



RANCHO VALENCIA

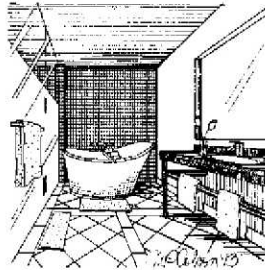
RANCHO SANTA FE, CALIFORNIA

THE COAST OF Southern California offers a combination of scenic splendor and agreeable climate found in only a handful of places around the globe. It doesn't take much to lure me back to this Riviera-like landscape, and the reopening of one of my favorite resorts provided a welcome excuse for a visit. In early 2012, Rancho Valencia closed for a \$30 million overhaul. Prior to the renovation, reports that it felt dated had been trickling in, and I was eager to see whether the 10 months of work, undertaken by the resort's new owners, had been time and money well-spent.

Our suite had a secluded location at the far end of a paved footpath. Its Spanish-style interior came with wrought-iron chandeliers hanging from a vaulted ceiling, a sunken living room and a gas fireplace. Blue-and-white Moorish-inspired tiles enlivened the bath, equipped with a steam shower and soaking tub. Our terrace, with a Jacuzzi, invited lazy afternoons.

The food was delicious, though the beautiful farm-to-table *Veladora* restaurant really showed its mettle at dinner. I especially enjoyed the briny "Breath of the Sea" appetizer, a jewel-like composition of sea urchin, prawns, oysters, clams, cucumber and seaweed in a cool dashi broth. Next door, the lively *Pony Room* bar draws a chic local crowd.

We also took advantage of the upgraded 2.5-acre spa, comprising a fitness center, yoga pavilion and 10 treatment rooms arrayed around hushed garden courtyards. Fireplaces seemed to be everywhere, even in my treatment room, which also had a soaking tub on its patio. It felt remarkably indulgent to bask in a warm, myrrh-infused bath with cool, soft drizzle speckling my face. I left feeling thoroughly renewed and at peace.



Most Glamorous Bath

Attention to detail proved to be the hallmark of the **Capella Washington, D.C., Georgetown**, and nowhere was this more evident than in the bath of our refined Deluxe Room. A black marble floor and cream Venetian plaster walls created an understated but elegant setting, the highlight of which was a sculptural white freestanding limestone tub. It was a welcome sight at the end of our long walks around the nation's capital. Perfect lighting; well-stocked towel racks; numerous convenient hooks; and a generous supply of Acqua di Parma toiletries were all much appreciated.

“ A small complimentary white leather travel kit contained extras for the journey home.”

EL ENCANTO

SANTA BARBARA, CALIFORNIA

AFTER A SEVEN-YEAR restoration by Orient-Express, Santa Barbara's oldest hotel reopened last March. For decades, its famous terrace provided a glamorous stage for movie stars and presidents alike. Located above Santa Barbara in the residential Riviera neighborhood, El Encanto first opened in 1917. Its glory days lasted from the 1920s until the 1950s, after which decline slowly set in.

Spread across seven acres overlooking the Pacific, the 92-room property now comprises Bungalow Suites, smaller Bungalows and new, modern Luxury Suites. The original tile-roofed bungalows were raised so that new foundations could be constructed and modern comforts, such as radiant-heat tile flooring, installed. Thoroughly traditional on the outside, our bungalow came with an attractive sunroom sitting area and a bedroom with a gas fireplace. The splendid bath was almost as large as the bedroom. Strolling through the grounds before dinner, we easily saw why El Encanto has inspired such loyalty and affection.

In the restaurant, Executive Chef Patrice Martineau, formerly of *Daniel* in New York, serves "California Coastal" cuisine. His menu has a farm-to-table ethos: Fruits and vegetables come from an on-site garden, and cheeses are crafted with milk from Ellie, the resort's own cow. In a nod to tradition, Martineau still serves the hotel's famed floating island dessert, the "Enchanted 'Oeuf à la Neige,'" which dates to the 1920s. New amenities include an infinity pool, plus a magnificent spa that employs seasonal organic products.

Orient-Express has done a fine job, and the meticulous restoration of this famous sanctuary will delight its many admirers.





Indelible Memories of 2013

TRAVEL IS OFTEN EXHILARATING and intoxicating, but it also bequeaths a fund of memories that is a lifelong source of solace and delight. Here are four highlights from 2013 that will forever inspire interludes of fireside reverie.

Strolling in a Paris Market

The famous open-air food market on the Avenue du Président-Wilson runs from the Place d'Iéna in the 16th arrondissement down to the Avenue Marceau. We were immediately struck by the artistry with which the summer abundance of France was displayed: a mound of glossy black cherries flanked crates of fuzzy peaches, including the juicy *pêche de vigne* that the French especially prize; white and purple eggplants; and thumb-size zucchini with their orange flowers still attached. At another stand, we fell into conversation with a farmer selling lamb, fresh milk and cheeses from his farm, La Bergerie du Mesnil in Normandy's Sainte Scolasse sur Sarthe. And nearby, we came upon the Bar à Patates, selling more than a dozen varieties of new-crop potatoes. There was a long line at the stand of the famous market gardener Joël Thiébault, who supplies fresh seasonal vegetables to many of the best restaurants in Paris. But the grand finale was provided by the stall of fishmonger Jacky Lorenzo, where live shrimp from Brittany rustled under a jute cover, and the line-caught sea bass made us yearn for a kitchen.

A Botanical Safari

The Grootbos Private Nature Reserve is located near Hermanus, 100 miles east of Cape Town. The southwestern tip of Africa encompasses the so-called "Cape Floral Region," a botanical paradise and hot spot for plant diversity. Although the smallest of the world's six recognized floral kingdoms, the Cape region — locally called *fynbos* (fine bush) — boasts 9,250 species, 70 percent of which are endemic to the region. We explored the reserve in an open vehicle with a passionate and wholly exceptional guide.

As a result, this unusual excursion proved as thrilling as a search for big game.

California Spa Heaven

I took advantage of a rainy day to spend some time in Rancho Valencia's sumptuously remodeled spa, a 2.5-acre complex comprising a fitness center, yoga pavilion and 10 treatment rooms arrayed around hushed garden courtyards. My "Sixth Sense Ritual" started with a myrrh-infused bath on my treatment room's patio. It felt gloriously indulgent to soak in the fragrant water as cool, soft drizzle speckled my face. Inside the treatment room, warmed by a kiva-style woodburning fireplace, the ritual continued with an expert body and scalp massage. Throughout, a laundry load of hot towels kept me cozy and relaxed. Wrapped in a warmed bathrobe, I left feeling thoroughly renewed and at peace.

Costa Rica Quetzal

El Silencio Lodge is surrounded by a private 500-acre cloud forest reserve. Hiking in silence permits guests to encounter a dazzling array of tropical birds including tanagers, chlorophonia, hummingbirds and rare black guan. Despite this abundance, nothing prepared us for the sight of an iridescent-green resplendent quetzal perched in plain view. Venerated by the Aztecs and Maya, the sacred bird is 14 inches long, with a 26-inch tail streamer. Despite its spectacular appearance, it is notoriously difficult to spot, and the encounter was unquestionably the highlight of our trip to Costa Rica.

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LAST WORD

A New Look for the Newsletter

Over the past 34 years, I have made many minor changes to *The Hideaway Report*: The index has migrated quite frequently; column widths have waxed and waned; and even the precise shade of green has evolved. My aim has been to prevent the publication from appearing old-fashioned without losing its feeling of familiarity. Above all, I wanted its restrained design to suggest integrity, and to inspire confidence in the reliability of its advice. I have considered using color photographs on innumerable occasions, but always worried that the newsletter might come to resemble a brochure. Recently, however, I have been persuaded that the time has come for a substantive change. In the past year, I experimented with color supplements on golf and cruises and found that they were popular with subscribers. So, as you will see, I have decided to take the plunge. Henceforth, *The Hideaway Report* will be a 12-page, four-color publication. I trust that its new appearance will still seem dignified and inspire trust. But perhaps it will also be more evocative, and convey the romance of travel a little more directly. Of course, for even more extensive illustration, plus video, be sure to visit our newly redesigned website at AndrewHarper.com.