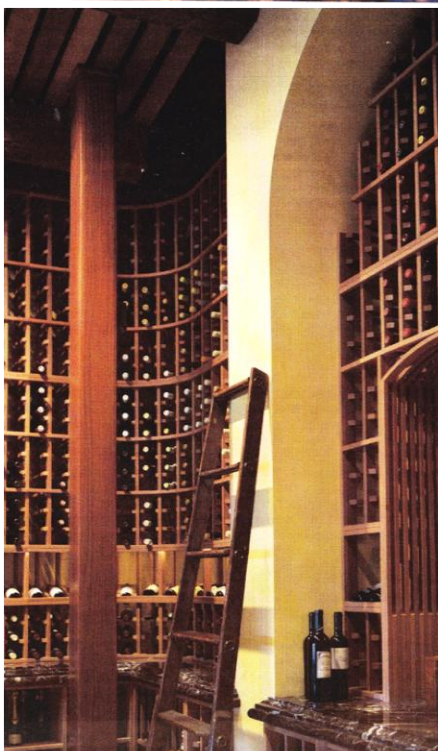
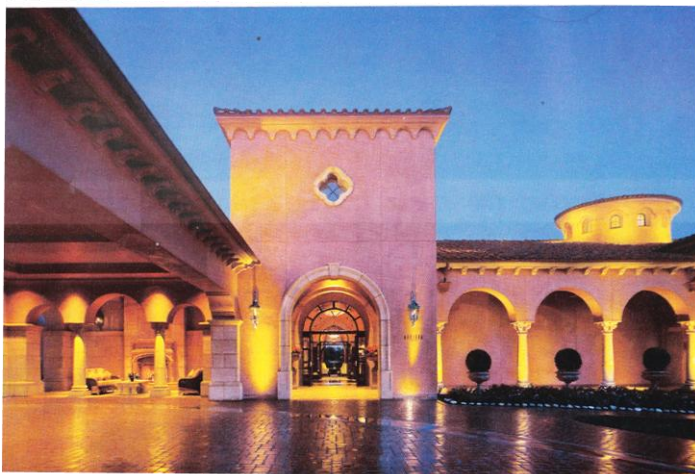


Eating California

Everything in moderation, they say—unless you're staying at one of the Golden State's celebrated gastro inns.

BY LESLIE ANDREA WESTBROOK

Whales travel 500 miles for their sustenance—committed California foodies eagerly do the same. The Golden State is, after all, a gastronomic mecca, serving up a natural bounty of food and wine. Want to eat, drink, and be merry ... and not have to designate a driver or pop for a cab? Better yet, want to finish a superb wine-soaked meal by toddling off to a luxe guestroom at one of California's best gastro inns? If an after-meal stroll doesn't suit your taste, a couple of the following properties (Meadowood and Grand Del Mar) even shuttle guests between their room and the dining room. Close to home, I would be remiss not to recommend Tydes Restaurant & Bar in Montecito, where chef Joel Huff, a third-generation Ventura native and resident, turns out topnotch dishes exclusively for guests staying at the adjacent Four Seasons hotel and members of the private Coral Casino Beach & Cabana Club. But for this issue we decided to go further afield, north and south. Just like whales.



Above: Addison, the Grand Del Mar's signature restaurant, boasts the pinnacle of culinary refinement.

Top right: Contemporary French influences can be seen on chef William Bradley's menu, which offers just four seasonal courses.

Left: California cult wines join distinctive selections from around the world in the wine room.

GRAND DEL MAR, SAN DIEGO

If opulent, Italian palazzo-style architecture, gilt lamps, chandeliers, and marble rock your gondola, the Grand Del Mar delivers in a transformative setting that may make you think you are in Italy rather than inland San Diego. The opulent rooms are a bit over the top for this writer's taste, but luxuriously comfortable just the same.

The property's signature five-diamond restaurant, Addison, is named for famed Palm Beach architect Addison Mizner, whose Italianate aesthetic informed the resort's architecture. Dining at Addison brings new meaning to "dinner theatre," as the experience is quite a production, indeed.

Chef William Bradley has earned his well-deserved kudos to date, including five-star and five-diamond ratings and several James Beard nominations. We began with an amuse bouche that was definitely five-star: pickled cranberries with crème fraîche and basil (it would make a great Christmas dish), and puff pastry canapés of mascarpone, olive oil, and sea salt. Star power cuisine—including sea scallops in a lemon purée, calamari risotto Milanese, foie gras deux façon in a cèpe noir syrup, and Oregon morel mushrooms with apple wood bacon—more than satisfied, as did the wild loup de mer in a Thai coconut curry and lamb rack persillé.

Artisanal lemon brioche with house made butter provided a filling distraction, while amazing global wine pairings—2003 Palazzo della Torre from Verona, Italy; 2007 Josef Leitz Rudesheimer Drachenstein Riesling Spätlese; De Trafford "straw wine" from the Stellenbosch region of South Africa; Gruner Vertliner "smaragd" from Domane Wachau; and 2007 Alziner Muhlpunt—added considerably to the evening's festivities. There is a dance to the service; cutlery is turned with a flourish on the minimalist table settings.

On another front, a guided hike through the remarkably wild Los Peñasquitos Canyon Preserve is de rigueur, while the main swimming pool and spa provide dreamy escapes. All in all, a memorable special occasion destination, well worth the journey 150 miles south of the Ventura County border.

5300 Grand Del Mar Court, San Diego; 858.314.2000, thegranddelmar.com