

From above: The artfully-designed Biltmore lobby; a view of the Monarch dining room complete with a full bar and comfortable leather seating.

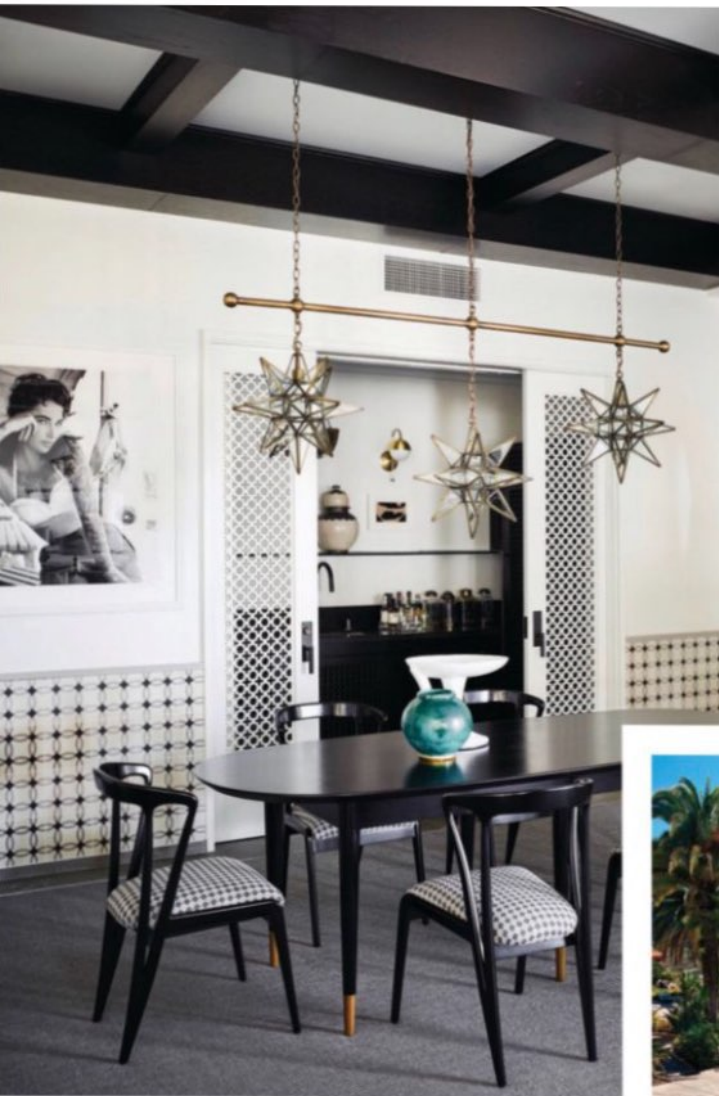
American RIVIERA RISING

Last winter's natural disasters left Santa Barbara and Montecito a shadow of what stood before, but the cities have re-emerged and are more luxurious than ever.

By Casey Hatfield-Chiotti

In April 2018, downtown Santa Barbara's luxurious Hotel Californian (thehotelcalifornian.com), a 121-room hotel with Spanish Colonial Revival style architecture and modern Moroccan interiors by designer Martyn Lawrence Bullard, celebrated its grand opening, a lavish affair complete with a concert by John Mayer. "It was a celebration of getting the hotel built, becoming part of the community and everything we weathered," recalls Hotel Californian General Manager Warren Nocon. The new incarnation of the historic hotel that originally opened to the public in 1925 is one of a number of hotels in Santa Barbara and Montecito that saw its winter season impacted by the December 2017 Thomas Fire and the January mudslides.

After months of repair and healing, America's Riviera, so-called for its white washed Mediterranean architecture, bougainvillea and mountain and sea vistas, has regained its footing. The much-anticipated Rosewood Miramar Beach in Montecito (rosewoodhotels.com/miramar-beach-montecito), a 16-acre resort on the site of the former Miramar Beach Hotel, is scheduled to open in late 2018. When it debuts, guests will enjoy oceanfront suites with direct access to one of Santa Barbara's most secluded beaches, two swimming pools and a ballroom with bespoke Baccarat crystal chandeliers. The glamorous Four Seasons Resort The Biltmore Santa Barbara (fourseasons.com/santabarbara), home to the exclusive Coral Casino Beach and Cabana Club, reopened June 1st. This fall, the hotel will unveil the Anacapa Suite, a 2,000-square-foot indoor-outdoor suite with views of Butterfly Beach and a private plunge pool. In other luxury hotel news,



Clockwise from left: Alcazar dining area at Hotel Californian; seared Barramundi with celery root puree from Finch & Fork; the Ritz-Carlton pool has ocean views. Bottom right: The Santa Barbara Museum of Art



Ritz-Carlton brought its sophisticated brand of luxury to the region last year when it took over the Bacara Resort (ritzcarlton.com), a 358-room hotel comprised of low rise villas with wrought iron balconies on 78 sparkly oceanfront acres while from its secluded hillside perch, the Belmont El Encanto (belmond.com/elencanto) is celebrating its 100th anniversary with a year of festivities including a vintage cocktail menu harkening back to the hotel's early days.

The local fine dining scene received a significant boon as well this summer with the opening of The Monarch in August at the understated yet elegant Montecito Inn (montecitoinn.com). The dining room, featuring 100-year old columns and oversized arched windows, recalls 1930s Santa Barbara while the menu celebrates the bounty of the Central Coast: think spot prawns marinated in chermoula, abalone with bone marrow, lemon and capers and locally sourced meats like pork tenderloin brined in brown sugar roasted to perfection in a wood-fired hearth.

The completion of the Hotel Californian,

located on four city blocks, was the culmination of the city of Santa Barbara's waterfront revitalization efforts. Nocon says guests have been flocking to the hotel to experience the guestrooms with jewel-toned pops of color, the Marrakech-inspired Spa Majorelle, the Mediterranean restaurant Blackbird, and to explore the adjacent Funk Zone neighborhood. Once home to fish processing and manufacturing plants, the industrial area has gained national attention for its vibrant tenant mix including MOXI, The Wolf Museum of Exploration + Innovation, the Spanish restaurant Loquita and the refined tiki bar Test Pilot, as well as a host of wine-tasting rooms and art galleries. "People are just happy to be here. Come experience Santa Barbara at its best," says Nocon. ■

Must See & Dos

Santa Barbara Museum of Art

Santa Barbara's fine arts museum is currently undergoing a multimillion dollar renovation, but it remains open to the public, albeit with a smaller amount of exhibition space. When the renovation is completed in 2020, the museum will have added a new reception area and galleries dedicated to contemporary art and photography and new media. 1130 State St., 805.963.4364, sbma.net

Finch & Fork

Locals love Finch & Fork for its clean California cuisine and creative cocktails by bar veteran George Piperis such as the Dill Berrymore with toki Japanese whiskey, lustau oloroso sherry, strawberry, dill and lemon. Monthly Sip & Swirl events bring Santa Barbara's best wineries to the restaurant's rooftop. 31 W. Camillo St., 805.879.9100 finchandforkrestaurant.com

Bibi Ji

On State Street, chef Jessi Singh, from San Francisco's and New York City's Babu Ji, and Rajat Parr, a James Beard Award-winning sommelier, teamed up to open the Indian restaurant and wine bar earlier this year. The seafood-focused menu incorporates unique ingredients such as Hope Ranch black mussels and Santa Barbara sea urchin. 734 State St., 805.560.6845, bibijisb.com

Grassini Family Vineyards

One of Santa Barbara's most respected wineries opened a tasting room in the Presidio Neighborhood in December 2017. Due to the events of last winter, the ribbon cutting didn't take place until spring. The space with a reclaimed wood bar top and a fireplace is a cozy place to tuck into a reserve wine tasting paired with chocolate truffles. 24 El Paseo, 805.897.3366, grassinifamilyvineyards.com

