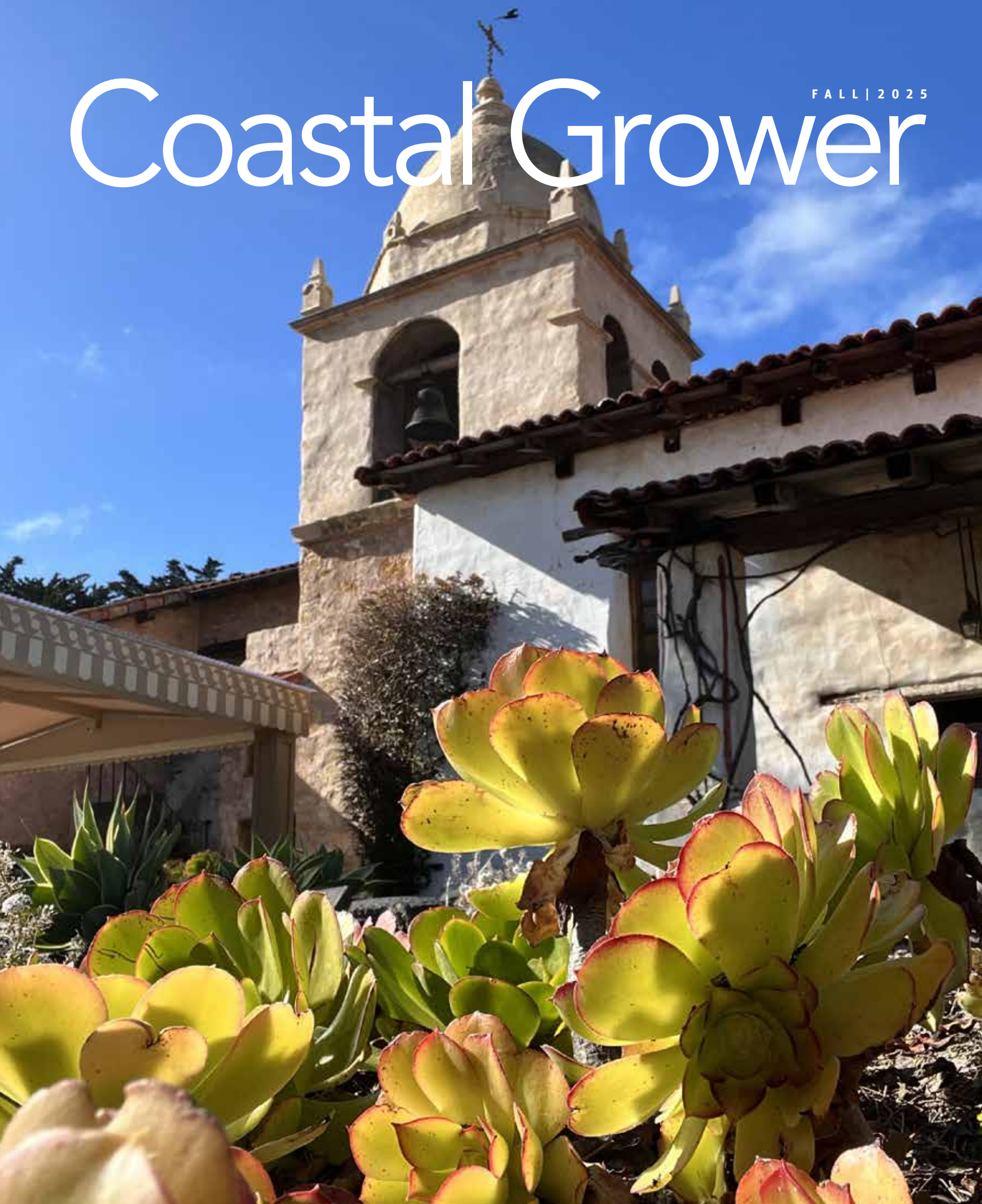


Coastal Grower

FALL | 2025



A Fresh Look At a Local Treasure

Carmel's famed Cypress Inn undergoes 'light-touch' renovation

By Mike Hale



Renowned for its artistic legacy, Bohemian spirit and timeless beauty, the storybook village of Carmel-by-the-Sea cherishes a host of treasures — yet few with the glamour and charm of The Cypress Inn.

A refuge where Old Hollywood magic meets Spanish-Moroccan style — and where every guest (whether two-legged or four) feels perfectly at home — the stately inn brought into global prominence by the late screen legend Doris Day has stood unchanged at its core for decades.

But as it approached its centennial following decades under the glare of the spotlight, the famed boutique hotel born on Lincoln Street in 1929 needed a refreshing. The inn is currently undergoing a “light-touch renovation” under the guidance of renowned Carmel-based designer and hospitality innovator Charles Gruwell. The approach is not about reimagining but about refreshing — “not a complete change,

just upgrading the feel of it,” according to Joseph Violi, the inn’s newly appointed general manager. “(Gruwell) is the perfect person to take this on.”

Spearheading the project is the inn’s owner Dennis LeVett, a local entrepreneur and Day’s former business partner who has decades of experience in local hospitality. Violi refers to his own role as “a steward of a legacy,” and thinks of his current opportunity as the pinnacle of his hospitality career.

“The inn has such a storied history and our job is to bring it forward with a sophisticated approach,” said Violi, a graduate of Cornell’s prestigious School of Hotel Administration, and with more than 35 years in luxury hospitality (including a long-ago stint at nearby Carmel Valley Ranch).

Work is unfolding in phases, rather than one grand reveal. “Everything is being done in steps,” said Violi, who noted that the inn would not close at any point. “The living room is totally being redone, and it will have a big impact because every local knows

it. That’s where we host live music on Thursday, Friday, and Saturday nights — it’s a beloved space.”

Guestroom renovations are just beginning, with palettes and furnishings still being chosen by Gruwell. The team is committed to keeping the Spanish-Moroccan theme, ensuring that the inn’s heritage remains intact even as the details are refreshed for modern sensibilities.

The heart of the hotel remains the restaurant/bar Terry’s Lounge, named for Day’s late son, musician and producer Terry Melcher. Terry’s has long been the place to meet friends, enjoy a cocktail, and soak in the inn’s relaxed glamour.

The Gruwell-led refresh has leaned into the Moroccan spirit, adding a tent-like feel to the front area (known affectionately as “the dog bar,”). Local artist Lisa Haas has adorned the space with trompe-l’œil (French for “deceives the eye,”) a style of painting that uses realistic imagery to create a three-dimensional illusion. Outside, guests





now find new patio furniture, umbrellas, and heat lamps — simple touches that have already been warmly embraced by locals.

A timeless gathering place

The famed boutique hotel rose to prominence through the talent of master builder Michael J. Murphy, who just after the turn of the 20th century crafted more than 350 buildings in Carmel, making him one of the single most influential shapers of the village’s look and character.

From the ornate entrance and wrought iron embellishments to the famed Queen Tower suites with their sweeping views, the Cypress Inn always boasted a welcoming sophistication. It is part of the Carmel Boutique Inns collection, but its singular history — blending Old Hollywood, Carmel’s bohemian charm, and a pioneering pet-friendly philosophy — makes it stand apart.

“We have to be sensitive to the history

and legacy of the property,” Violi said. “We’re updating what has traditionally been a legendary inn in Carmel-by-the-Sea and bringing it more into the 21st century — but with a light touch.”

The inn’s design pedigree is nearly as famous as its pet policy. In 2013, Carmel designer Julie Gardner unveiled a renovation that fused Old Hollywood with Spanish–Moroccan overtones. The look featured rich tones of paprika, ginger, and clove alongside handcrafted tile, wrought iron, and alabaster lighting. Gardner called the style “Glam-Meets-Morocco,” and it became the Cypress Inn’s signature aesthetic — a visual reminder of both its architectural roots and its Hollywood lineage.

A legacy born in the Golden Age

The Cypress Inn began life in 1929 as the Hotel La Ribera, a white-painted brick landmark with black-and-gold trim that local press immediately hailed as “one of the show places of the Monterey Peninsula.” Designed in a Spanish Revival style, its arches, wrought iron details, and Mediterranean influence set the tone for what would later evolve into its celebrated Spanish–Moroccan décor.

Ownership changed hands in the 1960s, when Earl E. McInnis and his son Frank restored and modernized the property, renaming it Cypress West. But its most

famous chapter began in the mid-1980s, when Day (a Hollywood icon but also a Carmel Valley resident) and LeVett purchased the hotel. By then, Day had stepped away from her film career and devoted herself to animal welfare, founding the Doris Day Animal Foundation.

One non-negotiable request for the hotel was simple but groundbreaking: it had to be pet-friendly. At a time when hotels rarely welcomed pets, the Cypress Inn became Carmel’s first boutique hotel to invite four-legged companions as warmly as their owners. That pioneering stance, coupled with Day’s star power, soon earned it recognition from *Sunset Magazine* as “probably the most famous dog-friendly hotel in the country.”

Carmel itself was the perfect backdrop. Dogs run free on Carmel Beach, stroll the town’s shop-lined streets, and find water bowls waiting for them at storefronts. At the Cypress Inn, they find doggie treats at check-in, outdoor dining spaces where they can curl up by their owner’s side, and even post-beach rinse-off stations in the courtyard.

In the end, what has become the most famous dog-friendly hotel in the country, is equally known for its style, grace and hospitality.

“It’s been part of Carmel’s fabric for decades,” said Violi. “It’s important that we treat her with the respect she deserves.” **CG**

