



the **PULSE** TALK ABOUT TOWN



OLD WORLD CHARM, NEW WORLD ELEGANCE. The Bernardus Lodge and Spa is a delightful Carmel Valley get away, in the heart of the Central California wine country.



The Best Of Both Worlds

Bernardus Lodge & Spa, in the heart of Carmel Valley, provides a serene, true wine country experience, within easy access of California's most dramatic coast.

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↳ **SILENT ROLLING HILLS OF VINES, AND A BLUE-GREEN LINE-UP OF OCEAN WAVES THUNDERING TOWARD SHORE... A LUXURY CALIFORNIA RANCH ESTATE WITH AN AIR OF CASUAL EUROPEAN ELEGANCE...THE FOOD ON YOUR PLATE PLUCKED FROM THE GROUND MERE FEET FROM WHERE YOU SIT, PREPARED WITH AN ATTENTION TO DETAIL FAR REMOVED FROM YOUR WORKADAY WORLD. THE BERNARDUS LODGE & SPA, IN THE HEART OF CARMEL VALLEY, RE-OPENED AFTER A RECENT COMPLETE MAKE-OVER, MELTS SUCH DISPARATE ELEMENTS IN AN EFFORTLESS BLEND OF OLD COUNTRY SENSIBILITY AND CONTEMPORARY CALIFORNIA CHARM.**

In 1999, Belgian developer Bernardus Marinus Pon built the Bernardus Lodge on the former site of the Carmel Valley Inn, which dated to 1950. Under Pon's care, the reputation of both the lodge and its eponymous winery grew, as did that of its award-winning

restaurant, Marinus, helmed by Chef Cal Stamenov. Recognized for its excellence on a global scale, the Bernardus Lodge was a renowned, secluded, Central California gem. Pon, however, now in his 70s, sold the Lodge to Ensemble Hotel Partners, who, after a four

month shuttering and complete renovation, reopened in April 2015.

The afternoon we arrived, the valley was awash in bright sun as we wound our way along Carmel Valley Road to the crushed stone drive, greeted by the vineyard and olive trees that line the way up to the lodge. After leaving our keys with the valet, we were ushered up the paved steps, beneath a stunning crystal chandelier refracting the sunlight it caught through the trees in a brilliant daytime display. Upon entering the reception lobby, a glass of Bernardus Winery Sauvignon Blanc appeared immediately before us. Crisp and dry, it hit the spot as we checked in.

Our beautifully appointed room, one of 57 on the property, was spacious and bright, with two sets of double doors opening to a patio, overlooking the manicured green expanse of the bocce courts. Like all the rooms, it had been completely redone in the course of the recent remodel and sported luxe features like a two person soaking tub, heated bathroom floor, limestone fireplace, king-size bed with Italian linens and a complimentary wine bar featuring Bernardus wines.

We enjoyed a delicious, supple, Bernardus Pinot Noir while we prepared for dinner at Lucia, the new Bernardus' ode to farm to table dining—conceived and executed by Chef Cal Stamenov. A graduate of the California Culinary Academy, Stamenov has helmed the Bernardus kitchen (known as Marinus in its



previous incarnation) from the beginning, winning awards and gaining recognition from *Wine Spectator*, *Zagat* and *Forbes* among others.

Committed to a seasonal, locally sourced menu, Chef Stamenov, who lives just down the road, populates his menu with vegetables, fruit and eggs from his own property, as well from the abundant chef's gardens throughout the Bernardus Lodge grounds.

At peak seasons as much as 60 percent of the produce served at Lucia is grown directly on the resort property.

Unlike many resort restaurants, Lucia stands on its own reputation. As a result, tables are often at a premium and reservations are recommended, even for resort guests. This is, however, a reservation you definitely want to make. Somewhat more casual in approach than when it was known as Marinus, with an open feel and the outdoors brought in via glass doors opening onto the airy deck and fire pit, Lucia excelled in every way, beginning with the expert familiarity and evocative descriptive powers of our waiter, Larry.

After a thorough vetting of several intriguing possibilities including the Scallop Wellington foie gras, portobello mushroom soup and butter-braised lobster with corn puree and black truffle among them, we were inevitably forced to choose. We started with a tomato, vegetable gazpacho, so fresh and light there was no doubt the ingredients had begun that day in the ground. Next, came Monterey Bay abalone, with jamon aioli, chickpeas and cherry tomatoes—a medley of bright, clean



flavors, each absolutely distinct and perfectly matched. For an entrée, I selected the local blackberry marinated squab, that was delightfully moist, dark and rich, more like beef than bird, while my wife enjoyed the seared scallops, immense in both their size and essential mel-low sweetness.

Last but certainly not least came desert. A “deconstructed” goat cheese cheesecake, with homemade raspberry sorbet, graham cracker crumble and candied lemon peel. Each part standing perfectly alone, yet completely transformed when combined into the sublime whole. My wife, who has tasted a dessert or two, professed it to be possibly the best she'd ever had. A glass of grappa was an effective closer, and I was soon dreaming comfortably.

The next morning, I got up for an early dip in the pool. The air was cool and a crown of clouds topped the surrounding Santa Lucia Mountains. The pool, however, was a perfectly refreshing

DON'T BE SHELLFISHI. (You'll want to share!) (l) Seared Day Boat Scallops. (below) Monterey Bay Abalone.

86 degrees. After a breakfast of Savory eggs and a perfect pot of French press coffee, the clouds had burned off and we availed ourselves of one of the complimentary Mercedes on hand for guests to use up to 4 hours a day. We chose an eminently sporty SL convertible, dropped the top and headed off. With over 300 of days of sunshine a year, and an average temperature of 71 degrees, you can come to expect good weather in Carmel Valley, but conditions this perfect can never be taken for granted.

Just a few miles down the road lies Carmel Valley Village, less than a mile end to end, the village is home to 22 tasting rooms, including Bernardus' own. We definitely planned on doing some tasting, but not until we'd gotten the most out of our loaner convertible, so we went the other way first and headed for the charming hamlet of Carmel by The Sea. Home to countless galleries and boutiques, we shopped the charming, hilly streets high above the ocean without commitment for a couple of happily aimless hours. Suddenly thirsty, we got back in the car and returned to the tasting rooms of Carmel Valley Village.

One of seven Monterey County appellations, Carmel Valley is known for its cabernets, merlots and other red varietals. We tried several, at three walkable wineries, Bernardus' own as well as Joyce Vineyards, and Hollman Valley Ranch and found the valley's burgeoning reputation to be well deserved.

Then it was back to the Lodge for some poolside “R&R”—at least for me. While I took a long soak in the poolside hot tub, my wife took advantage of the expert pampering available at the elegant spa facility, also completely redone in the recent remodel. The spa offers a wealth of luxurious treatments from massage therapies, to “wellness rituals” that release tension and restore energy and balance, as well as a selection of “body indulgences” meant to scrub, polish and soothe your body to perfection.

This proved all the satisfaction we required and so, we retired to our room for the night. It wasn't on the room service menu but when we requested the amazing cheesecake we'd had the night before, the kitchen happily made it available. It might have been even more revelatory the second time. This delightful denouement proved a fitting finale to a truly peaceful and relaxing weekend, full of indulgence and delight. ☺