

Carmel-by-the-Sea: Quaint

Every coastal town I visit seems to have its own magic. Carmel-by-the-Sea, Calif., is no exception.

Shaded by cypress and eucalyptus trees of biblical proportion, Carmel is swept in Pacific breezes, glittered with golden sunsets and lavished with lush green hills.

No wonder the town was first envisioned as a private playground for the wealthy and wild who could be lured by golf courses, polo fields and extravagant entertaining inside the gates of an enchanted forest by the sea.

"It was a time when a black-tie event was available every night of the week," said the late Virginia Stanton, referring to the likes of Salvador Dali dinners and Crosby Clambakes. She and her architect-husband, Bob, made their home in nearby Pebble Beach before venturing out into the Carmel Valley.

Celebrity-spotting is still popular in Carmel, but the social climate promotes the idea everyone who comes here is special and should enjoy the privilege to relax, blend in and enjoy the fruits of their labor. In other words, the venerable tradition of tolerance and respect for privacy prevails.

A few weeks ago, I visited Carmel-by-the-Sea for the first time. My home for the long weekend was a quiet corner suite at the Happy Landing Inn, one of seven uniquely designed rooms at newly renovated 1926 property.

Furnished to reflect the timeless elegance of Audrey Hepburn, my bedroom was anchored by a stately king bed covered in starched white luxury linens monogrammed in

black with Hepburn's initials. Lounging in hounds tooth-covered antique chairs, I enjoyed a hot breakfast delivered to my room each morning. Under the soft glow of the silk-shaded

crystal lamps, a single pink rose scented the room.

And this Hepburn quote was framed on the wall: "I believe in pink. I believe

Rebecca McCormick

ITravel!

that laughing is the best calorie burner. I believe in kissing, kissing a lot. I believe in being strong when everything seems to be going wrong. I believe that happy girls are the prettiest girls. I believe that tomorrow is another day. And I believe in miracles."

Carmel-by-the-Sea seems to reflect all that Hepburn believed.

A few blocks away, at the foot of a gentle slope on which the European-like village is perched, waves of the emerald Pacific lap the ivory sand, where hundreds gather each evening to bask in the rosy glow of sunset.

Throughout the town, laughter prevails. Whether it's a wedding party celebration, a golfers' reunion, a girlfriends' getaway or an artist's retreat, Carmel breeds social interaction.

In an effort to "hold back the future," Carmel's residents rallied to keep streetlights, sidewalks and home mail delivery away from their doorstep. In return, they enjoy walking or driving to the post office to collect mail and visit and laugh with their neighbors.

When out-of-town folks complained about uneven pavement being a problem for visitors wearing high heels, Carmelians responded by requiring a license to wear such risque

Planning a trip?

Carmel Visitor Center

P.O. Box 4444

Carmel-by-the-Sea, CA

93921

831-624-2522

800-550-4333

footwear in their town. Even that is sort of funny.

And years ago, when the need for a jail finally arose, the town refused to build one. Instead, they still transport offenders to the nearest jail in Monterey.

Perhaps most idyllic of all observations about Carmel is the town doesn't even have a cemetery. You're welcome to live it up while visiting, but after you're gone, you'll have to leave for good.

Hepburn believed in lots of kissing, and apparently hundreds of couples do exactly that in Carmel. Weddings here can be done without the paparazzi for a \$100 civil ceremony or "in front of God and everyone" for a \$2 million pageant.

Hepburn believed in being strong when everything seems to go wrong.

I had the opportunity to concur with her philosophy when two other girls and I put on our big girl panties for the Land Rover Experience Driving School. Supposedly customized for our experience level and appetite for adventure, the instruction catapulted us to a whole new level of exhilaration when the instructor said as we topped a hill and headed down the other side, "This is where you want to take your foot off the brake."

Hepburn believed happy girls are pretty girls. Well, you can definitely shop until you drop in Carmel-by-the-Sea.

Ocean Avenue is home to nearly 90 art galleries, as well as clothing boutiques, cafes and