

Character in Carmel

by Lisa Richardson | Travel | 0 comments



It's not as though I was surprised those three days in Carmel-by-the-Sea were so pleasurable. How surely this one square mile penetrated my psyche was the zinger.

Homebound along the Salinas Highway, smiling at the fog as it tended the vines in the Highlands beyond, and skirting golden hills on the 101 and I-5 South, I inwardly revelled at the people and places that are Carmel.

I'm one of a group of journalists hosted by the city, with an itinerary to-die-for in Carmel-by-the-Sea. I emerge indulged, awed and sated.

My take-aways will translate to my next experience, and perhaps yours, too:



Stay in a boutique inn or B&B. #12 at the Monte Verde Inn (Ocean and Monte Verde Street) was situated in a cozy alcove with a shared deck. French doors open to a room with a four-poster bed, a sleek bath with marble shower, an oversized tub and charm. I was touched by the kindness of Marc, Deb, Maria and Judith here.

Denny LeVett owns the Monte Verde Inn and the sister property, Casa de Carmel, plus Lamplighter Inn (co-owned with Bobby Richards), Forest Lodge, and Vagabond House. He and Doris Day have co-owned the European chic Cypress Inn since 1986. Dog-watching is a great pastime here. There's ample opportunity to seek out lodging with a personality that complements your agenda in Carmel-by-the-Sea.

Awaken with a jaunt to the ocean as the morning sky changes. It's marvelous for the body and the mind. Find happy dogs, friendly souls, 3' waves and sensuous white sand between your toes. You'll want to don layers and the appropriate footwear. Restoration efforts are underway for the dunes habitat.

I long to walk the trail from the beach through the Del Monte Forest to the Asilomar Dunes in Pacific Grove.





Dine well. Choice bistros are everywhere.

*At lively, southern Italian Vesuvio, the combination of the garlic bread (from a 40 year-old family recipe), Pesto Genovese, Chianti and Chef Rich Pèpe made me swoon. A taste of the newly launched, intense Pèpecello hit the spot afterward. Rich Pèpe has owned the Carmel Bakery (since 1899-the oldest business in town) for 30 years, Little Napoli Bistro Italiano for 25 years, and Vesuvio

for 4. We gave the rooftop bar a thumbs-up.

*Everyone eats and drinks at Terry's Lounge in the Cypress Inn, where you peruse decades of Doris Day memorabilia and watch her romantic comedy flicks at the massive bar. I recommend Chef Jonathan Bagley's Roasted Brussel Sprouts with Bacon, delectable Monterey Bay Calamari Tempura with Middle Eastern spices and Harissa Aioli, Lamb and Chickpea Harira (a stew with lentils, tomatoes, carrots, couscous, topped with a fried egg) and the classic cocktail of your choice.

*For romance and housemade spinach gnocchi that's lighter and delectable than you can imagine, try Casanova. Since 1977, the establishment has evolved from a tiny shack to a capacity for 250 guests in a charming, imaginative setting with its own bakery and a 30,000 bottle wine cellar. Dine at the (actual) Van Gogh table for an extravaganza.

*My absolute favorite is Cantinetta Luca, where the glass of Dolcetto "Clerico," Burrata with Frescobaldi Estate Olive Oil, sea salt and crostini, and Bucatino alla Romana with housemade pancetta with shallots, chili, white wine, pomodoro and olive oil knocked my socks off.

*eateries are so numerous, you'll be tempted to have your fill and make use of doggie bags.

Speaking of which...



Bring the dog. Carmel-by-the Sea is the epitome of dog-friendly. Half of the locations in the key of the downloadable Carmel Innkeepers Association map are pet-friendly. They are ubiquitous here, nattily dressed and well-behaved. Indeed there is only one park (Devendorf) that excludes the 4-legged guests.

Don't miss Yappy Hour Monday through Friday at the Cypress Inn!

Take a walk. Get to know the city from a fresh perspective. Explore intricate passageways, food, wine, and art or just go! Maps are widely available. Meandering is spectacular, too!

*We gather around Staci at the Sunset Center for the **Carmel Food Tour**. She told us that her goal was that we be reasonably full. Step by step, I'm stunned at the fervor of the culinary movement. 1-Via the Court of the Fountains, *Anton & Michel* is our first stop for modern European fare. Chef Mark Simpson pleased with a taste of slow braised (in Guinness, tomato puree and veal stock) Kobe beef.

2-At the intentionally rustic *Affina* (6th & San Carlos) Chef James Anderson nailed it with a glass of Le P'tit Paysan Viognier and Caprese Salad featuring locally-sourced tomatoes, burrata, basil, sea salt, olive oil and balsamic reduction. This "Coastal Cuisine of Monterey" is the vision of Nico Izard, co-owner and executive chef.



3- Casanova’s Chef David Baron wows with breadsticks and olive tapenade, seductive gnocchi made



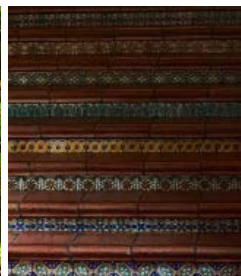
from pate choux dough and Georis Pinot Gris on the tree-covered patio. We began full at this point.

4-*Trio Carmel* refers to art, wine and olive oil. We're treated to olive oil education and tasting and combinations like cinnamon-pear infused balsamic vinegar and blood orange EVOO, then lemon balsamic vinegar and mushroom sage EVOO. The coup was our choice of olive oil on vanilla bean gelato. Baklouti Green Chile Pepper-with a bit of sea salt-was the bomb!

5-At *Terry's Lounge*, the Lamb Curry Meatball Boulettes and the New-Classic Manhattan: welled bourbon, Carpano Antica sweet vermouth, and Fee Brothers whiskey barrel-aged bitters from NY gave us a second wind.

6- *Carraccioli Cellars* is a 4th generation Swiss-Italian-run boutique winery with a French winemaker. The '08 Brut Cuvée reflects the methode champenoise and 5 years of aging on the yeast. The '11 Pinot Noir was so fine I bought a bottle for my husband.

7-*Lula's Chocolates* were the grand finale. These butter-based caramels with 9 varieties of salt are sensational. Can't wait to share Aloha Rocky Road (with macadamia nuts) with our kids and grandkids. The sea salt caramels and turtles I brought home are almost gone.





***Carmel Walking Tour** Artist Kelly Steele guided the group past the bronze couple on the bench, MJ Murphy's House from 1900 and the milk shrine, where residents often left personal, humorous (think Hank Ketcham of Dennis the Menace fame) notes to the milkman. In contrast, he pointed out arches, clay tile and wrought iron of Spanish Revivalist architecture, plus Carmel Stone in structures and under our feet.

"Picture a village in a forest," he says. Trees are linked with the city's personality and are often the topic of discussion in City Hall, he notes.

We encounter the savvy drought-tolerant landscaping at City Hall, fairytale Hansel and Gretel

cottages, and Church of the Wayfarer, where its Biblical Garden identifies the scripture associated with the plant (Aloe, John 19:39).

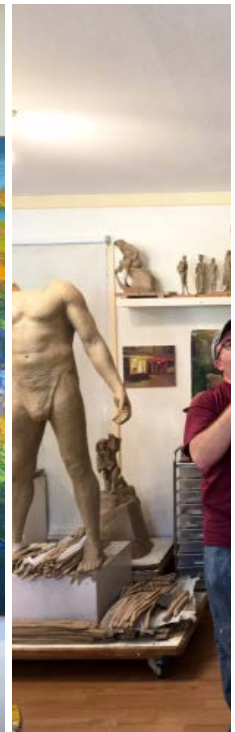
Intricate passageways beckon, and we are encouraged to enter and exit in different directions for the full experience. In one, the Court of the Golden Bough, artist/ proprietress Iva Winton of "American Crafts & Jewels" passed by whispering, "I'm glad you like my window."

A dog bowl is spied at the Paseo Building, where Rich Pepe's Café Napoli and Vino Napoli grace another walkway.

The secret path that leads to the Metaphysical Bookstore entrances us.

Our final passage returned us- all the wiser and experienced-to the Pine Inn Courtyard.

There are an inordinate number of butterflies in Carmel-by-the-Sea!





***Carmel Art Tours** We're open-eyed as Rohana LoSchiavo embraces the gloriously diverse art scene.

At *Winfield Gallery* in an old dinner theatre (with Figge Cellars tasting room inside), Chris Winfield shares a compelling collection of art and sculpture.

David Potigian, owner of *Gallery Sur* tells us "You're either polishing your stone or you're selling it." Photographer Gary Geiger's fluid water pieces mesmerize.

The photography of Edward Weston and Ansel Adams, among other 19th and 20th century and contemporary artists, are displayed at the *Weston Gallery*.

Gallery 21 features the vivid world of Eyvind Earle, whose roots in Disney animation often emerges in his art.

Cassandra Blackmore Studios showcases the artist's dramatic glassworks.

Steven Whyte's Sculpture Studio & Gallery is amazing, with current projects underway and displays of his past works, including "The War Hymn Monument," at Texas A&M, the largest (18,000 pounds) single bronze sculpture at any educational establishment in the world.

Galerie Plein Aire has been a fixture in Carmel for 18 years. Growing up in Big Sur, Cyndra Bradford's family enjoyed free time with an abundance of art materials. Her art is intertwined with the region's landscape and her triptychs do it justice.



***Wine Walk By-The-Sea** The “passport” may be used at 9 of 14 tasting rooms, at your own pace. The Pepe Winery Red flight (Pinot Noir, Erupzione Chianti and Vesuvio Cabernet Blends) was a great welcome with arancini risotto lollipops and savory marinara at *Vino Napoli* on day 1.

Across the street in the California Live Oak-flanked Pickadilly Park courtyard is *Galante*, where I enjoyed reds, which included the robust 2012 “Grand Champion” blend of Cabernet Sauvignon, Malbec and Petit Sirah. Owner Jack Galante’s great grandfather James Devendorf was one of the founders of Carmel.

I returned to *Caraccioli* and tasted once again, this time taking home the bright French-oaked ‘11 Chardonnay.

The passport doesn’t expire and I have six flight vouchers remaining.

***The Carmel Farmers’ Market** is held Thursdays from 10-2.

The golden beets and Heirloom tomatoes I purchased made a fantastic Roasted Beet and Goat Cheese Salad found on Epicurious.com

***Think outside the box.** The 3850 residents in Carmel-by-the-Sea do. Forget curbs, street numbers, street lights (they don’t exist). Recognize that Seventh is Ocean Avenue. Accept that Coach is the only chain. No high heels (you’ll need a certificate from City Hall) and no fires on the beach on the weekends. Perfection has its price.

From Junipero Serra to Devendorf and Powers to Calamity Jane, Edward Weston and Clint Eastwood, the town has been shaped by influencers past and present.

It’s quirky and elegant, relaxed and celestial, gorgeous and grounded, quite like the Cypress on the city’s logo.







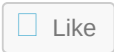
If You Go:

The non-profit Carmel Innkeepers Association (www.stayInCarmel.org) is a good resource for 40 boutique hotels and unique properties within the city.

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