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NORTHERN CALIFORNIA'S LARGEST NEWSPAPER

Laid-back luxury at redesigned Bernardus Lodge

By Paige Porter Fischer



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The newly renovated Bernardus Lodge and Spa in Carmel Valley.

For most Bay Area residents, the summer months take us on a constant scavenger hunt for sunshine, heat and natural beauty. Most of us would admit that we'd love to chase down a little luxury, too. If the chance of fog is low — and the chances of R&R in a stunning setting are high — well, those are the kinds of odds that spell “vacation.” This summer, all bets are on [Bernardus Lodge](#), one of Carmel Valley's most beloved spots, which has recently reopened after a four-month remodel and redesign of the landmark property.

The Lodge, reimagined by the Los Angeles architectural-design firm [Arya Group Inc.](#), has been opened up and beautifully exposed to the lush setting that draws loyal guests from around the globe.

The verdant landscape seems to spill from the dramatic Santa Lucia Mountains, which change colors with the moving sun, giving guests a constant kaleidoscope to watch from the property. Surrounded by lavender fields, vineyards and organic gardens that feed the Lodge's redesigned restaurant, Lucia Restaurant & Bar, the luxury hotel now fully embraces the landscape that makes it so unique.

The genius of Arya Group's design is the perfect marriage of rustic and chic — respecting the vibe of the valley while enlivening it with a few modern touches. With the goal of barefoot luxury in mind, the designers redefined the idea of a country retreat. Throughout the property, approachable materials such as stone, grass cloth and oak floors fit with the Lodge's surroundings, while glittering glass chandeliers, mosaic tiles and modern furnishings bring a contemporary, sophisticated slant.

"I've been here 15 years, and it's been a treat to come back and see what they've done to the place," says Bell Captain [Tim Sherman](#), who walks me from the gravel drive to the front desk. "I'm so proud of how the lobby looks now. It makes the best impression on folks when they arrive. I love walking guests up the front steps — and through the front door



— and seeing their expression when they get a look at the place."

While guests like myself widen our eyes and take in the new details — like the way the sunlight catches the chandeliers and bounces shards of light across the flagstones — Sherman pours me a glass of Bernardus' own [Sauvignon Blanc](#) to say "Welcome home," at least for a little while.

Home is one of 57 luxuriously appointed guest rooms, each with a private terrace or patio to take in the various photogenic views. Some

rooms face the pool; some look over the impeccably manicured croquet and bocce ball court; and others face the trees and mountains. A handful of rooms are nestled around the chef's garden and the adjacent wedding garden. Two spa suites boast private hot tubs on secluded patios. All the rooms feature cozy sitting areas, fireplaces and bars stocked with Bernardus wines. Newly renovated bathrooms marry rustic woods with timeless Carrara marble, and each features a deep and wide soaking tub for two.

"I'm the most blown away by the new bathrooms," says [Colleen Prince](#), who lives in Monterey and has been coming to Bernardus Lodge for eight years. "We have always loved this place, but it feels a bit more luxurious than it did before. Everything is fresh and new, but it's still laid-back and not stuffy at all. We are lucky that we can hop in the car and be here in so little time, because it truly feels like we've arrived in another world. This is the sun belt of Carmel — so when everywhere else along the coast is foggy, this place usually has blue skies."

Bernardus Lodge has enjoyed its spot on the culinary destination map for years, thanks to chef [Cal Stamenov](#)'s brilliance in the kitchen. Having spent years studying under some of the world's most famous chefs, from [Alain Ducasse](#) and [Pierre Gagnaire](#) to [Masa Kobayashi](#), Stamenov is steeped in the European culinary tradition, all the while committed to artisanal products and in-season, hyper-local produce — thanks to his sprawling organic garden a few steps from the kitchen.



Formerly Marinus, the new Lucia Restaurant & Bar still offers the tasting menus for which Stamenov has become known, though locals are thrilled that they now can stop by for a la carte options, too. Guests also can grab casual bites, lunch and cocktails at the newly redesigned bar or on the sprawling patio. But the most coveted spot in the house may be the chef's table, in the kitchen, where guests eat in a booth whose walls have been signed by the famous people who've come to see Stamenov create his culinary masterpieces — [Julia Child](#)'s autograph among the many signatures of thanks. “I consider myself so incredibly fortunate to work here, in this particular kitchen in this particular setting,” says Stamenov, who's developed relationships with fishermen, foragers and farmers throughout Carmel Valley. “This truly is a magical place. You feel it when you drive up the driveway. Everything here — from the design to the food — really honors the landscape we're so lucky to be a part of.”

Bernardus Lodge: Rates from \$625. Lucia Restaurant & Bar, open for breakfast, lunch and dinner. Bar menu available 2:30-10 p.m. 415 W. Carmel Valley Road. (831) 658-3400. www.bernarduslodge.com.

Bernardus Winery: Tasting room hours: 11 a.m.-5 p.m. daily. \$12 fee for four wines.
5 W. Carmel Valley Road, Carmel Valley; (831) 659-1900. www.bernardus.com.