls, and a welcome bag of treats. Canines are permitted on the main building verandas and can be seen under foot and table as their owners dine and take in the view.

Activity seekers can find hiking, morning yoga, or kite flying on the green expanse of the main parade ground, but the electric bicycles alone are worth the stay. These sleek, retro vehicles allow for easy and endless exploration around the hilly terrain.

The hands-on Children's Bay Area Discovery Museum is within walking distance of the Lodge, and the Marine Mammal Center is close by. The Cavallo Point Cooking School provides classes within its state-of-the-art open kitchen. And tucked behind the resort's acclaimed gift shop, The Mercantile is Cavallo Point's Art Gallery, a small, atmospheric public space that stages works by such artistic luminaries as Imogen Cunningham, Ruth Asawa, and Ansel Adams.

Cavallo Point offers shuttle service into downtown Sausalito, where one can find many dining options, such as the stellar Poggio Trattoria. But with two dining spots on site, Farley Bar and Murray Circle, guests often feel compelled to settle within the picturesque premises.







SF Jazz Gala 2020

On January 30, SFJAZZ hosted the SFJAZZ Gala honoring Mavis Staples with the SFJAZZ Lifetime Achievement Award.

Gala co-chairs, Mick Hellman and Denise Young Smith, helped produce the event, raising proceeds for the SFJAZZ artistic and education programs. The SFJAZZ Center was abuzz with cultural and political leaders, celebrities, artists, and music enthusiasts.

The event celebrates Staples' artistic vision and contributions to global music over the last 70 years. Staples is Grammy Award winner, a chart-topping soul/R&B/gospel singer, Kennedy Center honoree, and has been hailed as "one of America's defining voices of freedom and peace" by NPR. Having dedicated her life to being a messenger for love, faith, justice, brotherhood, and joy, Staples was celebrated by several notable attendees, including Mayor London Breed, Joachim and Nancy Bechtle, Molly Coye, Lisa and Ken Jackson, Katie Hall and Tom Knutsen Saori and Mike Kappus, Ann and Roger McNamee, Lisa Pritzker, Rick Swig, Adam Swig, and more!

VIP Gala supporters enjoyed a lively cocktail hour and seated dinner with featured artists followed by the Gala Concert featuring some of the most exciting names in music, including Bonnie Raitt, Rosanne Cash, and SFJAZZ Collective. The performances culminated in the SFJAZZ Gala After Party. Gala-goers and after-partiers celebrated with a plentiful array of the finest cuisine and drinks throughout the evening by Paula LeDuc. Late-night fare was provided by SFJAZZ's favorite neighborhood spots.



Becoming Spider-Man

By Nora Heston Tarte



In 2014, Ricky Mena, then 30 years old, walked into a children's hospital to visit a friend's child in the hospital. Before stepping into the room, Mena slipped into the men's restroom to change into a \$1,400 custom-made Spider-Man suit he purchased from a costumier. Not long into the visit, Mena was escorted from the facility by security, and claimed his name was Peter Parker to avoid getting into trouble. Since then, Mena has visited more than 15,000 sick children around the world, donning the Spider-Man suit, and he hasn't been asked to leave. With invitations from prestigious children's hospitals, a verified blue checkmark on Instagram, and a solid fundraising platform for his 501(c)3 nonprofit, his services are free of charge to the children's families.

The idea to become Spider-Man came to Mena literally in a dream. Down on his luck after walking away from a blossoming career in the Los Angeles music industry, Mena was sleeping on a friend's couch while working toward becoming a personal trainer. One night, his deceased grandmother visited him while he slept, telling him to become Spider-Man and visit infirmed children. "It just felt too much like real life," says Mena. "It didn't feel like a dream."

With only \$300 to his name, Mena embraced his risk-taking wild side and sold his Chrysler 300 to buy the costume. Mena's plan didn't take off smoothly—he experienced a lot of rejection, mostly because he lacked formal training in interacting with infirmed children. Mena persevered, as he wasn't looking for a paycheck for the gig, he just wanted a way to give back.

That moment in the hospital before he was asked to leave helped Mena discover the importance of his vision. Jeremiah, the little boy he visited, was

thrilled and his mother's images went viral on social media. "It was just so moving to see how many people were asking in the comments, 'Who is this person?' and 'How can we get Spider-Man to come over here?'" Mena recalls.

The road to becoming Spider-Man hasn't been without bumps. For a long time, Mena lived with friends gratis on the condition that he pursued the Spider-Man gig. He worked as a bouncer and a personal trainer to make ends meet. In 2015, Heart of a Hero, a nonprofit organization, was born, and Mena and his wife, Kendall, who plays Spider-Gwen, began bringing in donations. Mena now plays Spider-Man full-time; he had to quit personal training to fulfill the large number of requests he was getting to visit children in hospitals, hospice care, and at homes.

An acutely distressing experience, however, almost derailed his operation. After a two-week period during which Mena held two children as they breathed their last breaths, he took a month off from playing Spider-Man to go to therapy and overcome the post-traumatic stress that he subsequently experienced. It was one thing to be a part of a child's life, it was another to be a part of their death. During that time, he had to decide if this is truly what he wanted for his life. Mena realized that to him, playing Spider-Man was both giving back to sick children and a way to serve God.

Mena is thriving as Spider-Man, traveling the world to bring toys to children who need a pick-me-up and, most importantly, to be their hero in a time of need. "Kids live in a world that we as adults don't," says Mena. "Being a hero is a pathway to reinforce their ability to fight."

Learn more at www.HeartOfAHero.org.