

RIVIERA

ORANGE COUNTY

AWAY
WE
GO!

TOP TRAVEL SPOTS—FROM
MUSTIQUE TO MARRAKECH

+PLUS

Local O.C. Glam Gurus

Cali's Own Derek Lam

Get Lost at Carmel Valley Ranch

SoCal Style for Summer

& More Expanded Party Pages!

12000 BRISTOL STREET, SUITE 100, COSTA MESA, CA 92626

MODERNLUXURY.COM



SESS 1182 JUN

IWC

INTERNATIONAL WATCH CO. SCHAFFHAUSEN
SWITZERLAND, SINCE 1868

Guest Ranch

A posh outpost near coastal Cali reinvents the meaning of rural sprawl. | *By Kersten Wehde* |

Winding up Robinson Canyon Road toward Carmel Valley Ranch, afternoon sunlight streams through oaks and the sweet, still air glistens. A family of quail flits across the road and a deer bounds into the woods. I can't help but wonder if the concierge is watching this scene unfold from the window, fervently whispering into a Nextel phone, "Cue the deer!" And yet the magic of the recently renovated resort, unveiled last September, is quite real. Most everything about the property—from the sparkling air to the rope swings—is refreshingly playful and authentic. Picture 500 acres of luxurious rusticity, and not one inch of pretentiousness.

Those who were raised in Carmel and its namesake valley but abandoned it for SoCal, learned the cachet our hometown carries outside its borders—that you were dressed by animated birds until you were 18; that you are a hobbit, a monk or a cowboy; that Clint

RUSTIC, REVAMPED

From top: A hilltop yoga platform offers a view of the Santa Lucia Mountains; the renovated Carmel Valley Ranch lobby leads to The Lodge restaurant



is actually your godfather—and are protective of its stuck-in-another-century rep. Being surrounded by stasis and quiet affluence for so long, you're wary of those who would change things or make it rain. So, even though I knew the Ranch had devolved into a charmless property for "get off my lawn" types, and had learned that Hyatt scion John Pritzker had bought the beleaguered spot with plans to launch it into the five-star stratum, I was apprehensive. Would his \$35 mil redo update the valley's oft-sold acreage? Render it unrecognizable? Turn us into the new Napa? Answer: Yes.

Carmel Valley Ranch emerged from its makeover looking 20 years younger and twice as gorgeous. Take the links: The Pete Dye-designed golf course got a multimillion-dollar upgrade and now features a cozy, convivial Clubhouse that demands post-play discussion of the back nine, which snake through hillside vineyards and offer some of the resort's loveliest, sunniest vistas. (Nearby, Pebble Beach has the Pacific, but even Spyglass can't beat the Ranch's monopoly on "78

degrees and perfect, again.") Chef Tim Wood, a six-year vet of the esteemed Marinus, now at the culinary helm of The Lodge, pulls from 2 acres of organic gardens for his menu of locally sourced dishes. Indulgences continue at the brand-new, 10,500-square-foot spa, which makes brilliant use of the calming lavender found on the property. The sanctuary's 139 rooms are exquisitely appointed, each with its own souvenir box (bird whistles, seed packets) and some with wraparound decks. Afternoons are spent on photography walks, learning beekeeping or manipulating flora into essential oils. Fresh and far from stuffy, it's like summer camp but with more wine—or the wine country, with more fun.

And then there's the coup de grâce in the Carmel Valley vs. Napa matchup. In the end, Pritzker did all that I feared he would, and more—except for the new Napa thing. This is far superior to Napa. **B**

Rates from \$325, 1 Old Ranch Road, Carmel, 831.625.9500, carmelvalleyranch.com