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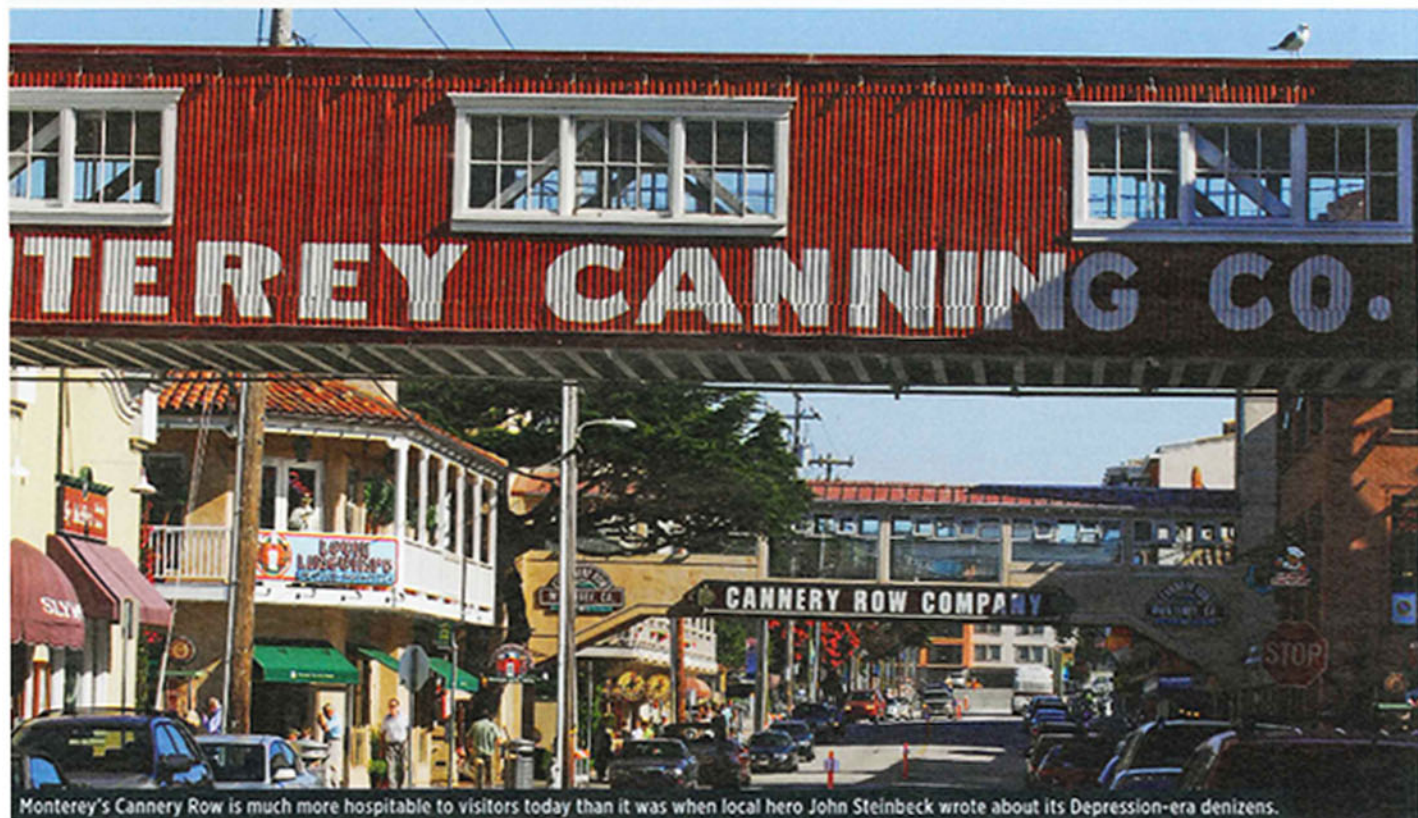
DISCOVERING THE MONTEREY COAST

BEAUTY, ADVENTURE, GREAT FOOD AND WINE AWAIT

BY TIM FISH PHOTOGRAPHS BY ALANNA HALE



Perched on the cliffs of Big Sur near Highway 1, the Post Ranch Inn offers fine dining and spectacular sunset views.



Monterey's Cannery Row is much more hospitable to visitors today than it was when local hero John Steinbeck wrote about its Depression-era denizens.

Striking scenery is just one reason to visit the Monterey Coast. Few destinations in California have such wide appeal and diversity, offering history, outdoor adventures and wine country, as well as fine dining and lodging opportunities more often found in large cities.

Located about 120 miles south of San Francisco, the Monterey Peninsula is the centerpiece of the region, anchoring the south shore of Monterey Bay. Most of Monterey County's residents live inland and to the north, while the coastal area is sparsely populated. The city of Monterey has just 30,000 residents, and Carmel-by-the-Sea, Carmel Valley, Pebble Beach and Big Sur have far fewer.

That means there's room to explore. The Spanish were doing just that when they founded Monterey in 1770. Monterey was the capital of California under Spanish and Mexican rule, until the United States captured the city in 1846. By the early 1900s, fishing was king, and Cannery Row supplied the country with canned sardines and salmon. Unfortunately, overfishing led to the collapse of the industry in the mid-1950s.

Spanish missionaries made the first wines in the region in the late 1700s. The modern wine era began here in the 1960s, with a few stalwarts such as Chalone, but most of the region's wine was blended into the mass-market bottlings of Paul Masson and others. "Even when I came here in 1997," says winemaker Peter Figge, of Figge Cellars, "85 percent of the fruit was trucked outside the county."

That's beginning to change. Monterey County is large, with about 40,000 acres of vineyards; its winegrowing centerpiece is Santa Lucia Highlands. Since the late 1990s, the Highlands have gained national attention thanks to the success of vineyards such as Pisoni, Mer Soleil and Garys', as well as a wave of new producers, including Roar and Morgan.

In recent years, a host of small wineries, like Figge Cellars, have set up shop. They provide visitors to the Monterey Coast with

plenty of opportunities to discover new things. You can taste a range of wines in both Carmel-by-the-Sea and Carmel Valley—two areas where a number of wineries have opened tasting rooms in close proximity to one another.

Beyond wine touring, there's much to do. The Monterey Bay Aquarium is among the best zoological institutions in the world. Historic sites abound, and beach hikes and whale-watching excursions are popular. Pebble Beach is a golf destination, with world-class courses that hug the ocean. The region has two of the most breathtaking scenic drives on the California Coast: the 17-Mile Drive on the Monterey Peninsula, and Highway 1, which traverses the rugged and beautiful terrain of Big Sur south of Carmel.

If you want to be pampered at a hotel or first-class restaurant, the Monterey Coast doesn't disappoint. Visitors have a host of options, from the secluded luxury of the Post Ranch Inn, in Big Sur, to the good-value InterContinental Clement Monterey, on the piers of lively Cannery Row.

The dining scene is surprisingly sophisticated, including *Wine Spectator* Grand Award-winning restaurants Sierra Mar and Marinus, while another nine restaurants hold a Best of Award of Excellence. (For a complete list of area winners, see page 56.) Wendy Heilmann, Pebble Beach Resort's director of wine and spirits, sees a growing interest in food and wine from locals and visitors alike.

In the Tap Room at Pebble Beach Lodge, where golfers like to spend big after a good round, Heilmann sells a lot of cult wines, including Screaming Eagle, and top Burgundies such as Domaine de la Romanée-Conti, but curiosity extends beyond those at the other restaurants she handles. "We see a lot more interest in wines of this region," Heilmann says. "The wines have really started to come up on the radar."

The same could be said for the Monterey Coast in general. It is fast becoming a must-visit destination on the West Coast.

Bernardus Lodge

415 Carmel Valley Road, Carmel Valley Telephone (888) 648-9463 Website www.bernarduslodge.com Rooms 57 Suite 1 Rates \$455-\$2,050

This intimate retreat in the foothills of the Santa Lucia Mountains recently changed ownership. While an upgrade is in the works, the lodge maintains its appeal for easy luxury. With a vibrant and modern adobe design, the resort is elegant, while retaining rustic highlights of limestone, rough-hewn logs and ceramic tiles. It combines the privacy of a country getaway with the amenities of a larger resort, including a pool and a spa and fine dining at Marinus restaurant. The spacious guest rooms have vaulted ceilings, fireplaces, two-person tubs and French doors that open to a patio or balcony. Located 10 miles inland, in Carmel Valley, its vineyard setting is sunnier and warmer than the coast. Another plus: It's near the area wineries and tasting rooms.

Carmel Valley Ranch

1 Old Ranch Road, Carmel Valley Telephone (866) 405-5037 Website www.carmelvalleyranch.com Suites 139 Rates \$325-\$875

After a \$40 million makeover in 2010, this once dusty 1980s-era resort has become a summer camplike getaway for affluent families. The ranch covers 500 acres, much of it wooded and mountainous. There are 8 miles of hiking trails, a spa and two pools, as well as an 18-hole golf course designed by noted course architect Pete Dye, a working vineyard and an organically grown garden. Native oaks shade the three clusters of guest suites. The suites themselves are large, and each includes a living area with a pullout bed. Interiors are finished in attractive warm colors, with wood floors and slate-accented fireplaces. The menu at The Lodge restaurant favors local ingredients, and the wine list offers a solid selection of 450 bottles.

InterContinental Clement Monterey

750 Cannery Row, Monterey Telephone 866-781-2406 Website www.ictheclementmonterey.com Rooms 192 Suites 16 Rates \$189-\$1,300

With a genial atmosphere and a prime location right on the blue water of the bay, the Clement is one of the newer additions to the Monterey scene. It's located just a few steps from the aquarium in the heart of an increasingly revitalized Cannery Row. The rooms are genteel, done in wood accents and soft colors. Many have gas fireplaces and large soaking tubs. The best rooms have balconies that overlook



Casa Palmero is the most intimate of Pebble Beach's three resorts, and feels like a village.

the water and provide views of the many seals and sea otters, while entry-level rooms are across the street but easily accessed via an enclosed pedestrian bridge. Restaurants, bars and entertainment are plentiful in the surrounding area.

Pebble Beach Resorts

The Lodge at Pebble Beach, 1700 17-Mile Drive; The Inn at Spanish Bay, 2700 17-Mile Drive; Casa Palmero, 1518 Cypress Drive; all Pebble Beach Telephone (800) 654-9300 Website www.pebblebeach.com Rooms 427 (among three resorts) Suites 27 (among three resorts) Rates \$635-\$3,725

Pebble Beach has three resorts, each with a distinct personality. The Lodge, built in 1919, offers classic old California elegance, with rooms that have a stylish formality. It also overlooks the 18th hole of the famed Pebble Beach Golf Links. The Inn at Spanish Bay is more contemporary in design, and the accommodations have a casually luxurious ambience. Guests gather nightly around firepits that look out to the ocean. The intimate setting of Casa Palmero evokes a small Mediterranean village, with flower-trellised walkways, red tile roofs and fountains. The rooms radiate an easy opulence. Restaurants, shopping, golf, spas and health clubs are all on the resorts' shared property.