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Weekender: Exploring Carmel's Stone-Paved Alleys, Wine Caves, and Miles of Beach

Caitlin Harrington | Photo: Steve Alexander/Creative Commons | July 20, 2016

The charmer-by-the-sea turns 100 this year.



SLIDESHOW
Point Lobos State Reserve.
(1 of 5)



Scene In...



Carmel celebrates its [100th birthday](#) this year, and several local businesses and arts venues have spiffed themselves up for the occasion. While you'll still find everything that lends Carmel its European-style charm—thatched-roof cottages, postcard-perfect white sand beaches, a legion of art galleries, and [famously dog-friendly](#) policies that put even San Francisco to shame—new eats, revamped hotels, and a year-long roster of centennial events all add up to the perfect time to give Carmel a second look.

Eat

- Hibachi on your fire escape.
- Barbecue in your own backyard.



Wander down one of Carmel's stone-paved alleys to find [Il Tegamino](#), a snug trattoria serving Italian comfort food. Brothers Giuseppe and Salvatore Panzuto opened in October with a Neapolitan menu that pays homage to their mother's cooking. Dig into the meatball bar's well-herbed meat, seafood, and veggie options, then settle into the low-lit 24-seat dining room, or head to the courtyard, warmed by heat lamps, optional blankets, and a Tuscan sangiovese.

For breakfast, head to French newcomer [Lafayette Kitchen & Cafe](#) for galettes and coffee. The owners of two popular local eateries, Ben Khader of Yafa Mediterranean restaurant and French-born Isabel and Jean Bernard Vial of Lafayette Bakery, teamed up to open the breakfast and lunch spot in May. Styled after a French country inn, the café serves crepes, pastries, breads, and sandwiches, plus coffee, espresso drinks, and fresh-pressed juices. Settle in under the vaulted ceilings and order a latte and pain perdu: buttery slabs of French toast topped with seasonal berries. Grab a jar of homemade jam or a to-go baguette sandwich for a beach picnic.

Drink

Drive 20 miles east on Carmel Valley Road, past hillside farms and cattle ranches, into Carmel Valley Village, a tiny hamlet with a Mediterranean climate and almost 20 wineries, all within walking distance of one another. Veteran vinters Mike Kohne and Mark Dirickson opened [Mercy Vineyards](#) there in 2008; not long after, their small-yield varietals began turning heads. Try a generous tasting of seven wines from their fog-dense Soledad vineyard, situated on a dried riverbed ideally suited to growing pinot noir and chardonnay.

For a different perspective, head two blocks east—and then down—into [Holman Ranch](#)'s underground wine caves. The caves house the winery's destemming, pressing, fermenting, and barrel aging processes, converting grapes from the nearby vineyard into award-winning pinot gris, sauvignon blanc, and pinot noir. There's also an [olive grove](#) just over the hill, plus olive oils to sample in their tasting room, where you'll try hand-harvested extra-virgins that put European varieties to shame.

Stay

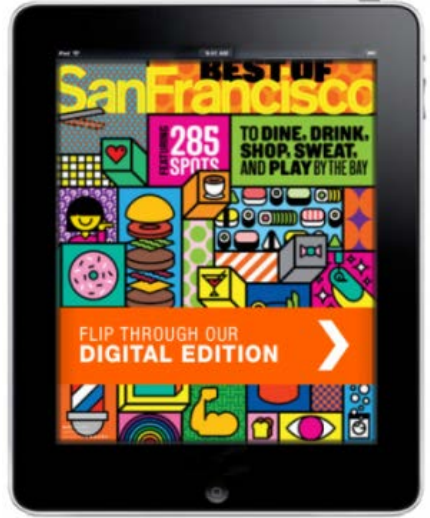
Just in time for Carmel's centennial bash in October, a couple of local inns have reopened with new names, new owners, and newly renovated digs. The former Dolphin Inn has been reborn as the [Hotel Carmel](#), which opened in May following a \$2.5 million renovation by surfer-turned-boutique hotel developer John Grossman. The updated decor incorporates coastal wood, beachy wicker, seaside photography from Carmel and Big Sur—and, in about half the rooms, fireplaces. Hit the Jacuzzi or relax by the fire pit in the revamped courtyard, or get retro with the library's vintage cassette player. There's complimentary wine at happy hour and a bagel bar at breakfast.

Just a few blocks south in Carmel village, the old Cobblestone Inn has a sleek new identity. Rechristened the [Hideaway Inn](#), the boutique B&B may feel familiar to some San Franciscans: It's now managed by Plumpjack, the hospitality group founded by Gavin Newsom that's behind the mid-Market craft cocktail bar Forgery as well as Wildhawk in the Mission (which supplanted [the old Lexington Club](#)). In the reboot, floral wallpaper is out; two-tone solid paints and natural wood—and the requisite fire pit—are in. Bonus: Ask for a dog-friendly room and your pooch will be treated to a doggie bed, treats, food and water bowls, and a customized ID card.

Do



Now Playing



Classical music fans, take note: Carmel's annual [Bach Festival](#) is up and running through July 30. Led by London-based maestro Paul Goodwin, this year's fest features Grammy-winning musicians, like [Virtual Choir](#) conductor Eric Whitacre and Billboard chart–topping piano duo Anderson and Roe.

Back again after a two-year closure, the outdoor [Forest Theater](#) puts on community-theater stage productions along with alfresco movie nights. Up soon: a musical production of *The Wizard of Oz*, running from August 17 to September 25. If concession-stand Raisinets won't hold you over, bring in a wine and cheese picnic from downtown gourmet emporium the Cheese Shop. Pack a blanket to stay cozy during cool evenings, or snag a spot near one of the two blazing fire pits.

Don't leave without getting an eyeful of some of the region's—and the country's—most breathtaking scenery. From Carmel village, head three miles south to [Point Lobos State Reserve](#). At 1,325 acres, including 750 acres of the nation's first marine sanctuary, the rocky coastal reserve lures nature lovers of all stripes and activity levels. Hike or bike one of over a dozen trails along coastal cliffs or through acres of Monterey pine; kayak, snorkle, or [scuba dive](#) among sea otters, anemones, and a kelp forest. ([Monterey Bay Kayaks](#) and [Adventures by the Sea](#) rent out kayaks from \$30.) Parking fills up quickly during summer, so for your best shot at a spot inside the lot (\$10), arrive before 9:30 a.m. or after 3:00 p.m.

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