

FATHOM

This Hotel Is the Ultimate California Wine Escape (And, No, It's Not in Napa or Sonoma)



Moroccan-inspired interiors and tiles galore at Hotel Californian. Photo by Amelia Mularz.

SANTA BARBARA, California - Ask a wine drinker — anyone from a seasonal rosé sipper to a full-fledged oenophile — about California wine destinations, and they'll likely point you to the northern part of the state. For good reason, because Napa and Sonoma are the stars of the Golden State's wine world. But we shouldn't overlook the wine wonderland south of San Francisco.

One of California's dreamiest wine-centric escapes, [Hotel Californian](#), is located two hours north of Los Angeles in Santa Barbara, the ritzy beach town that serves up sun, surf, and seriously good sipping. The wow factor abounds at the 121-room hotel right across from the beach and decked in dazzling Moroccan decor. When wine magnate Bill Foley, owner of [Foley Family Wines](#) and winner of the 2022 Wine Star Award for Lifetime Achievement from *Wine Enthusiast*, bought the property last year, he cemented Hotel Californian's place as a prime wine destination.





A Legendary Hotel Turned Design Haven

The original Hotel Californian opened in 1925 to high expectations for its ocean and mountain views, sophisticated features like a phone and a bath in every room. Even its room rate of \$2.50 a night (hefty in those days) didn't scare travelers away.

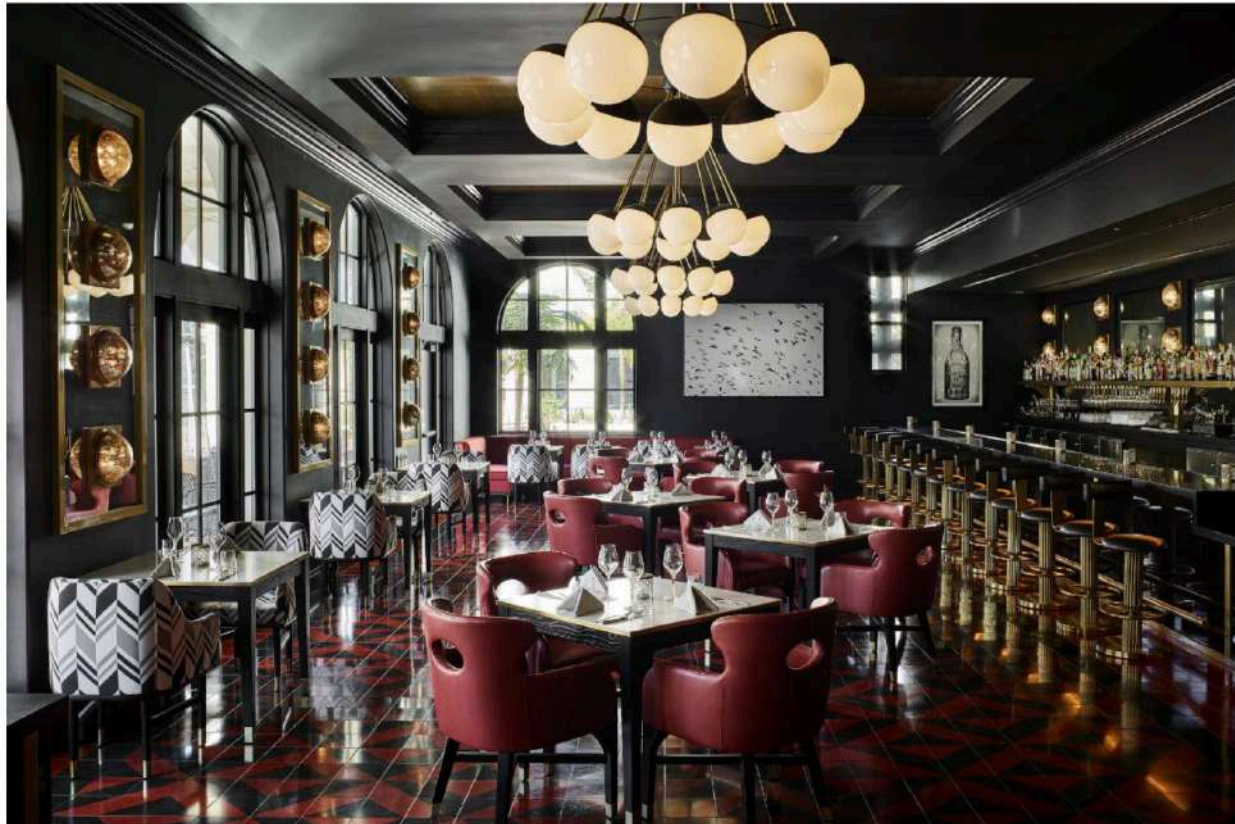
What did cause a fright, however, was the 6.2 magnitude earthquake that hit Santa Barbara eleven days after the hotel's opening. The building's exterior brick collapsed, exposing many rooms to the elements and making the hotel look like an open-sided dollhouse.

The building was repaired and went on to enjoy a heyday from the late 1920s through the '40s. Then the hotel fell on hard financial times and ended up sitting vacant for more than a decade at the turn of the 21st century.

An eight-year overhaul that ended in 2018 transformed the property into the glamorous Moroccan-meets-Spanish Colonial Revival masterpiece that Foley purchased in 2021. Today the hotel is spread across four buildings on three adjacent street corners and includes restaurants, a tasting room, and a rooftop pool. The man responsible for the interior eye candy is designer Martyn Lawrence Bullard, who is famous for his boutique hotels and homes for celebs like Sir Elton John, Cher, and multiple Kardashians.

Among the standout features are 26 different styles of tile (the property ordered 1.1 million pieces during the revamp) and varied ceramic patterns throughout the lobby, the library bar (Djinn), the hotel's two restaurants (Goat Tree and Blackbird), the tasting room (The Society: State & Mason), and the rooftop pool (Tan-Tan). The most mesmerizing mosaics are in Majorelle, the hotel spa named for the famed Marrakech gardens. Not the domed ceiling made of hand-painted tiles: It took three months to create.

Bullard carries Moroccan touches through to the guest rooms with more tiling, golden cobra sconces, and custom textiles. Equally eye-catching (if notably less North African) are the portraits of Hollywood icon superimposed with tattoos. Elizabeth Taylor, Marilyn Monroe, and Marlon Brando in inked arm sleeves add a little edge to an upscale stay.



Taste More Than 70 Wines

While Bullard brings his eye for design, Bill Foley brings his taste for fine wine. Foley Family Wines owns two dozen wineries across four continents — and you can taste plenty of their pours right on property at [The Society: State & Mason](#), a former boutique space that Foley transformed into a Moroccan-style tasting room. If you're anxious to get back to your room, you can buy a bottle to go or enjoy just a glass and nibble (go for the heirloom tomatoes with creamy burrata). If

you're up for a full party for your palate, book a Riviera Reserve Experience, a tasting that includes four West Coast wines and carefully curated food pairings, like smoked salmon rilette, a tartlet of foraged mushrooms, and seared filet mignon.

Of course, wine is also on the menu at Goat Tree, Blackbird, and Djinn, as are seriously creative cocktails. Blackbird hosts monthly winemaker dinners in which guests can mingle with a featured winemaker from the Foley portfolio over a nicely paired meal.



Perhaps the most interesting wine tasting perch on site is the Tan-Tan pool, which was designed so guests could stand in the water with a glass of wine in hand while enjoying the ocean views. The name Tan-Tan is a nod to the Berber village that hosts the event considered the Burning Man of Morocco, so consider the rooftop oasis your invitation to unwind. And while they don't serve pinot during Pilates in the courtyard, the hotel does supply sustainably sourced, PVC-free Corc Yoga mats made from 100 percent cork.

Go on a Santa Ynez Valley Tasting Tour

While there's plenty to keep you occupied at the hotel, when you want to wander farther afield for a tasting, Hotel Californian can make all the arrangements. After all, Santa Barbara County's Santa Ynez Valley is where Bill Foley started his wine empire. The hotel's Travel Like a

Connoisseur package includes complimentary tastings and discounted wine purchases at The Society: State & Mason and complimentary tastings at three nearby Foley Family vineyards: Lincourt Vineyards, Foley Estates, and Firestone Vineyards.

Bill Foley's very first foray into wine was Lincourt Vineyards, which he bought in 1996. Located in the Santa Rita Hills, it's named for Foley's two daughters, Lindsay and Courtney, and produces wines named for influential women in his life. Tastings take place either outside on a covered porch with sprawling vine views or inside an original 1926 Sears Craftsman Kit Home. Nearby, Foley Estates, Foley's second wine-producing property, is another Santa Rita Hills vineyard that produces world-class chardonnay and pinot noir.



The Foley vineyard that gets the most buzz is Firestone in Los Olivos, which served as a location for the 2004 film *Sideways*. (Characters Miles, Jack, Stephanie, and Maya skip out on a boring lecture to wander through the barrel room.) Even before that, Firestone was known for being the first estate winery in Santa Barbara County. Leonard Firestone (the son of legendary tire innovator Harvey Firestone) and his son Brooks founded it in 1972. For reality TV fans, Brooks also happens to be the father of Andrew Firestone of *The Bachelor* season three fame. Visit the vineyard today and you're more likely to run into Meowbec, the estate's resident cat, than any

reality TV stars, tire legends, or Hollywood actors, but you can savor an exceptional fumé blanc while soaking up hilltop views.



Firestone Winery, a filming location for "Sideways." Photo by Amelia Mularz.

Explore Santa Barbara's Funk Zone

Back at base, you'll find even more tasting rooms, as well as cozy cafés, art galleries, restaurants, and shops in the Funk Zone, the neighborhood just outside Hotel Californian's doors. Once an industrial warehouse district, this stretch of about ten blocks near lower State Street and the waterfront is now a walkable bohemian enclave and home to the largest section of Santa Barbara's Urban Wine Trail. The better stops include [Deep Sea Tasting Room](#) on Stearns Wharf for sipping with a side of ocean views, [Paradise Springs Winery](#) for a kid- and dog-friendly spot with outdoor seating, and [Fox Wine Co.](#) for its laid-back vibe and rosé kombucha on tap.

The Funk Zone won't disappoint when it comes to souvenirs. [SeaVees](#), an iconic California brand that dates back to the 1960s, sells beach-casual kicks; [Loveworn](#) is stocked with vintage denim and hand-screened tees. Together, they create a classic Santa Barbara look to pair with any Santa Barbara wines you take home. [The Blue Door](#), a vintage collective with home treasures spread



across three floors, is the place to snag a set of 1950s etched wine glasses, an ideal way to drink the local vino.