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**CARMEL-NOT-BY-THE-SEA:**  
No, Dorothy, this isn't Tibet. Only a few miles  
from winery-dotted Carmel Valley Village are  
mystical views of local ranches and Mount Toro.  
Beyond it: the world-class vineyards of the  
Santa Lucia Highlands. SEE PAGE 72.



The twists and turns of Carmel Valley, the oft-overlooked wine region to the south that now has a destination resort, are the subject of Josh Sens' cover story on page 72.

## START

## Billions of reasons to hide

Billionaires come in many guises, but the ones around here generally prefer disguise. In all the large homes from Pacific Heights to Woodside, from St. Helena to Hillsborough, what distinguishes the residents with nine zeroes in their net worth from the ones with six or seven? Nothing, if they can help it. Unless you're Larry Ellison, the tendency is to lay low. You drive your own car. You dress humbly. You keep your second home in Pescadero or Tahoe or Park City out of architecture magazines and yourself out of the gossip columns. The only way anyone knows how truly rich you are is by reading *Forbes*, which has the nerve to track your holdings in publicly traded stocks.

This issue of *San Francisco* tells the stories of four such people, and how their business endeavors in a couple of Northern California's most famous locales has pushed them into the limelight. John Pritzker recently shed his last \$300 million to \$400 million in Hyatt Hotels stock—his father founded the chain—and bought into Chip Conley's hotel network, Joie de Vivre, along with a fallow resort property in Carmel Valley. In reading Josh Sens' "**Left Turn on Carmel Valley Road**," (page 72), you'll not only learn (or relearn) to appreciate one of California's most beautiful valleys, but you'll also discover how Pritzker is trying to remake his property into a Valhalla of sorts. When the magazine got a visit from Pritzker earlier this year, he clearly felt some ambivalence—not about the resort and his plans for it, but about giving up 26 years of privacy raising a family in San Francisco, his name and his wealth no big deal, in order to promote a project he cares about that may do some good.

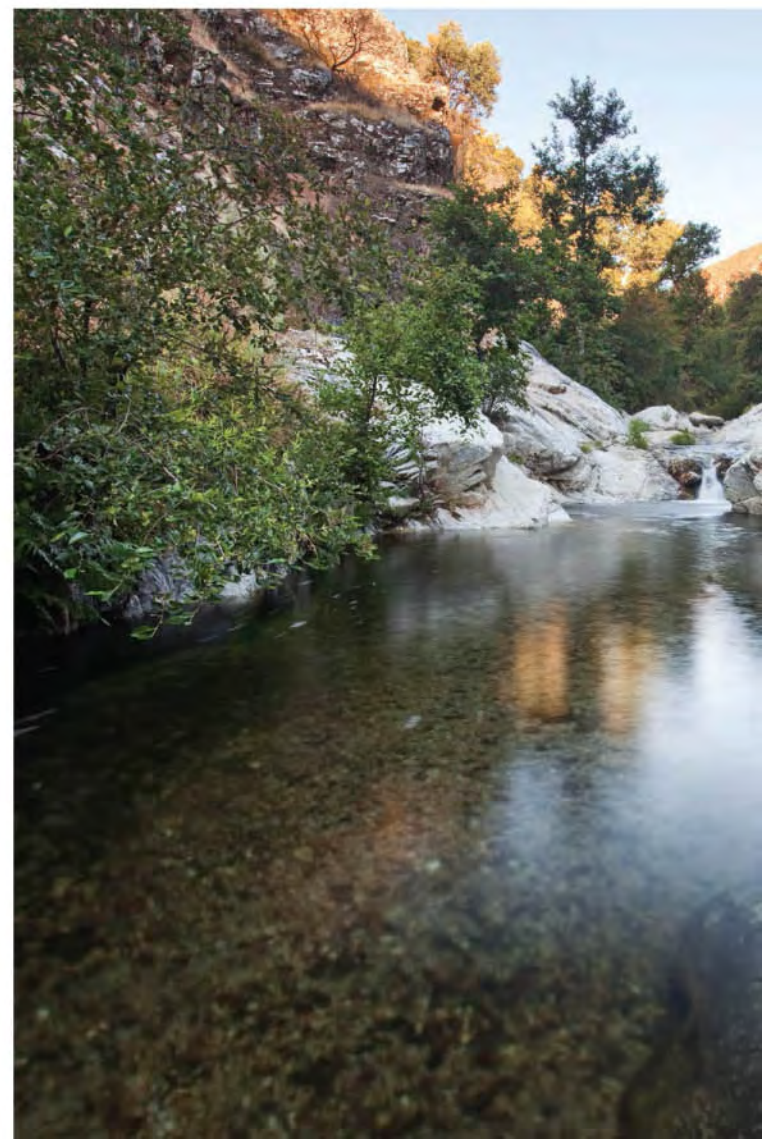
Meanwhile, "**Seeing the Forest for the Trees**" (page 82) outs the three Fisher brothers—Bob, Bill, and John—as having the vision and the deep pockets needed to help the great redwood forests of the California

coast, huge expanses of which they now own, grow again. Like Pritzker, the sons of Don and Doris Fisher have always avoided the spotlight. A's fans, for instance, don't know squat about the team's main owner, John Fisher, who is never shown on telecasts in his seats at the Coliseum.

The Fishers certainly haven't talked much publicly about their timber interests, but contributing writer Jaimal Yogis includes them in his tale anyway. He recounts the lead-up to the family's takeover of former Pacific Lumber land in Humboldt County, where, arriving after a quarter century of conflict, they've chosen to repair relations with environmental activists and heal the forest. The brothers have let it be known that it's against their will that our story is about them personally, not just about their investment. Well, that'll teach 'em not to attract attention to themselves by doing anything worthwhile with their money. ■



BRUCE KELLEY,  
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF





Spend a few easy days eating, sipping pinot, and bumping around **this untrammed wine country near the sea**, and you get the sense that a tipping point is approaching—that the famously ranchy valley is about to boom. Here, dear hikers, drinkers, and adventurers, is why you may be right.

## LEFT TURN ON **CARMEL** VALLEY ROAD

**BY JOSH SENS**

PHOTOGRAPHS BY  
KODIAK GREENWOOD

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: Carmel Valley Road invites you to take the top down; dine on dayboat scallops at Marinus; dip into Tassajara Creek; and take a seat at Wagon Wheel Restaurant, where Clint meets the locals.

Like many billionaires, Hyatt heir **John Pritzker** is not immune to the lure of boyish acquisitions. Among his is a 2002 Aston Martin that is not just the same model but the very vehicle that Pierce Brosnan drove in a James Bond film. Pritzker uses the car to commute around San Francisco, where he lives and where his private-

equity firm is located, but it makes him uneasy when others focus on it. He's wary of perceptions, and he'd rather not be seen as that guy.

Of his possessions, the one to which Pritzker prefers to draw attention cost him far more than his sports car did, even though he got it for a song. It's a sprawling property called Carmel Valley Ranch, a luxury resort two hours south of San Francisco, on 490 acres in a sylvan valley of the same name.

The ranch became Pritzker's last year, when his Geolo Capital bought it from the Blackstone Group for \$20 million, down from an asking price of \$95 million. No sooner had the ranch become his than Pritzker set about overhauling it. He has committed an additional \$35 million to transform

the property from a golf retreat with a starchy reputation into a family-friendly destination, as well as a flagship in the Joie de Vivre hotel fleet, Chip Conley's well-known Northern California hospitality brand—which, it so happens, Pritzker's company has snatched up, too.

Named by *Forbes* in 2009 as the 236th-richest person in America (estimated net worth then: \$1.5 billion), Pritzker can afford to be bullish at a time when the hotel industry is overrun with bears. But his investment involves more than financial risk. At Carmel Valley Ranch, Pritzker has staked his name—and has stamped his whimsical vision—on the dominant property in a valley where others with deep pockets have foundered before.



## FOUR NIGHTS OF FOOD

Post-Citronelle disaster, raised hopes for the valley's tiny restaurant scene.

BY JOSH SENS

Two years ago, the giant Blackstone Group enlisted celebrity chef **Michel Richard** to open an offshoot of his famed Washington, D.C., restaurant, Citronelle, in the lobby of the investment outfit's struggling property, Carmel Valley Ranch. "Around here, it was pretty much a joke from the start," says Steve Ray, a local seed broker whose roots in Carmel Valley reach back to the late 1800s, when his family settled in the area as homesteaders. "It just showed how tone-deaf some people are to what the valley really is." The restaurant offered a prix fixe Francophile menu—and shuttered within a year.

Now the ranch's new owner, John Pritzker, is trying again for a great restaurant, in the hopes of increasing the number of dining destinations in the valley that can sustain a memorable getaway.

FROM LEFT: The California cheese plate at Lodge Restaurant; the dining room's walk-in wine cellar; chef Tim Wood in the garden.



CHEESE PLATE: PAUL DYER; COURTESY OF CARMEL VALLEY RANCH





CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: The billionaire force behind the valley's attempted reinvention, John Pritzker, sits in what he calls Carmel Valley Ranch's "rompable" section; the bar at Lodge Restaurant; the Infinity Pool offers serenity; beekeeper John Russo at the apiary.

Pritzker is confident that his fate will be different. As he sees it, past owners of the ranch (there have been four others since it opened, in 1981) have failed to take advantage of its location in one of California's most distinctive spots, where an urbane present rubs up against a rustic past. In its original incarnation, the property was a private golf club—the kind of uptight enclave satirized in the movie *Caddyshack*. Then, in 1987, the members-only club morphed into a stiff-lipped resort with an image at odds with its surroundings.

Like Healdsburg 20 years ago, or Paso Robles more recently, Carmel Valley has a quiet charm that makes travelers feel as if they've stumbled on a secret, despite ample evidence that others have arrived long before. Along Carmel Valley Road, which cuts east through the valley from Highway 1 in Carmel and relaxes into curves as it leaves civilization behind, cowboy bars and boutiques share space with saddlery shops and spas. In the foothills, north and south, hiking and horseback-riding trails wind through a patchwork of cattle ranches and acres planted with pinot. The small commercial center, known quaintly as "the village," is both a local hangout and a tourist draw,



# 1

## LODGE RESTAURANT

Pritzker recruited **Tim Wood**, an energetic young talent and a veteran of the renowned Marinus, to oversee the resort's restaurants. Wood's menu focuses on smart but unpretentious farm-fresh cooking, with very local ingredients—some come from the ranch's two-acre organic garden, about half a mile away from the restaurant. His cuisine (picture such entrées as Angus steak with shallot-and-oxtail marmalade, and duck schnitzel with radish-frisée salad and pancetta vinaigrette) is meant to reflect the valley's rough and heady culture. 1 OLD RANCH RD., CARMEL, 831-625-9500, CARMELVALLEYRANCH.COM

Carmel Valley has long lacked an anchor destination that properly defines the area—at once refined and funky, upscale and outdoorsy, sophisticated but fun. Pritzker sees his ranch as that place.

with antiques shops steps away from down-home general stores. There are tasting rooms, but their counters aren't clogged with boisterous clinky-drinkers. It's a region with brilliant wines but no wine train. A five-car backup on Carmel Valley Road is a traffic jam.

Pritzker's plans call for a signature resort that reflects the setting, blending familiar upscale touches—a spa, farm-fresh cuisine—with earthbound programs such as guided nature walks, beekeeping, organic gardening, and culinary classes for adults and kids. Pritzker says this blueprint is custom-designed to tap into the market of 10 million people in Silicon Valley, San Francisco, and beyond, a Northern California population filled with active travelers who often make rustic getaways to Napa and Sonoma and who would leap at all that Carmel Valley has to offer, if only it were on their radar screens.

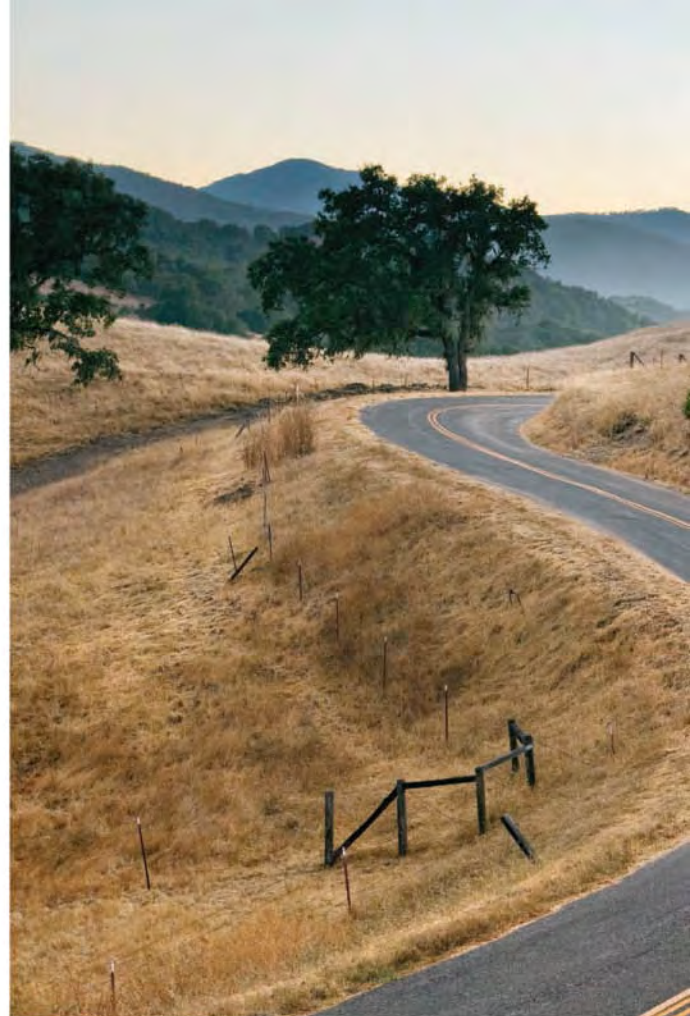
"Is this the next Napa?" Pritzker asks. "I don't draw that parallel, because I think Carmel Valley is already better than Napa. Think about it. You go to wine country with the family, and after a day or two, you've done all there is to do. Here, you've got the Monterey Bay Aquarium, Big Sur, Carmel. It's pretty much endless. It's just not always the first place on people's minds." So Pritzker has set out to change that, to tell the world about a more intimate wine country that's nearer to the sea and has fewer airs.

THAT CARMEL VALLEY HASN'T appeared on the average traveler's It List for decades is partly a function of geography and partly its own fault. On the one hand, in

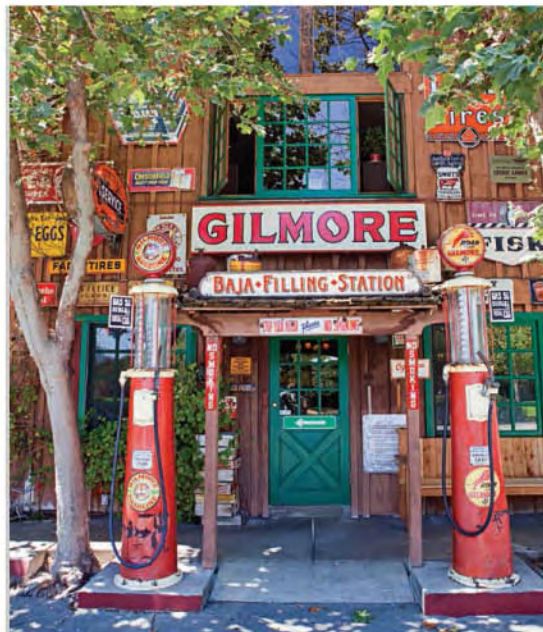
the quest for recognition, it's hard to compete with Carmel, Cannery Row, or 17-Mile Drive, to name only a few of the iconic destinations within miles of the valley's mouth. On the other, it's hard to do much worse than Carmel Valley has in its ham-fisted efforts to make itself known. Over the years, attempts to brand the valley have focused largely on what the region isn't: not as crowded as Monterey; not as foggy as Carmel; not as expensive as Pebble Beach. Faced with the image vacuum, many people today either ignore Carmel Valley or conflate it with prettified, commercialized Carmel.

The most specific marketing has emphasized the valley as a golf destination, but the golf industry is in the doldrums. Besides, compared with the famous layouts of Pebble Beach, Carmel Valley's three courses have never been regarded as very good. Golf's weakness as a draw was punctuated last year, when Quail Lodge, a golf resort and the second-largest hotel in the valley, announced that it was shuttering its guestrooms and becoming merely a golf club.

To watch Quail's silver-haired foursomes roam the fairways is to recognize another of the valley's image problems: "It's where your wealthy grandparents went to get away," says one San Francisco-based travel industry consultant who asked to remain anonymous. That impression is underscored by the valley's many famous residents (Clint Eastwood, Merv Griffin, Joan Fontaine, and Doris Day have all owned homes here; Rupert Murdoch owns a ranch at the valley's eastern edge) and by the fact that the region has long served as a country playground for the aging superrich.



FROM LEFT: Marinus's roasted-beet salad with local bigeye tuna; Stamenov at the chef's table, preparing a Berkshire pig for roasting.



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: Carmel Valley Road snakes east from Highway 1; Baja Cantina Restaurant; a residential driveway; Pritzker's 490-acre resort is flanked by the Sierra de Salinas (shown) and the Santa Lucia Mountains.



As early as the 1920s, a rancher named George Gordon Moore released Russian boars onto his property and used them for his guest's hunting pleasure. Their feral descendants often tear up fairways in the valley today. Later came Eastwood, who, in 1998, built the Tehama Golf Course development in the valley's northern hills; and before Eastwood, John Gardiner, a sporty entrepreneur who, in 1957, founded John Gardiner's Tennis Ranch, an exclusive camp for the very wealthy.

Joe Passov, a former tennis instructor who taught at Gardiner's Ranch in the early 1980s, recalls overhearing a conversation between several of his privileged students. The boys were engaged in a game of one-upmanship, comparing how many airplanes their fathers owned. Two. Three. The number kept increasing. When it came time for one young Rockefeller—an actual one, Passov believes—to register a tally, he paused and asked sincerely, "Do helicopters count?"

AS A SCION OF ONE OF THE COUNTRY'S most prominent families—his financier father, Jay, founded Hyatt Hotels & Resorts; his cousin Penny Pritzker oversaw the fundraising for Obama's campaign; his parents



# 2

## MARINUS

The one valley restaurant of national note—and worthy of it, too—this 11-year-old dining room at the Bernardus Lodge has already struck the brilliant balance between elegant and earthy to which Lodge Restaurant aspires, thanks to **Cal Stamenov** and his California cuisine. Such dishes as black bass with baby artichokes and green-garlic purée, and roasted lamb with English peas and morels, hint at the chef's aesthetic. After a quarter century in the area, wine director **Mark Jensen** can tell you stories about each local vintage he serves. A chef's table in the kitchen, available by reservation, has hosted culinary giants such as Julia Child and Thomas Keller, whose signatures adorn the walls.

415 CARMEL VALLEY RD., CARMEL VALLEY, 831-658-3595, BERNARDUS.COM



established the prestigious Pritzker Architecture Prize—Pritzker could get around by helicopter if he wanted to. But on a recent weekday, he opted for the Aston Martin, driving two hours south from San Francisco in order to show off his new backyard. “Look at this,” he says. “I think the previous owners forgot that this was all part of their property.”

It’s a hazy Wednesday morning, and Pritzker, wearing hiking boots and shorts, hoofs up a trail that winds into the foothills of the Santa Lucia Mountains, the scrub oak–studded backdrop to Carmel Valley Ranch. Behind him, stretching from the hillside toward the base of the valley, lies the resort’s developed footprint: the golf course, the guestrooms, the swimming pools, the spa. But before him, just beyond a ridgeline to the southwest, spreads a vast expanse of open space—the outer boundaries of the ranch, bleeding into the 5,000-foot peaks of the Ventana Wilderness, which reaches south into Big Sur.

Though a cold has left him feeling sub-par, Pritzker, who is 57, with a fireplug build and a thick sweep of black hair, walks fast and speaks even faster as he recalls his first encounter with the ranch. “I remember driving in and thinking, ‘This is nice,’” he says, repeating a well-worn but effective anecdote at the heart of his pitch. “As they were showing me around, I kept asking, ‘Is this part of the property? And this? And this?’ That’s when it started to hit me what we had.”

The trail leads to a plateau, where a large oak tree shades a wooden platform: the resort’s open-air yoga pavilion, a foundation

for one of many outdoor programs. A two-acre organic farm is being planted, along with four acres of vineyards and five acres of lavender fields. Guests who aren’t busy hiking with a bird expert or gazing at the stars with an astronomer might opt to harvest the fragrant flowers and, under the guidance of an instructor, turn them into soaps and essential oils. Or they might enjoy those products at the spa.

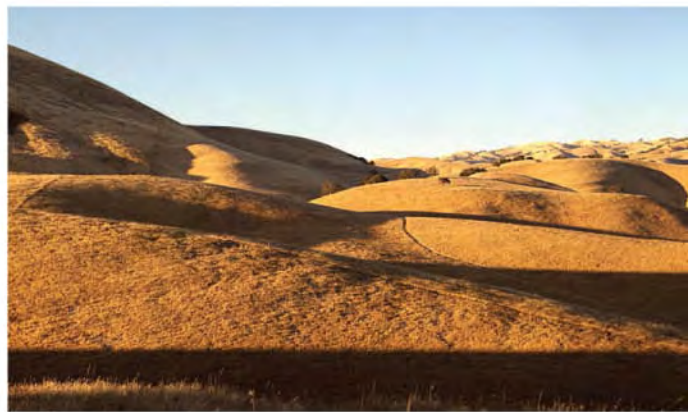
“I hate to sound too Northern California about this, but our plans just sort of unfolded,” Pritzker says. “We said things like, ‘Wouldn’t it be cool if we planted lavender here?’ ‘Yeah, but the lavender will attract bees.’ ‘OK, then we’ll have a beekeeper so we can have our own honey, which would be cool.’ ‘And we can use that honey in our restaurant.’”

As his vision crystallized, Pritzker realized what he wanted: a summer camp without the rigid discipline; a family resort with great food and wine, plus a youthful esprit perfectly suited to the casual vibe of not only the valley, but also moneyed San Francisco and the South Bay. “I know this sounds corny, but I’m a kid at heart,” Pritzker says. “And what we’ve got here is rompable country property that we plan to put to use.”

#### ENCOURAGING GUESTS TO EXPLORE

is a well-established trend in hospitality that has given rise to an industry term—*experiential travel*—and a spate of luxury wine-country properties, such as Hotel Healdsburg, in Sonoma County, and Calistoga Ranch and Solage, in Napa Valley. But while Pritzker faces competition for this niche to the north, he has none in Carmel

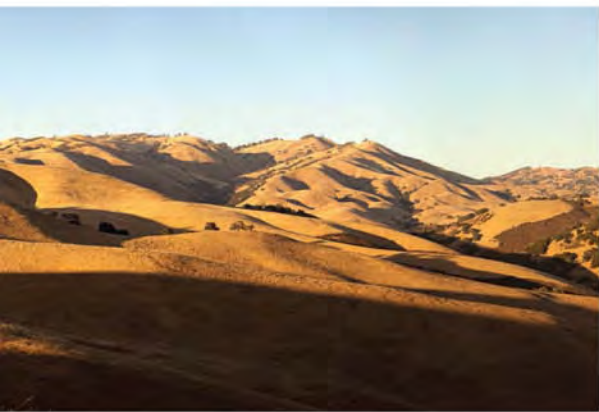
FROM TOP: A eucalyptus-lined road just west of town; upper Carmel Valley’s golden hills.



#### FOUR NIGHTS OF FOOD



FROM LEFT: Chef de cuisine Jérôme Viel has added a touch of sophistication to Will’s Fargo’s Wild West character; the popular restaurant welcomes guests for local comfort food.



## TOWN, DRUNK

WHY HUMBLE LITTLE CARMEL VALLEY VILLAGE IS WELL WORTH A TASTE.

BY JORDAN MACKAY

Unlike the words *Napa Valley*, seeing *Monterey County*—this massive region's appellation—on a label doesn't tell you much by itself. In the Salinas Valley, vast industrial plantings along Highway 101 near King City, including the nation's largest contiguous vineyard, Delicato's San Bernabe, have remade that part of America's Salad Bowl into America's Wine Box. (To be fair, these flatland grapes produce far better jug wines than those from the Central Valley do.) In the hills west of the spinach-lined highway, on the other hand, lie some of California's most important terrain for fine wine: the benchlands of the Santa Lucia Highlands. When those words appear on a bottle, take note.

The ocean-cooled vineyards here, mere specks from the vantage point of cars speeding along Highway 101, have helped establish the dark, complex, and potent style of California pinot known the world over. This elevation also produces balanced but intense chardonnays. You won't taste most of these acclaimed wines in the sparsely populated agricultural land where they're grown, though. Instead, follow the tourists: 16 miles away as the crow flies, in convenient rooms in and around Carmel Valley.

**Carmel Valley Village** has the largest number of stops, six within walking distance of one another, all open 11 a.m.–5 p.m. daily. The best include one of the state's top chardonnay producers, **Talbot**, which has a friendly and nicely appointed spot (53 WEST CARMEL VALLEY RD., 831-659-3500). In the



Highlands, Talbot operates the Sleepy Hollow and Diamond T vineyards, which are among the most prestigious. (Robb Talbot is pictured above, with his wife, Vivienne.) In addition to its chardonnays, try Talbot's pinots; they've improved immeasurably since winemaker Dan Karlsen—a pinot master formerly of Dehlinger, Domaine Carneros, and Chalone—took over.

A stroll away from Talbot is **Bernardus** (5 WEST CARMEL VALLEY RD., 831-298-8021), as serious about wine as the nearby Bernardus resort is about food—especially when it comes to the bordeaux varietals grown in its Marinus vineyard, part of the minuscule Carmel Valley subregion. The **Georis** tasting room (4 PILOT RD., 831-659-1050), which has strong cabs and merlots from the

winery's Carmel Valley plot, features a flower-rich garden patio out front (pictured above).

In the chichi **Crossroads Shopping Village**, a quarter mile south on Highway 1 from the Carmel Valley Road intersection, sits **Morgan Winery**, one of the region's greatest producers (204 CROSSROADS BLVD., 831-626-3700). The winery's Metallico chardonnay, so named because it's fermented and aged in stainless steel, was a revelation when it was first released a few years ago, and the single-vineyard pinots from the Highlands are succulent and bright. Fromage Fridays offer exactly what you'd expect, and Library Sundays give you a chance to sample wines with some age on them.

Off the **Monterey-Salinas Highway** in Monterey, a view-filled 10-minute drive over Los Laureles Grade from Carmel Valley, is **Ventana** (2999 MONTEREY-SALINAS HWY. #10, 831-372-7415). Ventana produces some of the state's crispest, most bracing sauvignon blancs, and its aromatic whites—riesling, pinot gris, and gewürztraminer—are also good. On nice days, the oak-shrouded patio makes a great place for a picnic.



# 3

## WILL'S FARGO DINING HOUSE & SALOON

Once a roadhouse and now a steakhouse, this valley favorite draws a crossover crowd that runs from dusty ranchers to fine-wine brokers, among them Ben Pon, owner of nearby Bernardus. Seven years ago, when Will's Fargo closed because of financial troubles, Pon bought the place and installed a new chef, **Jérôme Viel**, who has kept the steakhouse's standards high while placing a timely emphasis on local ingredients. As for Pon, he still eats at Will's Fargo once a week. 16 E. CARMEL VALLEY RD., CARMEL VALLEY, 831-659-2774, WILLSFARGO.COM

Valley itself, where the few other high-end ventures are either private communities (Clint Eastwood's Tehama and the ultra-exclusive Santa Lucia Preserve) or more narrowly focused, particularly Bernardus Lodge, whose spa and haute cuisine target couples traveling without kids.

That distinctiveness puts Pritzker in an enviable position, says Bill Baker, a branding consultant and the author of *Destination Branding for Small Cities*. "The valley isn't a completely blank slate," Baker says. "But through Carmel Valley Ranch, Pritzker has, in essence, a chance to define people's idea of what the valley is."

To hear some locals tell it, there are two Carmel Valleys: one rugged and authentic, the other gentrified and overstuffed. The less dogmatic view, though, finds many more valleys than those. Local demographics consist of a curious mishmash of old money and New Agers, hippies and hedge funders, celebrities and frontier-style eccentrics. The region comfortably makes room for both Tehama and Tassajara Zen Mountain Center, known for its kumbaya meditation retreats. Around the valley, you're as likely to come across a dusty rancher sipping fine wine in an upscale tasting room as you are to see a stockbroker sitting at the counter at the Wagon Wheel, a popular Western-themed breakfast-and-lunch spot.

The unofficial local census turns up such characters as saddle-shop owner Bob Mattson, a deaf, *Deadwood*-ian figure with a handlebar mustache who destroyed his own hearing by firing too many rifles as a kid; and a different sort of marksman, the Dutch-born Ben Pon, who represented his

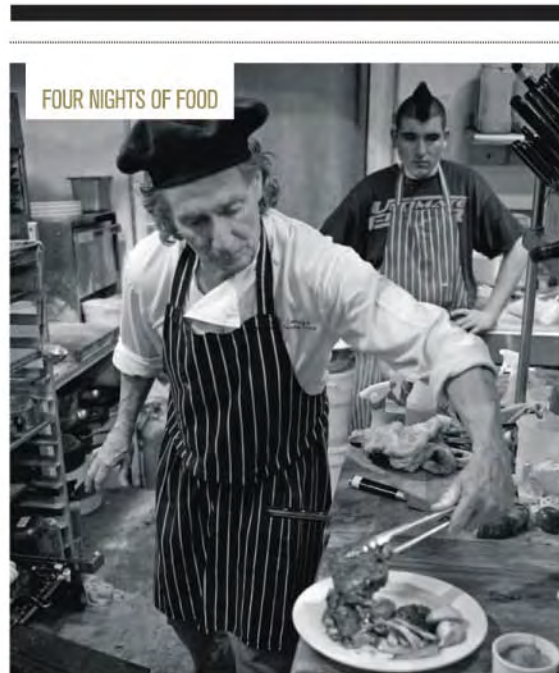
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country in clay-pigeon shooting at the 1972 Summer Olympics. Pon, whose father was a prominent Volkswagen distributor and the designer of an early VW bus, also tried his hand at Formula One racing but crashed his single-seat Porsche in his first race. Photos of the accident hang today outside the lobby of Bernardus Lodge, which Pon built in 1999 and quickly elevated with Marinus, the one restaurant in the valley that registers as destination dining, and a winery that produces some of California's most acclaimed chardonnays.

"You can't really pigeonhole the character of the valley," says Michael Jones, owner of the Cachagua General Store, a landmark in the valley's eastern reaches. "What I find is, it's home to extremes of all kinds: right-wingers, left-wingers, libertarians, and everything in between. Even my most liberal friends out here own guns, and they'll shoot you if you step onto their property."

"Ultimately, this is a very low-key area, and I think that's why a guy like Eastwood likes it here," says Joe Rawitzer, a local winemaker who was born and raised in the valley. "People are friendly, but no one really cares what your last name is or what you do for a living."

AROUND THE VALLEY, FEW PEOPLE seem aware that Pritzker has Hyatt money, but by now most recognize his name and know what he's been up to at the ranch. That purchase, along with his *Joie de Vivre* investment, has brought Pritzker full circle, returning him after a 20-plus-year hiatus to the industry that shaped his early career. Born in Chicago, Pritzker joined the family



FOUR NIGHTS OF FOOD

FROM LEFT: Cachagua General Store chef-owner Michael Jones works the line; the scene on a Monday night





CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: The road to Tassajara; one of its clothing-optional hot springs; its new changing house, at the pool; Zenshin Greg Fain, Tassajara's head monk; a stone suite built circa 1900.



business at 16. His first job was painting the boiler room of the Hyatt Regency O'Hare. Over the years, he has held myriad positions, including busboy and banquet manager, in multiple cities. In 1973, Pritzker moved to San Francisco, where he rose to a top post at Hyatt Hotels & Resorts. But, he says, the motive for his relocation was not professional. "Honestly? I came because of the music scene. The Dead were here."

Pritzker's regular-guy bearing is unexpected for someone of his provenance. He's more apt to order beer than wine with dinner, and he's prone to dropping F-bombs in casual conversation, not as expletives but as a language crutch. ("I had this painting," he says of the quirky piece by his great-uncle that now hangs in the Carmel Valley Ranch lobby, "and I thought, 'What the fuck am I going to do with this?'") Around the ranch, Pritzker prefers that his staffers address him as John. "If I could get my kids to call me Mr. Pritzker, that would be great," he says. (Pritzker is married and has three children, ages 26, 23, and 17.) "Otherwise, I don't need the 'Mr. Pritzker' thing."

For all of its benefits when he was growing up, Pritzker's famous surname also brought him a share of grief. When he was a teenager, one of his

CONTINUED ON PAGE 106



# 4

## THE CACHAGUA GENERAL STORE

Carmel Valley's best-kept secret is also the best example of its character. Located in Cachagua, a small community 30 minutes deeper into the valley and accessible only via narrow, winding roads, this old-school store morphs every Monday evening into a buzzing supper club that chef-owner **Michael Jones** names differently each week: Bit by a Kitty Roadhouse and God Hates Poor People Roadhouse are two recent examples. Jones' Cal-Med cooking is first-rate, but the scene itself is what lives on in your memory: a mix of cowboys and winemakers gathered in what amounts to a comfortable barn, with live music by Sky Ranch Jalapeño, a duo consisting of Dave Schifmann and gray-haired Jerry Garcia look-alike Pat Clark. Reservations highly recommended. 18840 CACHAGUA RD., CACHAGUA, 831-659-1857

## LEFT TURN ON CARMEL VALLEY ROAD

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 81

nonhotel jobs was at Lenny's Deli, a Chicago sandwich joint where he was working on the day news broke that his family had dropped many millions on the University of Chicago, a gift that gave rise to the Pritzker School of Medicine. Getting wind of the story, Lenny barked at his employee, "Hey, Pritzker, when is your family going to fork over some of that dough to me?"

Ballbusting of that nature, Pritzker says, helped him to develop a thick skin, not to mention a sharp sense of humor. Earlier this year, knowing that the ranch's acting general manager would be giving a tour of the ranch to AOL cofounder Steve Case, Pritzker put the GM up to a prank. When Case came upon two ramshackle stables in the foothills—vestiges of the property's ranching past—the staffer told Case that Pritzker would use the stables for a horse-whispering program, in which guests and equines could commune. "As we're telling him this bullshit, Steve's face keeps getting redder and redder," Pritzker says. "He was clearly embarrassed for us, but he wasn't going to tell us that."

Case represents a high-tech market that Pritzker sees as crucial to the success of the ranch. His plan depends on both families and corporate clients, the Googles and Yahoo!s: young companies whose employees might appreciate such offerings as an Iron Chef competition in the ranch's new "Adventure Kitchen" that would double as a team-building exercise. Guests checking in to one of the ranch's 139 renovated rooms (out with the stodgy golf-resort furnishings, in with hardwood floors and a more updated Restoration Hardware look) will be greeted with a gift box stocked with such items as a bird whistle, a tree guide, and a s'mores recipe. Before entering the lobby, they'll pass a rope swing dangling from an oak tree—a Tom Sawyer-ish image that now serves as the new logo for the ranch.

THE SPIRIT PRITZKER INTENDS TO EVOKE AT THE ranch is not only his own—playful and low-key—but also the valley's. His guests will be encouraged to drive farther down Carmel Valley Road, he says. "The twofer, for me, comes when we start attracting guests with enough disposable income to spend a few extra days down here to explore the area. We're not a casino. We're not trying to keep all the money on our property." Already, Pritzker is letting the valley spill onto the ranch. Tim Wood, a superb local chef who worked for six years at Marinus, has been brought on to run the resort's new restaurants; Mark Marino, an organic farmer who oversaw harvests at nearby Earthbound Farms, presides over the property's organic garden; John Russo, a local beekeeper straight out of central casting (big beard, mellow demeanor), handles the apiary and the lavender fields.

For as long as anyone can remember, Carmel Valley has, in fact, been less crowded than Monterey, sunnier than Carmel, and cheaper than Pebble Beach. But it has lacked an anchor destination that properly defines the area—at once refined and funky, upscale and outdoorsy, sophisticated but with a sense of fun. Pritzker sees his ranch as that place, and he expects it to turn a profit within three years. But

whatever happens, he says, he's in it for the long haul. "My DNA is Hyatt. We're not quick-flip artists."

In building his first hotel brand independent of his father's, created when John was a kid, Pritzker is also publicly defining himself for the first time. His family legacy is inescapable. Last summer, when the Carmel Valley Ranch fire sale went through, *Forbes* declared: "Jay Pritzker, the late Chicago financier, knew how to drive a bargain. Apparently, so does his son, John." But over time, and thanks to therapy ("Woody Allen's got nothing on me," Pritzker jokes), he has tackled the necessary questions and come to peace with them, Pritzker says. "Because Dad was a finance guy, he was proud of, albeit mystified by, my ability to deal with our guests' disparate personalities," he explains, breathing easily on his hike. "By dint of being an operator, I feel as though I've already made my bones and don't worry about ghosts of Pritzkers past watching my every move."

By now, the hike has taken him back over the ridgeline, toward the heart of the ranch. The sun is up and feisty, and the fog has broken over the valley. From high on the hill, Pritzker surveys the landscape. The vines are taking root, fresh soil has been laid in the organic garden, and purple patches of lavender are in bloom. It's starting to look like the resort he wants it to be.

Pritzker digs into his pocket for his car keys, then hops into his Aston Martin. As he leaves the property and heads toward San Francisco, the gate swings open and remains so for an instant, as if anticipating traffic coming the other way. \*

**JOSH SENS** IS SAN FRANCISCO'S RESTAURANT CRITIC.



## BACK STORY

### Cheech & John & Chip

John Pritzker, the billionaire scion of the family behind Hyatt Hotels & Resorts, was in search of a platform on which he could build a hotel brand independent of his family's. Chip Conley, who shares an alma mater with Snoop (Long Beach Polytechnic High School) and is the creator of some of California's cheekiest boutique hotels, was looking for a deep-pocketed investor to help him weather the downturn in luxury travel. When the two San Franciscans finally met, Conley took an immediate liking to his potential partner. "I was struck by his combination of humility and humor," says Conley. "He's down-to-earth." Pritzker was smitten as well, but to make sure that their sensibilities were a true match, he decided to tour each of the 33 California hotels that Conley has spiffed up and now either manages or owns.

Pritzker might have saved himself a lot of travel time if he'd visited only the rooms at the Hotel Durant, in Berkeley—where, on the bedside tables, he found the golden ticket. "Chip made the lamps from bong," says Pritzker, a (surprise!) former Deadhead. "I love his smart, quirky approach to hospitality." Pritzker's company, Geolo Capital, consummated the relationship earlier this year by acquiring a controlling interest in Conley's Joie de Vivre Hospitality for an undisclosed sum. It's the most noteworthy local alliance of hoteliers since Mark met Hopkins.

Conley is essentially a preacher, albeit a New Age one: He writes and speaks zealously on Eastern philosophies and their business uses, crediting his 81-year-old meditation teacher, Saliji, for his creativity. Pritzker, meanwhile, spent 20 years as a nuts-and-bolts operator of various Hyatt properties before retiring in 1988 in order to invest. Now, in what both men hope is a merger of yin and yang, he has set aside \$150 million to buy upward of 50 more properties across the nation for Conley and Joie de Vivre to play around with—ideally profitably. They've already added one marquee resort: Carmel Valley Ranch, the subject of our cover story, "**Left Turn on Carmel Valley Road**" (page 72). ★

BY JOSH SENS

PHOTOGRAPH BY JADE OLSON