

Southern California Dreaming

NEWPORT BEACH, CALIFORNIA | I have long believed that the world is segmented into two distinct groups of people. There are those who like geometry, for example, and ones who fancy algebra. A person is usually into the Beatles or the Rolling Stones, but not both. Ditto dogs and cats, and Coca-Cola and Pepsi, too. And for those baby boomers who remember the television classic *Gilligan's Island*, the choice is Ginger or Mary Ann. A similar divide exists when it comes to California; you either love the northern part of the Golden State, which I identify as anything above the coastal burg of San Luis Obispo, or the south. ►

BY JOHN STEINBREder



◀ As for my positions in such weighty matters, put me down for algebra, the Beatles, dogs, (Diet) Coke and Mary Ann. With regards to California, I have long been a big fan of the north, preferring San Francisco ahead of any other city in the state as well as the wine regions there (Napa and Sonoma Valleys ahead of those in Santa Ynez and Temecula), the national parks (Yosemite), the food (thank you Alice Waters and Thomas Keller) and music (Grateful Dead and Santana ahead of L.A.-born bands like the Eagles and the Doors). Then, there is the golf, of a public-access variety, and I felt for years that nothing in Southern California could possibly top the riches of the Monterey Peninsula and the layouts at Pebble

Beach and Spyglass Hill.

But a recent trip to the Resort at Pelican Hill in the seaside, super-rich town of Newport Beach has me re-thinking my Northern California bias

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when it comes to places to tee it up.

It starts with the courses at Pelican Hill, and the two 18-hole layouts there are a delight to play. Originally

designed by Tom Fazio in the early 1990s and then revamped by the architect nearly a decade ago, they offer stirring tee shots over gaping canyons that require both draws and fades; ample, well-contoured fairways lined by groves of stately pine, eucalyptus and sycamore trees; testy greens of varying sizes and shapes; and well-angled approach shots.

The sweeping ocean vistas and near-constant images of yachts and fishing vessels cutting through the nearby waters evoke SoCal at its very best, as do the sights of surfers riding modest-sized waves and cliff divers plunging into the ocean from craggy outcroppings. The sun always seems to be shining here as salty sea breezes keep things from ever getting too hot, and I cannot



Bungalow guest room

help but think that the only things I am missing during my rounds are my iPod and my Beach Boys playlist.

The accommodations at Pelican Hill also impress, and resort officials say that the 16th century architect Andrea Palladio inspired the design of its bungalow guest rooms and villas. The arched porticos and corniced columns endow the complex with the feel of a northern Italian estate, and the structures fit nicely in a locale where white stucco walls and red-tile roofs abound.

Had I not been solo, I might have opted to stay in one of the 128 villas, which range from two to four bedrooms and are equipped with kitchens (with Sub-Zero refrigerators and Wolf ovens) and individual washers and dryers and private terraces. The 24-hour butler service also recommends them greatly.

But as I was on my own, I secured a bungalow guest room in-

stead. All told, the resort has 204 of those, and they feature hand-hewn, wood-beamed ceilings; gas-lit, Italian limestone fireplaces; and spacious bathrooms with marble, walk-in showers and deep soaking tubs. My quarters also boast a balcony and sweeping views of the Pacific, and perhaps the most comfortable king-sized bed on which I have ever rested. The Wi-Fi functions flawlessly, and the coffee maker I crank up before golf every morning produces brilliant brews, especially when I fill its filter with the Guatemalan roast that housekeeping leaves in my room each evening.

I spend three days and two nights at Pelican Hill and quickly develop a very satisfying routine. Golf in the morning and afternoons by the Coliseum pool, which is perfectly circular, 136 feet in diameter and well serviced by a cadre of attendants. I find it very easy to ▶



Developers of Pelican Hill endeavored to give the oceanside resort the feel of a northern Italian estate.

local knowledge

◀ linger there for hours, reading, napping and occasionally cooling off in its briny waters. I avail myself of the services of a Pelican Hill masseuse in the 23,000-square-foot spa one day, and she deserves some credit for the 78 I shoot the following morn. I also visit the very well-equipped fitness center each day, and my predinner workouts there make me somewhat less guilty about the good food I was eating every night.

And the food is very, very good, especially at the eatery called Andrea. After Palladio the architect, of course. I am enchanted by that place as soon as I walk in, and walk by its glassed-in wine room on the way to my table. There were Massetos and Gajas and several Brunellos del Montalcino among the 1,200 bottles displayed there, and I cannot wait to take a gander at the entire list. It is a winner, to be sure, as is the menu, and I order well, beginning with fresh white asparagus, followed by lobster tortellini that was made in Andrea's temperature-controlled pasta room and the well-marbled, melt-in-your-mouth Wagyu ribeye that is broiled to absolute perfection.

Interestingly, perfection is a word one hears a great deal at Pelican Hill. From the guests, of course, and also from the staff, who talk about the way in which the resort was inspired by the Renaissance belief that humanity is uplifted by aspiring to perfection – and how they strive to do just that as they serve the people at the resort each day.

That is yet one more thing I like about the resort, and one more reason why I am becoming more of a Southern California person when it comes to golf.

Maybe I will even start to love geometry, and Ginger, too. ●

NEWPORT BEACH, CALIFORNIA | The Resort at Pelican Hill is located halfway between Los Angeles and San Diego – and is only a 45-minute trip to and from Los Angeles International Airport, in normal driving conditions. John Wayne Airport, also known as Orange County, is a mere 15 minutes by car.

▮ Of the two courses here, the par-71 North is regarded as slightly tougher and tighter, and it measures 6,945 yards from back tees. As for the South, it is a par-70 track that plays 6,580 yards from the tips, with four of its holes located on the west side of scenic Highway 1, right on the Pacific.

▮ Given the routings of the layouts as well as the terrain, carts are the preferred mode of transportation for golfers during their rounds. While I always rue those times I am unable to walk when I play, I do appreciate the excellent forecaddie services the resort offers as part of the guest fee. And the fellows who accompanied me during my two rounds were first-rate loopers.



▮ The 18 private cabanas overlooking the Coliseum Pool are joyous retreats and well worth reserving. Each is 170 square feet in size and comes with a Bose music system,

a flat-screen television, a ceiling fan, a pair of lounge chairs and personalized food and beverage service.



▮ There are 22 treatment rooms in the spa, and a plethora of treatment options, as well as steam rooms, saunas and saltwater Roman soaking tubs. A full-service salon also operates out of that facility, offering any number of facials, pedicures, manicures and hair stylings.

▮ As a rule, I am not a fan of resort golf academies, as I do not feel that there is ever much to be gained from having an instructor who has never seen me before, and will likely never see me again, mess with my already messy game. So it was with great reluctance that I paid a visit to PGA professional Glenn Deck at his facility at Pelican Hill. But he did a fabulous job, evaluating my rather ragged swing and various physical limitations and then making one suggestion as it related to my takeaway. I found the session surprisingly helpful, and I credit his advice with my being able to break 80 on each of my rounds.

▮ While Andrea may be the best restaurant at the resort, it is by no means the only option. All told, Pelican Hill boasts five eateries. One of those is the Coliseum Pool & Grill, and it offers superb American cuisine at breakfast,

lunch and dinner in a scenic and somewhat casual setting. Another is the Pelican Grill at the clubhouse, which puts out an array of stylish dishes that deftly utilize locally sourced ingredients. The wine list there earns kudos from diners, as does the Tasting Table that is set next to the open-concept kitchen. Not surprisingly given the very temperate climate in Newport Beach, both restaurants offer al fresco dining on terraces as well as plenty of seating space inside.

▮ Pelican Hill is owned and operated by the Irvine Co., a private enterprise focused on real estate development. The business was founded in the late 1800s when an Irish-born immigrant named James Irvine amassed tens of thousands of acres in the area, and for many years cattle ranching was the primary source of revenue. Today, the company builds suburban, master-planned communities; office buildings; and retail centers, among other things. The core of its holdings is the nearly 100,000-acre Irvine Ranch, and that property is said to encompass roughly one-fifth of Orange County. Donald Bren is the sole shareholder of Irvine Co., and his net worth is reported to exceed \$14 billion. **J.S.**

