

# The Golden Pine Cones

October 27, 2023

## When you're looking for the best, why not take the advice of your neighbors?

**C**ROWDSOURCING, SHMOWDSOURCING. Just who are “the crowd,” and what do they know about replacing the antiquated plumbing or the electrical system in your 1924 cottage? Are you going to ask a bunch of strangers to help you find a lawyer when someone dents your Tesla? What do “they” know about finding your grandmother the perfect dinner to celebrate her 100th lap around the sun?

Enter The Pine Cone’s smart, tasteful and good-looking readers (we’re just guessing about that, but after all, you know some excellent dermatologists who’ll look after your skin, not to mention dentists to whiten your teeth, hairdressers, manicurists and places to build a fabulous wardrobe). They’re not like your neighbors; they are your neighbors. And there will be a link to this year’s winners right on The Pine Cone’s home page, so you can find them anytime.

We don’t know the exact recipe that makes a Golden Pine Cone winner, but it seems to be a combination of excellent customer service, high-quality work and products, a generous ladle of empathy, a quart or two of personal care and a few pounds of attention to detail.

That means sharp-eyed landscapers who spot signs of the dreaded oxalis before it takes over the yard, medical practitioners who know you well enough to notice something isn’t quite right, chefs who don’t remove favorite items from the menu just to be trendy (but who will leave the lemon off the fish if you ask) — these are the kinds of people who make local businesses that work and whose services become sought after.

So, here’s this year’s list, in all its glory. After more than a thousand of you voted, the results were carefully compiled. We know who to call to get the stains out of your best tie, help you book that trip to New Zealand, mix a martini that would make James Bond proud or restack the rocks to move your stone wall to the right side of the property line. And now, you do, too.

Once again, we proudly present The Golden Pine Cones.

### FOOD AND WINE

- Best Neighborhood Market
- Best Butcher
- Best Deli

**Bruno’s Market & Delicatessen** — NE Junipero and Sixth – 6:30 a.m. to 8 p.m. daily – (831) 624-3821, [brunosmarket.com](http://brunosmarket.com)

Fermin and Ryan Sanchez’ Bruno’s Market has been a downtown institution for decades and wins praise from Pine Cone readers every year. With all the items you might hope to find at a local market — freshly baked bread from small bakeries, the best hot sauces in a variety of flavors, locally made jams and gourmet ice cream, to name a few — Bruno’s is everything a corner store should be. Considering its convenient downtown location and easy parking, it’s the ideal spot to pick up necessary supplies, picnic items, local wines and sweets, and its deli is famous for turning out freshly made, delicious — and gigantic — sandwiches made to order. Also voted Best Butcher, Bruno’s carries top-grade beef, choice cuts of pork and other prime meats, high-quality seafood and other items for the grill, stovetop or oven, and will custom cut anything when needed. Carmelites, as well as the city’s many visitors, always appreciate being able to find exactly what they need at Bruno’s.

### ■ Best Fruits and Vegetables

**Farmers Markets** — [oldmonterey.org](http://oldmonterey.org), [montereybayfarmers.org](http://montereybayfarmers.org), [everyonesharvest.org](http://everyonesharvest.org), [wcfma.org](http://wcfma.org), [ci.carmel.ca.us/farmers-market](http://ci.carmel.ca.us/farmers-market)

In a region where there’s a farmers market almost every day of the week, Pine Cone readers know where to find the

best fruits and vegetables (not to mention eggs, pasta, cheese, yogurt, nuts, meats and other staples, pastries and bread, prepared foods and plants). Del Monte Center hosts the popular Friday market that had been held at Monterey Peninsula College for decades (8 a.m. to noon in a lot near California Pizza Kitchen), where customers can expect to find the greatest number of farmers and other producers. A market takes over Alvarado Street in downtown Monterey on Tuesdays from 4 to 8 p.m. (4 to 7 p.m. in winter) and has plenty of products and crafts for sale, too. Pacific Grove presents a Monday afternoon market on Central Avenue from 3 to 7 p.m. Other markets are held on Thursdays at Sixth and Mission in downtown Carmel from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. and, new this year, from 3 to 7 p.m. in Laguna Grande Park in Seaside, and Sundays from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. at 215 Reservation Road in Marina and at Mid Valley Center in Carmel Valley. Seasonal markets take place at the Barnyard at the mouth of the valley on Tuesday mornings and at Del Monte Center in Monterey on Sunday mornings May through September.

### ■ Best Seafood Market

**Sea Harvest Fish Market & Restaurant** — 100A Crossroads Blvd., Carmel, and 598 Foam St., Monterey – open daily, check location for hours – (831) 626-3626 and (831) 646-0547, [seaharvestfishmarketandrestaurant.com](http://seaharvestfishmarketandrestaurant.com), [facebook.com/seaharvestmontereyca](https://facebook.com/seaharvestmontereyca)

Capitalizing on the abundance of the Pacific and local waters — and a demand for high-quality seafood — Sea Harvest opened three decades ago and added restaurants soon after. The markets in Monterey and at the Crossroads boast the best fresh fish and shellfish every day, from locally famous Dungeness crab and sand dabs, to halibut, sushi-grade tuna, locally caught squid, and a wide range of other sustainably

See **GOLDEN** next page



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# GOLDEN

*From previous page*

harvested bounty from the sea. The market's knowledgeable staff will help you select the best and freshest choices, and will offer cooking tips, too, if needed. The owners also recently opened a fish market in Moss Landing at 7537 Sandholdt Road, bringing their services back to North County.

## ■ Best Bakery

**Rise + Roam** — NE Mission and Seventh — 7 a.m. to 3 p.m. daily — (831) 574-2900, [riseandroamcarmel.com](http://riseandroamcarmel.com)

Rise + Roam changed hands this year, with founder Greg Ahn selling it to friend Xanthia Decaux and her partner, Steve Abraham. The duo relocated here a few years ago and purchased Revival Ice Cream on Alvarado Street in Monterey in 2021, and are now the proud owners of both institutions. Staying on through the switch is executive pastry chef Jes-

sica Haney, who can be counted on to turn out sinfully delicious sweet and savory pastries, as well as breads. It would be difficult to say which item won readers' hearts, because it could be the smoked salmon tartine with fromage blanc, the delicate puff pastry filled with an egg and gruyere cheese, the croissants, cinnamon rolls, muffins, cookies or even the gluten-free goodies, not to mention the cookies, cakes and other treats that appear in the cases after the morning pastries are sold out.

## ■ Best Bread

**Ad Astra Bread Co.** — 479 Alvarado St., Monterey — 7 a.m. to 5 p.m. daily — [info@adastrabread.com](mailto:info@adastrabread.com), [adastrabread.com](http://adastrabread.com)

Pastry chef Ron Mendoza quickly became well known locally years ago for his creations at upscale Aubergine in L'Auberge Carmel and went on to launch the hugely popular Ad Astra Bread Co. — his “micro bakery focusing on natural leavened sourdough breads.” The bakery “is committed to using all-organic flours to create Old World style sourdoughs

over a two-day bake process,” he says, and the sourdoughs are “mixed, hand portioned and shaped, and allowed to slowly ferment overnight,” with baking taking place the next day. Daily offerings include Seaside sourdough, olive and seeded sourdoughs, French baguettes and focaccia, but Ad Astra also turns out sweet and savory specials each day, from cardamom rolls and bread pudding to doughnuts and pretzels. After operating out of Other Brother Beer on Broadway for several years, Ad Astra relocated to the main drag in Old Monterey, and its products can also be found at local farmers markets, stores and restaurants.

## ■ Best Caterer

**Jeffrey's** — 112 Mid Valley Center, Carmel Valley — (831) 624-2029, [jeffreysgrillandcatering.com](http://jeffreysgrillandcatering.com)

A longtime presence in Carmel Valley, Jeffrey's can be relied on to provide the best for any occasion, whether for a large party or a small one — literally, two people to 500. Locals know they can count on this mid-valley go-to for the very important task of providing beautiful food and excellent service at any site, including the restaurant, which can be rented for private parties. Customers can even cater their own events with the “secret chef” option — order an array of entrees and desserts (including homemade ice cream) and pick them up using your own casserole dishes. A presence in the valley for nearly three decades, Jeffrey's operates a popular restaurant, sells highly addictive spiced nuts, and is extremely capable of meeting every catering need, with plenty of emphasis on fresh, local ingredients and just the right dishes for any occasion, all of which explains why it took Best Caterer again this year.

## ■ Best Wine Store

**Total Wine & More** — 808 Playa Ave., Sand City — 9 a.m. to 9 p.m. Monday through Saturday, 9 a.m. to 8 p.m. Sunday — (831) 920-0154, [totalwine.com](http://totalwine.com)

Since opening its first Monterey Peninsula location in the Sand Dollar Shopping Center in late 2021, Total Wine & More has strived to make its mark here, offering an ever-expanding selection at reasonable prices, hiring informed and helpful staff, and participating in local events. Clearly, those efforts have paid off, at least when it comes to winning Pine Cone readers' hearts. The chain was started in 1991 by brothers David and Robert Trone, who opened their inaugural store in Delaware. Since then, they've added more than 225 locations focusing on "unbeatable prices and unrivaled service from our expertly trained staff." Their store here, though small compared to most, carries 8,000 wines, 4,000 spirits and 2,500 beers, and contains a climate-controlled wine room for rare offerings and a walk-in humidor for fine cigars. On-line ordering is available, easy and convenient, too, and the stock changes frequently, so customers should keep an eye out for their favorites.

## ■ Best Tasting Room

■ Best Monterey County Cabernet Sauvignon

**Twisted Roots Vineyard** — 12 Del Fino Place, Carmel Valley — noon to 5 p.m. Thursday through Sunday — (831) 594-8282, [twistedrootsvineyard.com](http://twistedrootsvineyard.com)

For the couple and the friends who own Twisted Roots, which has a tasting room in Carmel Valley Village, making wine is joyous work, and they strive to make every visit a warm, fun and top-shelf experience.

Founded by third-generation wine growers based in Lodi, Twisted Roots was incorporated more than a decade ago and is owned by gregarious and affable Josh and Julie Ruiz and their friends. In addition to its popular cabernet sauvignon, which is soft and fruit-forward, but not heavy like many other cabs, Twisted Roots produces chardonnay, petite sirah, zinfandel from the family's century-old vines, sparkling rosé and dry hard apple cider.

## ■ Best Monterey County Chardonnay

## ■ Best Monterey County Sauvignon Blanc

**Bernardus** — 5 W. Carmel Valley Road, Carmel Valley — noon to 4 p.m. Sunday, 12:30 to 4 p.m. Monday, 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. Tuesday through Thursday, and 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. Friday and Saturday, reservations available at 11 a.m., 1 p.m. and 3 p.m. for up to 12 tasters, walk-ins accommodated based on availability — (831) 298-8021, [bernardus.com](http://bernardus.com)

Bernardus may have changed in look and feel after its new Dutch owners took over several years ago at the behest of the winery's late founder, Ben Pon, but the wines are as reliable as ever. Longtime winemaker Dean DeKorth retired this year, turning the reins over to highly capable Jim McCabe, who has also been on the team for many years. Again this year, the winery's sauvignon blanc and chardonnay took top honors in the Golden Pine Cones, and it should be no surprise. The sauv blanc, made with grapes grown by Michael Griva in Arroyo Seco, is bright and crisp, but far less grassy than most, with notes of citrus and white peach, while the chardonnay is perfectly balanced with acidity, richness and depth.

See **HONORED** page 4 GPC

A vertical banner for Bruno's Market & Deli. The top section has a dark background with the store's name in white. Below is an orange band with 'Thank You!' in white script. The middle section has a dark background with white text for three awards: 'Best Neighborhood Market 2023' (16 Time Winner), 'Best Butcher 2023' (14 Time Winner), and 'Best Deli 2023' (9 Time Winner). Each award is flanked by a pine branch with yellow pinecones. Below the awards is a quote from the Sanchez Family. The bottom section features three images: a large roast, the store's exterior, and fresh produce. Text below the images lists lunch specials and a prime rib carving station. The footer contains the store's logo, address, phone number, and delivery information.

**BRUNO'S MARKET & DELI**

**Thank You!**

to our valued customers for your patronage

**Best Neighborhood Market 2023**

**16 TIME WINNER**

**Best Butcher 2023**

**14 TIME WINNER**

**Best Deli 2023**

**9 TIME WINNER**

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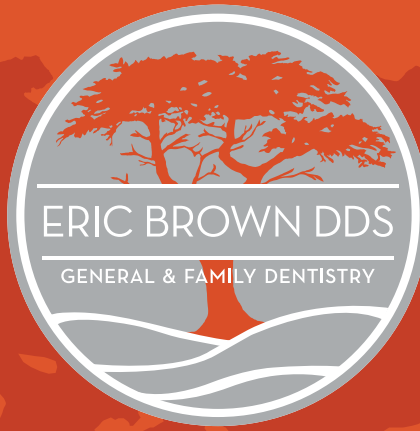
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2021



2023



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G O L D E N P I N E C O N E S

HONORED  
From page 2 GPC

■ Best Monterey County Rosé

**Dawn’s Dream Winery** — *NW San Carlos and Seventh – 12:30 to 6:30 p.m. Monday through Thursday, noon to 7:30 p.m. Friday, noon to 6:30 p.m. Saturday and Sunday – (831) 659-2649, dawnsdreamwinery.com*

In Monterey County, numerous wineries produce rosés from a wide range of varietals — though most are made from pinot noir grapes — and once again, Dawn’s Dream has emerged as the favorite among Pine Cone readers. Owned by Dawn Galante, the winery produces a dry rosé that offers bright citrus notes and juicy hints of fresh berries — and goes with just about everything. A winner annually for nearly a decade, the rosé is often sold out, but this year, as luck would have it, the wine is still in stock at \$38 per bottle. The winery is socially conscious, too, as Galante founded it with a mission of supporting charities benefiting women and children.

■ Best Monterey County Pinot Noir  
■ My Favorite Monterey County Wine

**De Tierra** — *NE Mission and Fifth – 1 to 6 p.m. Monday - Thursday and 1 to 7 p.m. Friday - Sunday – (831) 622-9704, detierra.com*

De Tierra Vineyards changed hands again this year, when owners Alix Bosch and Dan McDonnal, who purchased the winery in 2018, sold to Jeffrey Meacham and Andrew Schoenfeld, who already had an affiliation with the enterprise. But as in the past, its portfolio is strong and its tasting room welcoming, earning it accolades from readers again this year. Best Monterey County Pinot Noir is a highly competitive category, considering the incredible wines produced here and the fact that Monterey County has more acreage of pinot noir vines than any other in the state. De Tierra earned top honors for its iteration — and has three pinots on offer: 2018 Russell Vineyard for \$64, 2018 SLH Tondre for \$59, and 2021 Santa Lucia Highlands for \$49. It also took the vaunted title of My Favorite Monterey County Wine.

■ Best Monterey County Merlot

**Galante Vineyards** — *Dolores between Ocean and Sev-*

*enth – 12:30 to 6:30 p.m. Monday - Thursday, 12:30 to 7:30 p.m. Friday and Saturday, noon to 6:30 p.m. Sunday – (831) 624-3800, galantevineyards.com*

Galante Vineyards consistently produces highly regarded Bordeaux varietals, earning Golden Pine Cones year after year. While Jack Galante and wife Dawn sold their vineyards and winery to a young couple a few years ago, Jack Galante continues to focus on sharing the finest possible wines from his former Cachagua vineyards and other sources, and letting the fruit express itself in the wines. His merlot boasts balance, body and fruit.

■ Best Place for a Beer

**Alvarado Street Brewery** — *Carmel Plaza, Ocean and Mission, and 426 Alvarado St., Monterey – 11:30 a.m. to 9 p.m. Sunday through Thursday, 11:30 a.m. to 10 p.m. Friday and Saturday – (831) 293-8621 and (831) 655-2337, asb.beer*

With Alvarado Street’s stellar lineup of locally made beers, from perennial favorites Mai Tai IPA and Monterey Beer, to seasonal, sour and other more creative offerings — paired with delicious high-level pub food, plenty of indoor and outdoor seating at both spots, and a lively yet sophisticated atmosphere — it’s really no surprise ASB won this year’s award as the Best Place for a Beer. The father-and-son duo that brought immensely successful Alvarado Street Brewery to the Monterey Peninsula also operates Alvarado Street Brewery & Bistro in Carmel Plaza, and both locations are ideal for enjoying a beer (or several), along with some snacks. The Monterey beer garden and the patio in the plaza both offer great spaces for dining and drinking outdoors. ASB also serves at its taproom in its Salinas production facility, the pitch in Marina where Monterey Bay Football Club plays its home games, and recently opened a restaurant in a former bank on South Main Street in Oldtown Salinas.

■ Best Cocktails  
■ Best New Restaurant  
■ Best Place to Take Clients  
■ Best Chef

**Foray** — *NE San Carlos and Fifth – 5 to 8:30 p.m. Wednesday through Saturday, 11 a.m. to 2:30 p.m. Sunday – (831) 250-6100, forayrestaurant.com*

Since Michael Chang and Caroline Singer, co-owners of

Foray, opened their restaurant in late 2022, they’ve been busy testing and showcasing Chang’s impressive culinary skills as executive chef, Singer’s hospitality and all-around knowhow — including behind the bar, which produces creative and elegant cocktails — and their ability to create a space that is elegant, contemporary but not cold, and intriguing. Chang, whose cuisine is beautiful to look at while it showcases as many local and foraged ingredients as possible — and whose quiet but sociable personality has him visiting tables in the restaurant every night — is being celebrated as this year’s Best Chef. Foray’s elegance and spacious seating, along with its creative use of native cypress wood throughout, make it an impressive spot for dining with clients. And if a larger gathering is planned, its private room in the back is equally breathtaking in appearance.

■ Best Happy Hour

**Vesuvio** — *Sixth between Junipero and Mission – nightly from 4 p.m. to 6 p.m. – (831) 625-1766, chefpepe.com/restaurants/vesuvio*

Vesuvio’s happy hour comes in as a readers’ favorite again this year. Imbibers have plenty of options to enjoy happy hour, with a spacious indoor bar and a rooftop bar, aka The Star Bar, a lively terrace lounge. The restaurant offers several drink and food specials, with appetizers like sausage and peppers, arancini with marinara, fried artichoke croquettes with aioli, burgers from the burger bar — served with “way good” seasoned fries — drink specials, and a full bar capable of turning out all sorts of cocktails. Anthony Vitacca, the brilliant mixologist tasked with running the bar programs at all the Pepe restaurants, is always bringing something new and fresh to the table. Be on the lookout for seasonal cocktails. The place is popular, so reservations are recommended.

■ Best Family Restaurant  
■ Most Dog-Friendly Restaurant  
■ Best Restaurant in Carmel Valley

**Sur at the Barnyard** — *3601 Barnyard shopping center – 5 p.m. to 9 p.m. Monday through Friday, 11:30 a.m. to 9 p.m. Saturday and Sunday – (831) 250-7188, surcarmel.com*

It’s family-friendly. It’s dog-friendly. It’s in Carmel Valley? Far be it from us to argue with our readers. Geography aside, Sur serves fun along with an eclectic menu that retains

See **LOVED** page 6 GPC



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G O L D E N P I N E C O N E S

LOVED

From page 4 GPC

much of its DNA from veteran restaurateur Bill Lee, who opened the place in 2016. A couple of years ago, when Lee decided to retire for an estimated 57th time, he sold it to Dudley Ashley and Crystal Andino, who also own Pangaea Grill — another multiple Golden Pine Cone winner this year.

Sur is easy to get to — its Barnyard location makes parking a cinch — and its boisterous and happy vibe is welcoming. Have a seat and order a drink from the full bar. Special cocktails include the Mango Tango (Partida silver tequila, mango puree, Cointreau, simple syrup and lemon juice) and the Johnny Cash (Maker’s Mark, St. Germaine elderflower, sweet vermouth). The cheese bread may be one of the most popular things on the menu, but try not to fill up on it.

Favorites like filet mignon sliders (two for \$32 with fries) and grilled steak or salmon tacos (two for \$24 with all the fixings) are shareable, while the bacon grilled cheese with soup and fries (\$24) might make your inner child come running. The menu is wide-ranging to suit a range of palates, which may be why it’s the readers’ choice for family dining. Choose from seafood, meat, chicken and vegetables used in traditional American preparations as well as Asian fusion offerings. This is the sort of place where you’re almost expected to steal something off someone else’s plate (stick to your own table, though). Casual isn’t the right word, because Sur is special, but there’s something about it that makes you feel right at home — even dogs love coming to join the fun.

Finish up with a dessert served over a fog of dry ice to make some lasting and social-media-worthy memories.

Best French Restaurant

**L’Escargot** — *Mission just south of Fourth – 11:30 a.m. to 2 p.m. and 5 p.m. to closing Wednesday through Sunday – (831) 620-1942, escargot-carmel.com*

Founded in 1958 by Yvan Nopert, L’Escargot continues its more than two-decade tradition of country French cuisine with chef-owner Kerry Loutas. Boasting “a welcome alternative to the tourist experience,” L’Escargot is located just north of the downtown hustle and bustle, where you can enjoy casual fine dining with locally sourced ingredients in a serene setting. In addition to the eponymous snails, you’ll find familiar French favorites like onion soup and roasted chicken Provençale, along with rotating daily specials. Whether you

come for lunch or dinner, our readers seem certain you will not leave disappointed. Enjoy Californian or French wines curated for their quality and character in pairing with the cuisine, or enjoy a cocktail from the bar. Don’t forget to leave room for dessert, with options like delicious chocolate torte, crème brûlée, lemon tarts and many more — be sure to ask, because the sweet endings change regularly.

Best Chinese Restaurant

**Tommy’s Wok** — *Mission between Ocean and Seventh – 11:30 a.m. to 2:30 p.m. and 4:30 to 8:30 p.m. Tuesday through Sunday – (831) 624-8518, tommyswokcarmel.com*

There’s nothing better than picking up Chinese takeout and watching the sunset at Carmel Beach. Locals have been loving this little spot for years, savoring the bright, fresh dishes as tempting aromas waft from the kitchen. It’s been voted Best Chinese Restaurant by Pine Cone readers every year since 2008. Tourists manage to find it, too, giving it rave reviews on social media and travel sites for its great food, solid value and excellent service. Tommy’s Wok’s guests expect substantial portions that won’t break the bank, and they get them. You’ll find all your favorites — pot stickers, spare ribs, egg rolls, sizzling plates and soups, chow mein and mu shu chicken — plus a few things that might be new to you. Be a little more daring and give one of the lamb dishes a try, or bite into the fun texture of battered and fried prawns served with honey-glazed walnuts. A wide variety of Szechuan, Hunan and Mandarin dishes are all served up piping hot and ready to go.

Best Indian Restaurant

**Aabha** — *3690 The Barnyard – noon to 9 p.m. daily – (831) 250-5940, aabhaindian.com*

Aabha brings the exotic flavors and dishes of India to our own backyard. Executive chef and proprietor Bhupender Singh’s food is as warm as he is, from the coconut lentil soup to decadent butter chicken and saag paneer, every dish is sure to satisfy eaters of all tastes. The great thing about Indian food is that it offers a variety of vegetarian dishes bursting with flavor. Start with the samosas — crispy pastries stuffed with potatoes, peas and spices. Make sure you get some warm naan (Indian flat bread) to mop up the sauces, and wash things down with a mango lassi or order a bottle of wine. Everyone who comes to the hospitable and spacious restaurant feels welcome, and Singh’s delicious food never disappoints. The restaurant is now back to serving its much-sought-after lunch

buffet from noon to 3 p.m., when you can sample a variety of dishes without having to commit to one.

Best Italian Restaurant

**La Balena** — *Junipero between Fifth and Sixth – 5 to 9 p.m. Tuesday through Saturday – (831) 250-6295, labalenacarmel.com*

La Balena Cucina Toscana is tucked in one of Carmel’s charming downtown courtyards and feels like you’re dining in the heart of Florence. Owners Anna and Emanuele Bartolini pride themselves on their fresh dishes, sourcing ingredients locally and from small farmers, and changing the menu just about daily. “Our philosophy is to support small farmers the most that we can and translate the hard work of the farmer to the plate in a very simple and honest way,” said Emanuele. They aim to select high-quality ingredients and then let the food speak for itself. The most popular antipasti are the fried cauliflower, octopus, and meatballs.

“Our salads are something we are proud of, we source everything locally so there is always something changing but very fresh,” said Emanuele. Soup is made fresh daily and all the pasta is made in house. Even though it’s not strictly Italian, the fried chicken is a showstopper. La Balena always has some braised meat on the menu and a dish made from freshly delivered seafood. There’s an unusual selection of wines from Italy. “Ninety percent are from small producers, not using big names or commercial brands, but the price point is very fair,” said Emanuele. “We cover everything from sparkling, rosé, red, and have a good selection of orange wines — made with skin contact fermentation.” It is sophisticated simplicity. Emanuele can almost always be found at the restaurant, waiting tables and chatting with diners, bringing his Tuscan charm and hospitality.

Best Japanese/Sushi Restaurant

**Toro Sushi** — *Dolores between Fifth and Sixth – noon to 8:30 p.m. Monday through Thursday, 11:30 a.m. to 9 p.m. Friday and Saturday, 11:30 a.m. to 3 p.m. and 4:30 p.m. to 8 p.m. Sunday – (831) 574-3255, torosushicarmel.com*

Sushi is food, but it’s also beautiful. Of all the cuisines, it’s arguably the one that, done well, best exemplifies the truism, “We eat with our eyes first.” A good sushi chef’s knife is a sculptor’s chisel, transforming pieces of fish into carved

See WINNERS page 8 GPC



Thank you Pine Cone  
readers for voting Foray:

- Best Chef, Michael Chang
- Best New Restaurant
- Best Cocktails
- Best Place to take Client

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FORAY

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# 2023

*All Saints Day School - Best School*

*Scott Fujita - Best Principal*

*Sydney McKechnie - Best Teacher*

*Thank You  
for voting for us!*



Sydney McKechnie - First Grade Teacher  
Scott Fujita - Head of School

## 2022

All Saints Day School - Best School

Scott Fujita - Best Principal

Ashley Zaldivar - Best Teacher

## 2021

All Saints Day School - Best School

Scott Fujita - Best Principal

Mandy Georis - Best Teacher

## 2020

Scott Fujita - Best Principal

Forbes Keaton - Best Teacher

## 2019

Scott Fujita - Best Principal

## 2018

All Saints Day School - Best School

## 2017

Mary Carl - Best Teacher

## 2014

Bud Smith - Best Teacher

*Virtual Open House*

RSVP @ [asds.org](https://asds.org)



**Wednesday,  
November 1, 2023  
1:00 pm**



# WINNERS

*From page 6 GPC*

gemstones, mosaics and miniature works of art. Following that line of thought, Pine Cone readers chose Toro Sushi as their gallery of choice for the tastiest sushi and Japanese food around. Its simple two-page menu includes familiar favorites — edamame (steamed soybean appetizer), nigiri (pieces of fish atop slabs of rice), California rolls with real snow crab — and then adds twists like the Maine Squeeze, with tempura lobster and spicy tuna topped with hamachi (yellowtail), snow crab, macadamia nuts and other goodies.

Not everything's raw, of course — there's teriyaki and katsu-fried chicken coated in crispy panko. You can also order combo plates, or, for \$100, order omakase sushi, putting yourself in the chef's hands. Have some sake and enjoy the show.

■ Best Mediterranean Restaurant

**Dametra Café** — Ocean and Lincoln — 11 a.m. to 11 p.m.  
daily — (831) 622-7766, [dametracafe.com](http://dametracafe.com)

Faisal Nimri and Bashar Sneh were united by their love for music — both play the traditional Middle Eastern oud. Their passion for creating a welcoming atmosphere inspired the birth of Dametra Café. A sort of culinary (but more fun) version of the United Nations, it offers fare from Greek, Italian, Spanish, Moroccan, Turkish, French, Israeli and Lebanese cuisines and consistently attracts a queue of hungry diners.

“Our kitchen is small, but with a really big heart,” says the restaurant’s website, and diners can taste the love. Starters, including fried calamari, pita with tzatziki sauce or hummus, and spanakopita (the Greek specialty with phyllo-wrapped spinach and feta), are perfect for sharing. There are, of course, kebabs, gyros, shawarma and kofta (seasoned ground beef wrapped in lavash bread), but you’ll also find a salmon burger, assorted pastas, cioppino and paella. Vegetarians can choose stuffed grape leaves, baba ganoush, falafel or a variety of hefty salads. The international theme continues through dessert — if you have room — with baklava sharing the bill with tiramisu and triple fudge cake.

Hailing from Jordan and Syria respectively, Nimri and Sneeh continue to captivate their clientele through exceptional hospitality at Dametra Café, where their motto is “eat, laugh, live and love.”

## ■ Best Thai Restaurant

**Pacific Thai Cuisine** — 663 Lighthouse Ave., Pacific Grove — 11:30 a.m. to 2:30 p.m. and 4:30 p.m. to closing Monday through Friday, noon to closing Saturday and Sunday — (831) 646-8424, [pacificthaipg.com](http://pacificthaipg.com)

Pagrovians have known about this place for 15 years, but it sometimes seems to be overshadowed by fancy Fandangos and early bird hangout First Awakenings (both Golden Pine Cone winners in their own rights). The service is friendly, prompt and reliable — if you come in for lunch, they'll get you back to work before anyone starts wondering where you are.

Each of the moderately priced lunch specials comes with coconut milk soup — a hot cup of savory, spicy and creamy comfort that's not at all heavy. From there, have classic pad Thai or one of the delicious red, yellow or green curries. Protein choices include chicken, beef, pork or tofu, and there are usually plenty of vegetables.

All of the ingredients shine — salads are served with fresh greens, veggies are cooked to a nice crisp-tender consistency, and sauces complement the food rather than compete with it. The dinner menu is similar, if a little more pricey. On a chilly day, ask for the ginger tea — its nice, spicy kick that will warm you all the way through.

■ Best Mexican Restaurant

**Peppers Mexicali Café** — 170 Forest Ave., Pacific Grove — 11:30 a.m. to 9 p.m. Monday and Wednesday through Saturday, 4 p.m. to 9 p.m. Sunday — (831) 373-6892, [peppers-mexicalicafe.com](http://peppers-mexicalicafe.com)

Whether you're looking for a midday break or a fun evening out, Peppers is a great spot to kick back, sip a margarita or a Modelo and chow down on fresh Mexican food. You can choose between indoor and comfortable outdoor seating with heaters. Complimentary thick and hearty chips stand up to spicy red and milder green salsas. Everything comes out of the kitchen hot — make that sizzling, for the fajitas. Ask if there are tamales, because this casual and friendly spot does a great job with them.

The tacos, burritos and chile rellenos are all flavorful choices and, along with several other menu items, can be assembled into combo plates for \$13.50 to \$16.95, including refried or black beans and rice. When salmon is available — which seems to be all the time — it comes out perfectly cooked, tender and moist. Are you thinking outside the tor-

tilla? You have plenty of choices, including grilled seafood salad, chicken fajita salad, and several versions of prawns and snapper. If you have room, desserts vary.

### ■ Best Restaurant for Seafood

**Monterey's Fish House** — 2114 Del Monte Ave.,  
Monterey — 11:30 a.m. to 2 p.m. and 5 p.m. to 8:30 p.m. daily  
— (831) 373-4647, [montereyfishhouse.com](http://montereyfishhouse.com)

The DiGirolamo family has worked with seafood in Monterey for generations as fishermen and restaurateurs. Fish House owner David DiGirolamo grew up in the family's restaurant, Angelo's on Fisherman's Wharf, which many old-timers remember with a smile. The place on Del Monte Avenue (near Casa Verde Way) is so unassuming, you might have driven by it hundreds of time without giving it a second look. That would be sad, because our readers say that DiGirolamo understands how to prepare and serve fresh seafood.

Tempting appetizers include calamari and BBQ baby octopus. For the main course, choose among a variety of fish — either oak-grilled or blackened — with fresh vegetables and pasta for \$22 to \$30. Cioppino (\$31) with garlic bread is also on the menu, along with a nice selection of pastas, meat entrées and chicken, so no one need feel left out. Dessert options include tiramisu and cannoli. A nicely curated beer and wine list offers plenty of options to wash it all down.

### ■ Best Restaurant for Steak

**The Whaling Station Steakhouse** — 763 Wave St.,  
Monterey — 4:30 to 8 p.m. nightly — (831) 373-3778, [thewhalingstation.com](http://thewhalingstation.com)

Opened 52 years ago by local restaurant legend John Pisto, the Whaling Station continues today with Kevin Phillips (Beach House, Abalonetti) as managing partner. It's got all the traditional dishes that make a steakhouse great. Caesar salad tossed tableside? Yup. Creamed spinach? Sautéed mushrooms? Of course. Appetizers like escargot or oysters Rockefeller will have you feeling like Diamond Jim Brady (look it up, kids), and Phillips has added the FireCracker Shrimp beloved at the Beach House in Pacific Grove.

But you're here for the meat, right? We're talking aged cuts of beef sourced from America's heartland — Nebraska, Iowa and Kansas — ranging from a center-cut sirloin for \$44 to a Porterhouse for two (market price) and a prime slab of

See **FAVORITES** page 12 GPC



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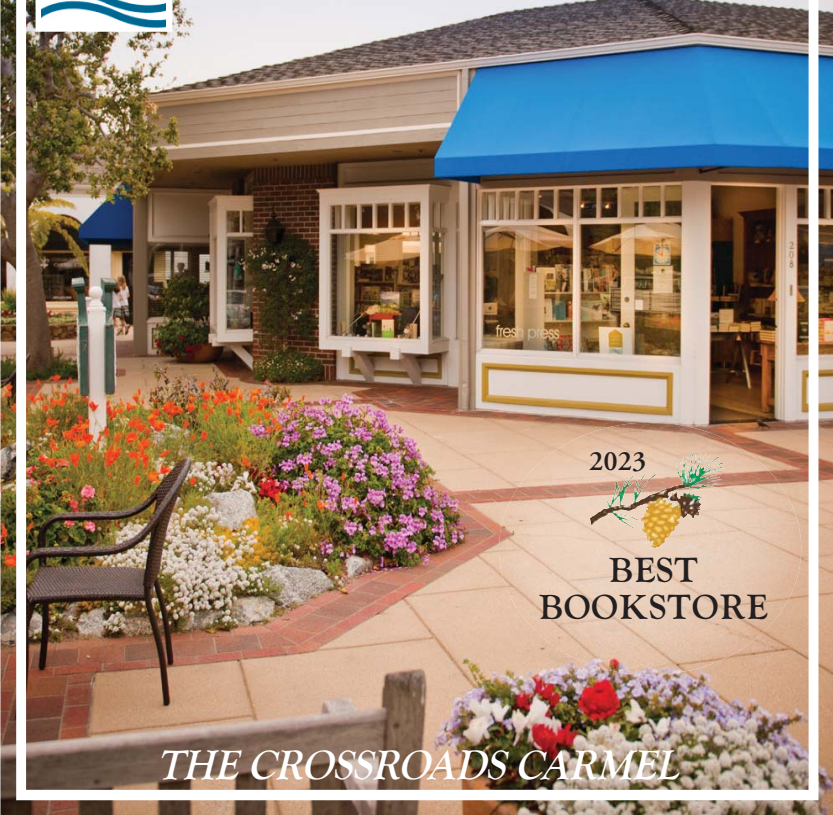





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## FAVORITES

From page 8 GPC

New York for \$62. Almost makes you want to stand up and sing the National Anthem. Rack of lamb, braised short ribs, and slow-roasted prime rib with Yorkshire pudding are also on offer, along with chicken, seafood and pasta. There’s a full bar and more than two dozen California and Italian wines by the glass, starting at \$9.

### ■ Best Restaurant for Vegetarians

**Julia’s Vegetarian Restaurant** — 1180 Forest Ave., Suite F, Pacific Grove – 9 a.m. to 9 p.m. daily – (831) 656-9533, [juliasveg.com](http://juliasveg.com)

It’s not easy being a vegetarian, let alone vegan. It’s not that there aren’t a lot of possibilities — it’s just that most restaurants don’t seem to embrace them. Non-meat-eaters get tired of running their fingers down a menu looking for salads without bacon and pasta-anything-but-primavera. This recently remodeled gem at the back of the Forest Hill shopping center between Safeway and Trader Joe’s is for them, but also for meat-eating friends who want to join them for a good meal.

Julia’s serves breakfast, lunch and dinner. The updated menu includes old favorites like the donut bites with cinnamon and sugar (vegetarian doesn’t always equal healthy) for \$8, cauliflower “wings” for \$16, the Iris Salad with roasted carrots, cauliflower, squash, yams and more in a tahini dressing for \$19 and the truly satisfying tamale pie (\$24). The taco salad (\$21) would be delicious on its own with cool avocado,

pickled red onions and more in a cilantro dressing, but the chef drops two delicious little fried tamales on the plate, making it a hearty meal. The restaurant also features live music Thursday through Saturday from 6 to 7:30 p.m.

### ■ Best Salad

### ■ Best Place to Read The Pine Cone

**Carmel Belle** — San Carlos between Ocean and Seventh – 8 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. daily – (831) 624-1600, [carmelbelle.com](http://carmelbelle.com)

Carmel Belle in the Doud Arcade always seem to be hopping. Don’t worry, though — you can usually find a place to sit indoors or on the patio, with plenty of room to unfold a beloved hometown newspaper and catch up on the Battle of the Pit and other local sagas.

This spot lets you have things your way, and all the things are really tasty. The restaurant uses local organic produce whenever possible and strives for sustainability. The coffee is good and hot, and you can start your morning with eggs, avocado toast or brie, fruit, walnuts and a baguette.

Lunch and dinner choices include hot and cold sammies and “comfort classics” like mac-and-cheese, meatloaf and roast chicken, but our readers are clamoring for more salad. There’s the farmers salad, with greens, cucumber, fennel, radish and carrot finished with a lemon vinaigrette, the chicken Cobb with free-range Mary’s chicken, the tasty autumn orchard with persimmons, pomegranate, walnuts and goat cheese, and a blue cheese and apple offering with candied walnuts. You can also choose Greek, mozzarella with roasted tomato, or market vegetable. When did eating your veggies get to be so much fun?

### ■ Best BBQ

**The Crossroads Barbeque** — 241 Crossroads Blvd. – 7 a.m. to 9 p.m. (or sold out) daily – (831) 250-7616, [thecrossroadsbbq.com](http://thecrossroadsbbq.com)

The Ingram family, known in three counties for exceptional barbecue, set up shop in the Crossroads in 2018. You can eat in the clean and sleek indoor space, dine outside on the patio, or place an order to go.

The Crossroads Barbeque focuses on one thing and does it extremely well — smoked meat. Choose from tri-tip, pulled pork, brisket, chicken, St. Louis-style pork ribs, and burnt ends — the flavorful trimmings from smoked brisket. Opt for

*Continues next page*

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# GOLDEN PINE CONES

*From previous page*

regular or large orders, or get it in a sandwich. Prices range from \$13.50 for a regular chicken meal to \$46 for a full rack of ribs with two sides and bread. Have a pulled pork or brisket sandwich to start the day, or a breakfast taco with an egg, salsa and your choice of meat in a flour tortilla.

It's a shame that home-style potato salad, sweet-and-savory baked beans, mac and cheese, and creamy coleslaw don't get as much attention, but what're you gonna do? There's beer on tap to accompany the meal, and for dessert, the Ingram family recipes for homemade bread pudding and berry cobbler are not to be missed, even if you must take them to go. If the pecan pie's anywhere near as good, count us in for that, too. Check the website for info about live music, catering, fundraising and more.

■ Best Fish & Chips

**Brophy's** — *San Carlos and Fourth – 11 a.m. to 9 p.m. (beverages until 10 p.m.) Monday through Saturday and 10 a.m. to 9 p.m. (beverages until 10 p.m.) Sunday – (831)586-5566, brophystavern.com*

Fish and chips, like roast chicken or beef stew, is one of the holy grails of cooking. It's simple, but elusive. On the face of it, c'mon, McDonald's can do it, right? It's just fried fish and French fries, for heaven's sake.

Do not say that to an aficionado unless you want to wear the ketchup they're not going to use anyway. Pine Cone readers understand that the struggle to find the best is real. The fish, in this case fresh halibut, has to be prepared so that the entire breaded crust doesn't disintegrate at first bite. It should be golden brown on the outside, but not overcooked and dry on the inside. The chips should be crispy, then fluffy inside. Everything must be adequately seasoned straight out of the fryer, and the same temperature — seriously hot — when it hits the table. We'll leave you to argue about whether you should add malt vinegar or dunk the chips in tartar sauce. You should order an ice-cold brew, too.

■ Best Place to Get Ice Cream

**Revival Ice Cream** — *463 Alvarado St., Monterey – noon to 9 p.m. Sunday through Thursday, noon to 10 p.m. Friday and Saturday – (831) 747-2113, revivalicecream.com*

Like any food, you can approach ice cream two ways — you can ask about how it's made, learning about the facilities, the chef's techniques, sustainability, locally sourced ingredients and so on, or you can ask how it tastes. If you're lucky, you find a place that offers all the above — like Revival Ice Cream.

The first part — technique, facilities, sustainability, etc. — includes using no artificial ingredients or sweeteners, selling reusable containers and offering vegan flavors. The second part, well, that's for you to decide, but the attention to detail in crafting (and for once, that's the right word) ensures a high-quality product.

It's still made locally in smallish batches, and the retail shop is right in the middle of Old Monterey, but you can get it delivered and even have it shipped nationwide. Favorite flavors include Bees Knees made with local honey, eucalyptus mint chip, and dark chocolate made with Theo's brand of rich, dark cocoa love.

The shop also sells 6-inch and 9-inch ice cream cakes (three-day notice required), ice cream sandwiches and gluten-free cookies. Not gonna lie — at around \$15 a pint, this is a splurge for most folks, but once you've had it, you'll know why our readers keep going back for more.

■ Best Sandwich or Burger

**Bear + Flag Roadside** — *7152 Carmel Valley Road – 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday and Wednesday - Saturday, 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Sunday – (831) 293-8608, bearandflagroadside.com*

Golden Pine Cone newcomer Bear + Flag was one of those spots that opened during the pandemic and not only survived, but thrived. In the space formerly occupied by Valley Hills Deli (same driveway as Baja Cantina) you'll find barbecue meat sandwiches Thursday through Sunday for as long as they last, and a diverse assortment of other concoctions between bread, like an Italian Paisano (mortadella, salami, prosciutto, coppa and provolone, \$18), a fried chicken sandwich (\$14), a blistered all-beef hot dog (\$11) and a signature burger with two patties on a potato roll with American cheese and all the fixings (\$14).

You can also get a salad with refreshingly eclectic dressing choices like turmeric tahini and garlic anchovy. Early birds can pick up a breakfast burrito, and soup, chili and cookies are on offer for those midday snack attacks.

■ Best Breakfast

**Stationaery** — *San Carlos between Fifth and Sixth – 8 a.m. to 3 p.m. daily for brunch, 5:30 p.m. to 9 p.m. Thursday through Saturday – (831) 250-7183, thestationaery.com*

This cozy establishment offers a dining experience focused on fresh and locally sourced ingredients. The menu boasts a range of dishes that cater to various palates.

A creative brunch menu includes a potato pancake with smoked trout, crème fraiche and gribiche, an egg-based sauce

with herbs (\$30), a decadent croque madame with ham, gruyere and fig (\$26) and a gussied-up Maine Lobster Roll (\$44) served with fingerling potato salad. Of course, it's a challenge for the rest of the day to live up to the joy of a lobster breakfast, but that's just how we roll in here paradise. Diners with lighter appetites are especially appreciative when every bite is filled with flavor, like the avocado toast with Meyer lemon, radish and Monterey Bay seaweed (\$19) or a Schoch's Dairy yogurt bowl with fruit, crunchy pumpkin-seed granola and honey (\$17).

If you want to come back later, dinner selections include halibut with broccoli, coconut milk and lemongrass, tuna crudo, and spaghetti amatriciana. There's a bar, six wines by the bottle or glass, and a choice of beers and hard cider.

■ Best Coffee

**Carmel Valley Coffee Roasting Co.** — *Ocean between Lincoln and Monte Verde, 3720 The Barnyard and 246 Crossroads Blvd. – Ocean Avenue from 6:30 a.m. to 5:30*

*p.m. daily, Barnyard from 7:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. daily, and the Crossroads from 7:30 a.m. to 5 p.m. daily – (831) 626-2913, (831) 620-0844 and (831) 626-8784, carmelcoffeeroasters.com*

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And if you eschew caffeine, here's a bulletin — the Crossroads location, at least, always has freshly brewed decaf,

*See SUPER page 16 GPC*

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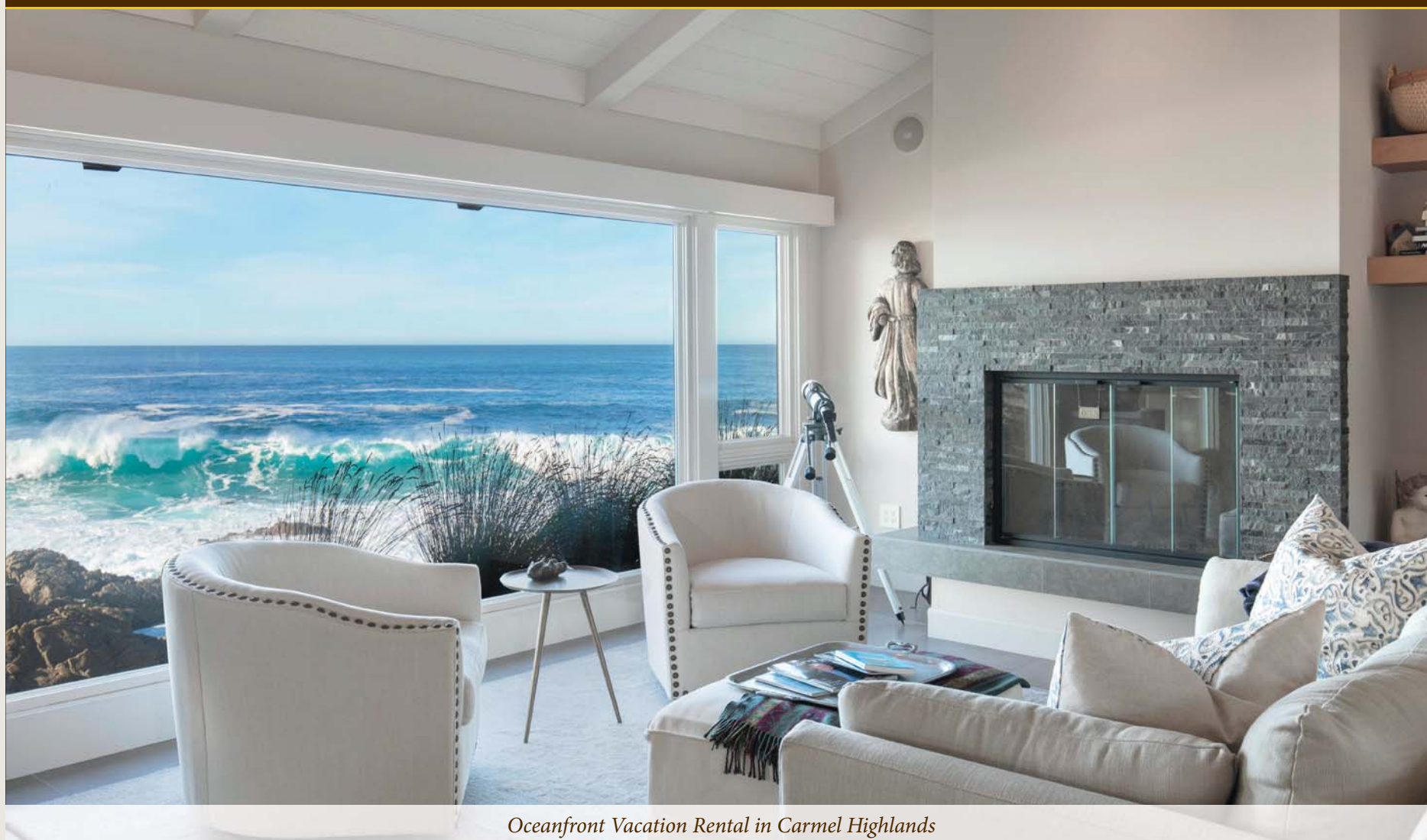


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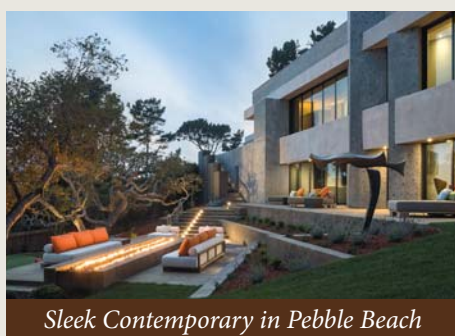
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## GOLDEN PINE CONES

### SUPER

From page 13 GPC

something that's getting harder to find these days.

#### ■ Best Coffeehouse

**Carmel Coffee House**— Ocean btw. San Carlos and Dolores — 7 a.m. to 5 p.m. daily — (831) 626-2095, [carmelcoffee.com](http://carmelcoffee.com)

Originally called the Caffè Cardinale and Roasting Co., Carmel Coffee House roasts small batches of beans — organic only — to help neighbors and out-of-towners kick start their days. It seems a little unfair that you have to find this little hideaway before you've had your first cup, but just look for the little alleyway between the Club stores, or for the shop's mascot, Gus the sea otter (specially created for the shop by late cartoonist Gus Arriola of "Gordo" fame).

You'll find a happy, energetic caffeine-fueled vibe in the pet-friendly courtyard, even on grey and foggy days. In addition to coffee, there's a nice selection of breakfast and snack foods, as well as tea, along with a refreshing conviviality and spirit of community. Online rave reviews attest to the quality of the coffee, food and service. Extend the experience by buying a bag of beans to take home.

#### ■ Best Desserts

#### ■ Best Special Occasion Cake

**Ruby's Sweet Sicily** — (831) 233-0937, [rubycakesofmonterey.com](http://rubycakesofmonterey.com)

Ruby's Sweet Sicily is a purveyor of treats like apple butter cobbler, mini birthday cakes, cannoli cake cups, mini Oreo cakes, traditional sugar cookies, rocky road brownies and pumpkin spice sugar cookies and ice cream seen at farmers markets all over the Peninsula. The business also offers gourmet

pasta to cook at home and everything you need for a great antipasto — or they can cater a whole party, but the readers went straight for the sweet stuff.

Chef Ruby makes beautiful custom cakes for all sorts of occasions. Past triumphs include confections shaped like Star Trek's Enterprise, an electric guitar, a slumbering dragon and a race car, to name a few. Some customers have even ordered cakes with surprises inside — car keys, an anniversary present, and an engagement ring. Although the company's Marina facility is closed to the public, tastings for wedding and other special cakes can be arranged. "We have a very nice tasting set up, with a beautiful table, fresh flowers, background music...we make the tasting fun," said the owners.

#### ■ Best Pizza

**Gianni's** — 725 Lighthouse Ave., Monterey — 4 to 9 p.m. Monday through Thursday, 3 to 10 p.m. Friday, noon to 10 p.m. Saturday, noon to 9 p.m. Sunday — (831) 649-1500, [giannispizzamonterey.com](http://giannispizzamonterey.com)

Talk about your oldies-but-goodies! Even if you've never come as a restaurant customer, you might have attended one of the 500 gatherings this place hosts in its banquet room annually — birthday parties, sports teams' celebrations and wedding rehearsals among them. Now run by the original owners' grandchildren, the little pizza shop that opened in 1974 has survived recessions, earthquakes and a pandemic. and remains a perennial favorite.

It's a no-nonsense operation with friendly service — people there work hard and seem genuinely happy you've decided to share your evening with them. Gianni's has found the secret sauce of changing with the times without alienating longtime customers who've come to rely on favorites like thin-crust pies in sizes ranging from personal to extra large (18 inches) topped with combina-

Continues next page

# Thank You!



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*Walt Sullivan*



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## G O L D E N P I N E C O N E S

*From previous page*

tions drawn from more than 20 toppings. Prices start around \$15 for an 8-inch mini pizza. Also offered are antipasti, pasta, lasagna, calzones, ravioli, meatball sandwiches, and, if you feel you should, salads. And you can wash it all down with a selection from the full bar or a cold brew on tap, and choose from cannoli, gelato or a tiramisu cup for dessert.

### ■ Best Wine List

**The Sardine Factory** — 701 Wave St., Monterey — 5 to 9:00 p.m. Sunday through Thursday and 5 to 10 p.m. Friday and Saturday — (831) 373-3775, [sardinefactory.com](http://sardinefactory.com)

You can eat in the Wine Cellar at this famous spot, or you can order one of its thousands of bottles at your table upstairs or in the lounge. Fifty-four years after its founding — famously on the “wrong side of the tracks” near Cannery Row — Bert Cutino and Ted Balestreri’s Old World-style restaurant is a go-to for locals and tourists alike.

In addition to a menu designed for splurge-worthy events like birthdays, graduations and winning a Nobel Prize, there’s an encyclopedic wine list. It eventually ends, or we’d say reading it online was like scrolling through Facebook. You know you’re in deep when you’re perusing the Cellar Master’s Selections (house recommendations) and it says, “Please see pages 15-19 for complete chardonnay selection.”

There are more than three dozen domestic and international wines by the glass starting at \$11, and the list itself boasts, “Currently we have over 2,000 selections on our wine list. This does not include any of the wines that we pour by the glass or hundreds more that are aging in our catacombs.”

Fear not, the staff is well informed and will cheerfully assist you in making just the right selection, whether you want to spend \$40 or \$400 ... or more.

### ■ Best Brunch

**First Awakenings** — 300 David Ave., Monterey — 7 a.m. to 2 p.m. daily — (831) 372-1125, [firstawakenings.net](http://firstawakenings.net)

This area has an abundance of great breakfast spots, as evidenced by the fact that you often have to wait in line to get a table at any of them. What else can you expect when brunch is one of the last great unhurried meals of the week? At least First Awakening’s move to Lighthouse and David means it has a bit more space, including a patio and old-school counter. The restaurant has been around for 29 years and if you remember it from the days when it was called First Watch, you’re officially an old-timer.

Its simple mission is, “Use fresh, quality ingredients. Treat customers like family. Hire kind & happy staff.” They might have added “serve portions that will fill up a longshoreman,” since the breakfast skillet is enough for at least two people. Start with a frying pan full of home-style potatoes, pile on a couple of eggs and some cheese, and then add ham, bacon and sausage for a meat lovers’ fast-breaker. The pancakes are fluffy, French toast is thick and eggy, the OJ is fresh — and prices top out at \$18.29 for a full order of eggs Benedict. It’s

*Continues next page*

2023



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From previous page

enough to get anyone out of bed. Did we mention they serve the coffee by the thermos pot?

### ■ Best Outdoor Dining

**Mission Ranch Hotel and Restaurant** — 26270 Dolores – breakfast 7 to 10:30 a.m. Monday through Friday, “early grazing” and cocktails from 3 to 5 p.m. daily, dinner 5 to 9 p.m. nightly, brunch 10 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. Sunday – (831) 624-6436, missionranchcarmel.com

Whether you’re gazing at the turquoise jewel of the lagoon and brilliant sand, watching wooly sheep munching on grass, or peering farther into the distance at the Santa Lucia mountains or the coast at Point Lobos, there are no bad views from Mission Ranch. Even though dining al fresco was forced upon everyone for more than a year, it was something this restaurant has always done well.

Mission Ranch doesn’t take reservations and asks you to limit your party to eight people, all in the interest of good service. The restaurant’s Sunday brunch buffet has returned, much to locals’ delight, but it’s not the only meal you can have outside. The cold “early grazing menu” is meant to be enjoyed with cocktails. If the sunset and ocean breezes whet your appetite for dinner, the menu will take you to sea with jumbo scallops with exotic mushroom and spinach risotto, or coriander-seasoned salmon. You can recall the rich local agricultural and ranching heritage with whiskey-marinated beef brochette or slow-roasted prime rib. Pasta choices like scampi linguine are similarly tempting. Mission Ranch is also a wonderful place to hear live jazz, but you do have to go inside. Check The Pine Cone’s weekly music listings to find out who’s at the piano.

### ■ Most Romantic Restaurant

**Casanova** — Fifth Street between Mission and San Carlos – 4:30 to 9:30 p.m. Tuesday through Sunday – (831) 216-3811, casanovacarmel.com

For more than 20 years, this spot has been living up to the romance evoked by its namesake, 18th-century Venetian Giacomo Casanova, a colorful fellow whose romantic exploits were the stuff of legend. It’s situated in a house once occupied by Aunt Fairy Bird, a soft-spoken woman who was Charlie Chaplin’s cook. The Georis family renovated it in 1977 with what they describe as traditional Belgian architectural influ-

ences. Once you’re done swooning over the charming history (ask about Van Gogh’s table — yes, that Van Gogh), it’s time to check out the food.

Casanova looks to small, organic farms and local fisheries when gathering ingredients and seems to make all that attention to detail appear effortless. The menu, which is a nothing less than a love letter from the kitchen, woos you with the promise of French onion soup, escargot and crab and lures you in deeper with duck confit or the sort of sole Meunière that memorably launched Julia Child’s lifelong love affair with French food. An excellent wine list and optional oyster-and-caviar service can make dinner highly memorable.

Giacomo Casanova wrote in “History of my Life,” “Cultivating whatever gave pleasure to my senses was always the chief business of my life; I never found any occupation more important.” The namesake restaurant in this magical village seems to have taken that sentiment to heart.

### ■ Best Restaurant for a Special Occasion

### ■ Best Restaurant in Carmel

**Pangaea Grill** — Ocean Avenue, 5 NE of Lincoln – 9 a.m. to 9 p.m. daily – (831) 624-2569, pangaeagrillcarmel.com

Our readers picked this easy-to-find spot on Ocean Avenue as the best place in town and the best restaurant for a special occasion. That’s understandable — the colorful dishes with clever plating always look like a party’s in progress. Pangaea is the name of the supercontinent believed to have existed 200 million years ago that broke up into the continents we know today (possibly because the historic resources board wasn’t around yet to declare the original land mass untouchable).

In that spirit of global dining, the playful menu features appetizers like caprese (fresh mozzarella with basil and tomato) sharing the space with Asian BBQ chicken wings and coconut Thai curry. You can get fried kimchee beef dumplings or an eggplant Napoleon with goat cheese, caramelized onions and portabella mushroom. Breakfast includes papaya parfait and Asian specialties alongside steak and eggs, and Benedicts. So, whether you’re celebrating an anniversary or just Tuesday night, this is a place that has you covered.

### ■ Best Bartender

**Brent Carlson/The Running Iron** — 24 E. Carmel Valley Road, Carmel Valley – 11 a.m. to 2 a.m. Monday through Saturday, 9 a.m. to 2 a.m. Sunday – (831) 659-4633

He might not have predicted he’d end up being the main man behind the bar at the Running Iron in Carmel Valley Village following his years as a server in well-loved restaurants — including the long-missed Cachagua General Store — but he’s now an institution there. Considering his extensive experience and how well he takes care of everyone who steps up to the bar, it’s no surprise Pine Cone readers chose him as Best Bartender — and not for the first time. Not only can he mix a mean drink, but he’s friendly, knowledgeable, a good conversationalist, and kindhearted. He and wife Danielle and their daughter are a frequent sight in the Village, often helping to make their community even better, and locals know he’d go to any length to lend a hand to anyone in need. He can also tell you pretty much anything you want to know about the valley, so if you want to go to a bar and feel immediately at home, look for Brent. His ginger hair and ready smile are giveaways, if you don’t know him already.

### ■ Best Restaurant Service

**Aubergine Carmel** — Monte Verde & Seventh – 5 p.m. to 8 p.m. Wednesday through Sunday – (831) 624-8578, auberginecarmel.com

Carmel’s first Michelin-starred restaurant, little Aubergine is tucked inside L’Auberge Carmel. The kitchen is helmed by Justin Cogley, a renowned chef who was honored as Food and Wine magazine’s best new chef in 2013 and has an array of awards to his name. As you’d expect for someone of his talents (not to mention those of exceptional pastry chef Yulanda Santos) food is reliably superb. Excited foodies cheerfully plunk down \$265 for Cogley’s eight-course tasting menu whilst sipping on selections from among 3,500 bottles in the wine cellar.

However, great food brought to the table by a surly or inattentive server makes for a nerve-racking purgatory where diners simultaneously fear and look forward to each course’s arrival. Thankfully, Pine Cone readers know good service when they see it — available, but not hovering; helpful but not obsequious, and knowledgeable without being patronizing. If you decide to enjoy this small treasure, you can relax — you’re in great hands.

### ■ Best Restaurant in Big Sur

**Nepenthe** — 48510 Highway 1 – 11:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.  
See SUPREME page 20 GPC

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## GOLDEN PINE CONES

### SUPREME

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and 5 to 10 p.m. daily – (831) 667-2345, [nepenthe.com](http://nepenthe.com)

More than 800 feet above the ocean, Nepenthe is an impressive alchemy of coastal views and great food that makes for a dining experience worthy of the drive. The family-owned and operated spot has long been a place where locals gather in good times and bad. Its name is derived from Greek, and means “no sorrow,” and is also the name of a mythical Egyptian drug that caused forgetfulness and relieved sadness. That may be related to the lack of wifi and the spotty cell reception. (“What’s that? You need me in the office right away? I’m sorry...you’re breaking up.”)

This place feeds everyone on a first-come, first-served basis — no reservations. The menu offers simple fare done well, like diver scallops, roast chicken and steak frites. Of course, you can always fall back on the Ambrosia Burger, a favorite for decades. Spend a few minutes perusing the impressively curated wine list with good bottles for most price ranges, or enjoy a cocktail from the full bar.

Café Kevah — one level down from Nepenthe — opens at 9 a.m. and offers a nice selection of breakfasts and coffee. Once your belly’s full, stop in at the Phoenix Shop (open 10:30 a.m. to 6 p.m. daily) and get lost among the works of local artists and craftsmen.

#### ■ Best Restaurant in Pebble Beach

**Roy’s** — 2700 17 Mile Drive (in the Inn at Spanish Bay) – breakfast 6 to 11 a.m., lunch 11:30 a.m. to 3 p.m., “light fare” from 3 to 4:30 p.m. and dinner 5 to 10 p.m. daily – (800) 877-0597, [pebblebeach.com](http://pebblebeach.com)

Roy’s setting at Spanish Bay is a gift — and a burden. The verdant golf course, the azure Pacific beyond, the outdoor fire pits where a bagpiper seems to singlehandedly conjure the sunset and the evening fog ... and somehow, you’re expected to turn your attention to a menu. Fortunately, Chef Roy Yamaguchi and chef de cuisine Pablo Mellin have made sure that the food matches the view. Although Yamaguchi’s roots are in Tokyo, he’s known as a major innovator in Hawaiian fusion cuisine. Sounds high-falutin’, but it translates to beautiful and deceptively simple-looking plates that promise big flavors in

*Continues next page*

# Play Time!

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# GOLDEN PINE CONES

From previous page

unexpected combinations. Breakfast is traditional — why would anyone mess with waffles or steak and eggs, anyway? Lunch, however, takes a hard western turn toward Hawaii and Japan with tiger shrimp and beef spring rolls and Kona coconut shrimp. Bento boxes, island-themed salads and a selection of entrees make for a satisfying meal. Dinner continues in the same vein, with entrees like Huli Huli Hamachi (yellowtail) and yuzu chimichurri local halibut with heirloom tomato confit. Meat lovers can choose from roast chicken, beef short ribs, rack of lamb or pork, among others. Signature cocktails include a spicy mango margarita and Roy’s mai tai, and the wine list is excellent.

## Best Restaurant in Pacific Grove

**Fandango** — 223 17th St., Pacific Grove – 5 p.m. to closing nightly – (831) 372-3456, [fandangorestaurant.com](http://fandangorestaurant.com)

You know you’re a hometown fixture when your original diners bring their grandkids in for special occasions — and that’s Fandango. It’s one of those rare gems that manages to make guests feel like VIPs without making anyone uncomfortable. Follow the host through the restaurant’s various French country-style dining areas with cozy fireside seats just made for a foggy winter (or summer) evening. Spend a few minutes with the impressive wine list, where you’ll find bottles from all over Europe. Vintages for a few reds date to the 1990s, with some Penfolds gems from Down Under. The Eurocentric menu includes many of the things Americans think of as classic continental cuisine, like onion soup, escargot, duck a l’orange, and house paella. The seasoned wait staff can help you select the right bottle of wine to accompany the veal piccata or double lamb chops. You can also get long-cooking favorites like osso buco or a North African lamb shank served with couscous and harissa — things you just don’t have time to make at home. Save room for the profiteroles or the Grand Marnier soufflé — either is a perfect end to a perfect meal.

## Best Restaurant in Monterey


**Stokes Adobe** — 500 Hartnell St., Monterey – 5 to 9 p.m. nightly except Wednesdays – (831) 264-8775, [stokesadobe.com](http://stokesadobe.com)

Built in 1833 and purchased by James Stokes, a fraudulent

*Continues next page*

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# GOLDEN PINE CONES

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“doctor” whose patients died with alarming regularity — though not alarming enough to stop them from coming — Stokes Adobe is said to be haunted by ghosts of former occupants and malpractice victims. Stokes sold it to baker and potter Honore Escolle and it subsequently housed a variety of inhabitants and businesses until 1950, when it became a restaurant. While some locals might think of it as the poster child for restaurant reincarnation (Gallatin’s, Stokes, Restaurant 1833), Pine Cone readers say it’s back to being the best in town.

One of the charming things about this place is the variety of dining room settings and plentiful, comfortable outdoor seating. The tables in the balcony above the bar are especially fun for people watching. Food is elegant and straightforward. Starters include caviar tater tots, duck liver mousse, and burrata with cured meats. Entrees start at \$28 for cavatelli cacio e pepe, an Italian preparation that is damned near magical — black pepper and parmesan cheese are tossed with the pasta and a little cooking liquid to make a rich, delicious sauce. Fish, chicken and pork are all on offer, and you can get a 7-ounce Australian wagyu steak or wood-fired prime rib, too. But please, don’t feed the ghosts.

## ■ Best Restaurant in Seaside

**Maligne** — 600 Broadway, Seaside — noon to 2:30 p.m. and 5:30 p.m. to 8:30 p.m. Tuesday through Friday — (831) 601-1302, restaurantmaligne.com

Named in honor of a nickname owner Klaus Georis had as a child, Maligne means a troublemaker or mischievous child. Georis — a member of the family that has brought much fine food and good wine to the Peninsula over the decades — seems to enjoy playing with people’s expectations. The building and its interior are industrial chic, yet you look down and the table is set with pretty china with a petite flower pattern. You’re

sitting in a neighborhood that’s more Home Depot than House Beautiful, but the menu is straight out of a French country cookbook.

All of it seems to say, “Don’t take yourself so seriously.” That does not, however, apply to the food. It’s cooked to perfection and presented in a way that’s both beautiful and accessible — after all, eating shouldn’t be like a round of Jenga. Service is excellent and even simple things like focaccia with olive oil become sublime. Morel mushrooms make an appearance in season, served simply with peas and spinach or with pasta, and everything is made with care. A three-course meal runs from \$40 up, parking is easy and the neighborhood’s been gussied up quite a bit in recent years. Definitely worth the trip.

## RECREATION AND THE ARTS

### ■ Best Local Artist

**Will Bullas** — Carmel Art Association Gallery, Dolores between Fifth and Sixth, and the Carmel Valley Art Association, 8 Del Fino Place, Carmel Valley — willbullas.com

Proving that art doesn’t have to always be serious, the lighthearted Will Bullas was again named Best Local Artist by Pine Cone readers. A gifted illustrator with keen sense of humor, Bullas has a particular talent for portraying animals in human roles. His latest work veers into other subjects, including clever portraits of the Egyptian god Anubis, Captain Hook and Peter Pan, along with a spoof on the “Almond Brothers.”

### ■ Best Local Photographer

**Randy Tunnell** — (831) 595-0394, randytunnell.com

A Monterey resident with a gift for taking

Continues next page

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## Best Outdoor Dining 2023

Photo: Steve Jost



## Best Place to Get Married 2023

Photo: Joshua Rose Photography

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# GOLDEN PINE CONES

*From previous page*

portraits, Randy Tunnell beautifully captured images of more than two dozen downtown artists in his 2022 show, “Their Own Likeness: Carmel Bohemian Painters,” at the Cherry Center for the Arts. A year earlier, his exhibit at Sunset Center’s Marjorie Evans Gallery, “A Photographic Study of Faith Leaders from our Community,” included portraits of 19 local religious leaders. You’ll also find him behind the camera at numerous local events, including the Carmel Bach Festival, graduation ceremonies and more.

## ■ Best Photo Gallery

**Center for Photographic Art** — *Sunset Center at San Carlos and Ninth - noon to 4 p.m. Wednesday through Sunday, and by appointment - (821) 625-5181, photography.org*

Since Ann Jastrab took over as executive director of the Center for Photographic Art four years ago, the group’s membership has tripled. The center’s many group exhibits, contests and lectures have drawn photographers from near and far. Some shows delve deep into long-forgotten printing processes that were employed by photographers in the 19th century, while others push boundaries and point toward the future of the medium.

“We strive to show a diverse array of exhibitions at the gallery, which has been located in the Sunset Center for decades,” Jastrab said. “We’re a little bit off the beaten path of Ocean Avenue, but it’s well worth the detour to stop by our space to see the work on the walls or perhaps sign up for an artist talk or lecture. Please come by soon to be inspired.”

## ■ Best Sculpture Gallery

**Bennett Sculpture Carmel** — *Dolores between Fifth and Sixth – 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. daily – (831) 626-3054, bennettsculpturecarmel.com*

A perennial Golden Pine Cone winner, Bennett Sculpture Carmel is owned by the mother-daughter team of Debi Bennett and painter and jeweler Ashley Bennett-Stoddard. The two carry on a legacy that was started decades ago by Debi’s late husband and sculptor, Bob Bennett, and his brother Tom. The gallery is also home to the creations of Tom’s daughter, sculptor Terrie Bennett. “Our mission is to maintain the integrity of the Bennett Bronze Classics while continuing to add innovative and creative new art to our gallery collection,” its owners say.

## ■ Best Art Gallery

**Carmel Art Association** — *Dolores between Fifth and Sixth - open by appointment - (831) 624-6176, carmelart.org*

In a town with a rich artistic history, the Carmel Art Association has no peer in the contest for the town’s creative heartbeat. Founded in 1927, its early members included some of the era’s greatest artists, and today, it represents nearly 100 of the region’s finest painters, printmakers and sculptors. Artists are juried in and represent a wide range of art forms — historic members include Wah Ming Chang, who worked for Disney studios and on Hollywood movies before becoming a successful sculptor; painter, muralist and lithographer Maxine Albro, whose work can be seen in Coit Tower in San Francisco, and cartoonists including Eldon Dedini, whose drawings have been seen in posters for the Concours d’Elegance, Gus Arriola of “Gordo” fame, and The Pine Cone’s own Bill Bates. The downtown gallery hosts monthly shows, meet-the-artist receptions, films, lectures and concerts.

## ■ Best Performing Arts Company or Group

**Pacific Repertory Theatre** — *Monte*

*Continues next page*



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Pictured left to right:  
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Michael Cate, Janine Cate  
Boone, Leo Valdez,  
Sean Morgan

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## GOLDEN PINE CONES

*From previous page*

*Verde between Eighth and Ninth – (831) 622-0100, pacrep.org*

Founded in 1982 by longtime creative director Stephen Moorer, PacRep is Monterey Peninsula's premier theater group, producing an array of plays, musicals and concerts. The theater company celebrates the genius of William Shakespeare each year with a festival in his name, kicks off the New Year with a rock 'n' roll tribute concert and mentors the next generation of actors through its School of Dramatic Arts. PacRep's latest offering is a musical version of "Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer," which opens at the Forest Theater Nov. 25.

### ■ Best Concert Venue

**Sunset Center** — San Carlos btw. Eighth and 10th – (831) 620-2048, sunsetcenter.org

Owned by the city, Sunset Center attracts world-class talent to its main stage. Once the historic Sunset School, it has been transformed into a state-of-the-art facility with soaring ceilings and excellent acoustics.

Sunset's 2023-24 lineup includes performances by Los Lobos, the Righteous Brothers, Bela Fleck, Mannheim Steamroller, and Bruce Hornsby, as well as classical music concerts presented by local groups like Monterey Symphony, Chamber Music Monterey Bay, Carmel Music Society and Youth Music Monterey County.

Sunset Center is also home to the Carmel Bach Festival, one of the longest-running musical events in the country, and the Marjorie Evans Gallery, which hosts art exhibits.

### ■ Best Place to Relax and Listen to Music

**Folktale Winery** — 8940 W. Carmel Valley Road, Carmel Valley – (831) 293-7500, folktalewinery.com

The perfect place to sip wine and enjoy live music in a garden setting, Folktale Winery in Carmel Valley is a sought-after venue for local acoustic musicians, mostly solo artists or duos. It also provides a stage for out-of-town acts and has hosted shows by several up-and-coming country music stars.

Located in Carmel Valley with stunning views of the nearby mountains, the former Chateau Julien was bought in 2015 by local winemaker, Gregory Ahn, and renamed Folktale Winery & Vineyards. "The name is inspired by the thrill of discovery, the joy of gathering, and the idea that every great bottle of wine holds a story," according to its website.

### ■ Best Local Music Group (classical)

**Monterey Symphony** — (831) 646-8511, montereysymphony.org

Seventy-six years after playing its first concert, the Monterey Symphony kicked off its 2023-24 season Oct. 7 with the first of six performances scheduled at Sunset Center. Led by music director Jayce Ogren, who took over last year, the symphony is committed to fulfilling its goal to "engage, educate and excite our community through the performance and continual discovery of symphonic music." In addition to performing the classics, the symphony's repertoires have included music from films like "Fantasia" and this year's "Love Letter from Hollywood," featuring themes and music from "Moon River" to Disney's "Coco."

### ■ Best Local Music Group (rock, jazz and pop)

**The Bubba Pickens Band** — *instagram.com/bubbapickens*

The Bubba Pickens Band continues to win

*See UNRIVALED page 26 GPC*

# BEST HOUSEWARES

*Thank you,  
Pine Cone readers!*

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Burgundy Sauce  
Basil Pesto  
Pesto Rosso

## SEMOLINA PASTA SHAPES

Linguine • Capellini • Pappardelle • Rigatoni

## PASTA FLAVORS

Plain • Tomato Basil • Pumpkin  
Herbs de Provence • Rosemary Garlic  
Bell Pepper with a Kick • Fig and Sage  
Black Truffle • Squid Ink • Spinach  
Beet • Porcini • Lemon Basil  
Custom Flavors Available



## HOLIDAY PASTA SHEET KITS

A fun tradition. Make a traditional lasagna or festive striped pastas with family and friends at home.

## ANTIPASTO AND DIPS

Nonna's Pumpkin Spice Cream Cheese and Mascarpone Spread  
Nonna's Date Walnut and Mascarpone Spread  
Tuscan Bean Dip • Traditional Tapenade  
Kalamata and Green Olive Spread  
Olive and Goat Cheese  
Sicilian Olives • Caprese Salad  
Sundried Tomato and Brie Pesto

## POPULAR ITEMS

Tortellini Salad • Caprese Salad  
Margarita Focaccia  
Spaghetti Squash Bake  
Baked Ziti • Cannoli

## FAMILY/PARTY SIZE RAVIOLI MEAL

Case of ravioli and party size pairing sauce.

*Mention 'Golden Pine Cone' or post your visit on social media at one of our Monterey Bay Markets to receive the following:*

- **\$1.00 discount** on any Bakery Bread Loaf
- **\$5.00 discount** on pre-order Holiday Cookie Box (\$20.00 limit)
- **\$1.00 discount** on fresh Raviolis, fresh Artisan Pastas or Gourmet Pairing Sauce (10 item limit per market total \$10.00 value)
- **\$50.00 discount** on rental of special event Gourmet Ice Cream Sandwich Cart (perfect for weddings, holiday parties, birthdays or special events)

## AWARD WINNING SWEET BREAD LOAVES

Pumpkin • Pumpkin Chocolate Chip  
Zucchini Orange • Buttermilk Banana  
Maple Pecan • Orange Pound Cake  
Lemon Pound Cake • Sour Cream Coffee Cake

## HOLIDAY TREATS

Cinnamon Rolls • Caramel Corn • Almond Roca



## AWARD WINNING COOKIES

Signature Biscotti: Orange Almond  
Chocolate Chip • Chocolate Krinkle  
Raspberry Thumbprint • Snowballs • Peanut Butter  
Old Fashioned Sugar • Shortbread • Cowboy Cookie  
Oatmeal Coconut Fun Chipper • White Chocolate  
Coconut Macadamia • Spritz  
Chocolate Chip • Chocolate Chip with Walnuts



## ORDER HOLIDAY COOKIE TRAYS NOW

Small and large cookie trays available. Order early, these make great business, family or neighbor gifts. Cookie trays with a variety of flavors including peppermint bark candy and our famous almond roca.

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Famous German Chocolate Cake Cup  
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**SUNDAY** — Live Oak • E. Cliff Drive, Santa Cruz • 9am -1pm

**MONDAY** — Pacific Grove Farmers Market  
Central Ave and Grand • 3-7 pm

**TUESDAY** — Old Monterey Marketplace • Alvarado Street • 4-7 pm

**THURSDAY** — Carmel-by-the-Sea Market • 10am-2pm

[Sweetsicilymonterey.com](http://Sweetsicilymonterey.com)



# GOLDEN PINE CONES

## UNRIVALED

From page 24 GPC

over readers of The Pine Cone, earning the somewhat elusive group another Golden Pine Cone.

With four Carmel High School teachers in the lineup, the band serves up a lively mix of bluegrass and folk. If you want to see them play, follow their Instagram page. “Come out and let loose at one of our upcoming concerts,” the band suggests. “We’ll bring the music, and you can bring the moves.”

## Best Place to Take Visitors

**Point Lobos State Reserve** — *Highway 1 south of Carmel – 8 a.m. to 7 p.m. - [pointlobos.org](http://pointlobos.org)*

Called the “greatest meeting of land and water in the world” by the late local painter Francis McComas, Point Lobos State Reserve is a magnet not only for painters and photographers, but for just about anyone who loves the outdoors. Famous for its rugged coastline, windswept cypress groves and ancient forest of Monterey pines, it’s remarkably accessible, and some of its trails than can even accommodate wheelchairs. It’s also home to one of the richest marine environments anywhere — every weekend, scores of scuba divers explore the mysterious world beneath the waves. If you want to show off the best of where we live, Pine Cone readers agree that Point Lobos is the place to do it.

## Best Local Festival

**Monterey Jazz Festival** — *[montereyjazzfestival.org](http://montereyjazzfestival.org)*

One of the world’s premier jazz bashes, the Monterey Jazz Festival has attracted world-class talent to the Monterey Fairgrounds since 1958. The three-day festival showcases more than 500 musicians on eight stages. The list of those who have played there reads like a Who’s Who of jazz greats. This year’s gathering included performances by Herbie Hancock, Diane Reeves, Christian McBride, John Scofield, Charles Lloyd, Samara Joy, Snarky Puppy and many others. Through its Next Generation Jazz Band and educational programs, the festival mentors the jazz musicians of tomorrow.

## Best Church-Sponsored Event

**Jewish Food Festival** — *[carmelbethisrael.org](http://carmelbethisrael.org)*

Hosted annually by Congregation Beth Israel in Carmel Valley, the Jewish Food Festival brings together people and great food. This year’s edition, which happened Aug. 27, celebrated the many charms of “Jewish Soul Food,” including favorites like hot pastrami, brisket, latkes, blintzes, matzo ball soup and egg creams — and so much more. After the pandemic turned the gathering into a drive-through event for the past few years, the in-person festival returned this past summer to Congregation Beth Israel.

## Best Place to Watch the Sunset

## Best Place to Walk Your Dog

## Best Beach

**Carmel Beach** — *Ocean and Scenic – free parking along Scenic is permitted from 6 a.m. to midnight – [ci.carmel.ca.us](http://ci.carmel.ca.us)*

Carmel Beach is such a part of the fabric of Carmel, it’s no wonder it’s always teeming with people — locals and tourists, alike — especially on a nice day. It’s also no surprise that Carmel is rated one of America’s top beach towns by Travel + Leisure, Thrillist, Trip Advisor and by Pine Cone readers who have consistently made it their choice for Best Beach. Whether you take your dog for a walk, listen to The Valley Piper — local winemaker and bagpiper Greg Freeman — at sunset or simply have a picnic, you are bound to leave with a greater sense of calm and serenity. Carmel Beach is also one of the most dog-friendly beaches you will ever visit — at sunrise and sunset, canines of every imaginable shape and size can be seen dashing and splashing along the shoreline.

## Best Hiking Trail

**Palo Corona Regional Park** — *4860 Carmel Valley Road, Carmel Valley – [mprpd.org/palo-corona-regional-park](http://mprpd.org/palo-corona-regional-park)*

Once more, readers have voted Palo Corona the best place to take a hike and, since it’s just a few minutes from Highway 1, it’s practically in their backyard. Sparkling new restrooms at the trailhead are a welcome improvement, too. Starting in the parking lot, you can wander the newly installed, flatter trails near the river or take a moderate-to-strenuous hike of 2 miles each way to Inspiration Point, with a steady climb through an elevation gain of about 850 feet before arriving at a hard-earned bench. The trail extends farther, with another section recently opened, but for many people, just getting that birds-eye view of Carmel Point, Carmel River Beach, Point Lobos and Carmel Valley is enough. Along the way, you will pass through an oak forest and maybe see some cows and bunnies. So, pull on your hiking boots, pack a picnic — don’t forget water — and enjoy the beauty in our very own backyard.

## My Favorite Park

**Garland Ranch Regional Park** — *700 W. Carmel Valley Road, Carmel Valley – dawn to dusk daily – [mprpd.org](http://mprpd.org)*

According to its website, Garland Ranch Regional Park is the granddaddy of the Monterey Peninsula Regional Park District — the first of the district’s park acquisitions. Garland Ranch Regional Park was purchased in 1975 from William Garland II, who the district said “generously gifted a portion of the cost by reducing the purchase price to below fair market value.” From the tree-lined banks of the Carmel River,

*Continues next page*

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WE APPRECIATE YOUR SUPPORT!

Thank you for voting for us!



We are so grateful to our valued customers and readers of the Carmel Pine Cone for voting De Tierra Vineyards:

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De Tierra provides a one of a kind tasting room experience in Carmel-by-the-Sea. Just one and a half blocks off Ocean Ave., our tasting room is located in a cozy cottage that opens up to the sights and sounds of downtown. Come visit us and experience our extensive wine portfolio which features many single varietal wines, unique blends, sparkling and dessert wines.



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Tasting Room Location: Mission & 5th, Carmel-by-the-Sea  
Monday-Thursday 1PM-6PM & Friday-Sunday 1PM-7PM



# G O L D E N   P I N E   C O N E S

*From previous page*

through the open, flat area of the old floodplain, Garland is home to a variety of landscapes at elevations from 200 to 2,000 feet above sea level and a labyrinth of trails you'll delight in discovering.

"Along the way, you will travel through maple-filled canyons, dense oak woodlands, and thick stands of chaparral. Garzas Creek gently bisects the park and provides a peaceful, shaded trail that reaches a secluded side canyon of redwoods," the park district says. It's a beautiful place to watch the subtle change of the seasons — who says we don't have seasons here? And if you pay attention, you'll even see wild-life trotting about.

■ Best Fitness/Health Center

**Carmel Valley Athletic Club** — 27300 Rancho San Carlos Road, Carmel Valley — 5:30 a.m. to 10 p.m. Monday through Friday, 6:30 a.m. to 10 p.m. Saturday and Sunday — (831) 624-2737, [cvaconline.com](http://cvaconline.com)

Established 54 years ago, the Carmel Valley Athletic Club — "the local's resort" — gives members just about everything they need for their health and fitness goals, while providing a sense of community. CVAC offers state-of-the-art fitness equipment to help you stay in shape, as well as group exercise classes, personal training services and social events, including weekend drop-in tennis. A two-story fitness center, 50-plus weekly group exercise classes, a heated 25-yard lap and recreation pool, family and adult hot tubs, social activities for adults and kids, childcare for youngsters ages 6 weeks to 12 years, and a bocce ball court are among the CVAC's offerings. The cafe serves fresh and healthy options for gym goers, from veggie wraps, to smoothies, the best sweet potato fries with aioli (all right, not the most virtuous snack, but hey, you just worked out), and much more, including daily specials. Members have access to the newly renovated — and Golden Pine Cone-winning — Refuge, "America's first co-ed outdoor relaxation spa."

■ Best Yoga Studio

**Seaside Yoga Sanctuary** — Carmel Plaza, Ocean and Mission — 7:30 a.m. to 8 p.m. Monday through Thursday, 7:30 a.m. to 6:30 p.m. Friday, 8:30 a.m. to 11:30 a.m. Saturday, 8:30 a.m. to 6 p.m. Sunday — (831) 899-9642, [seasideyogasanctuary.com](http://seasideyogasanctuary.com)

Seaside Yoga Sanctuary in Carmel Plaza has been building community since 2007. Its mission, stated on its website, "is to serve our community by creating a sanctuary to promote health and wellness through the practice and education of yoga." Seaside Yoga Sanctuary believes that yoga is for everyone — all ages and physical abilities — and their class offerings reflect that philosophy, from prenatal yoga

to therapeutic yoga to hatha flow, which focuses on continuous movement, rather than getting into individual poses and holding them. The class schedule also reflects the rhythm of the year, with seasonal classes like Autumn Moon Salutation. They offer outdoor classes (at Folktale Winery, for example)

See **AMAZING** page 29 GPC



Dolores between 5th & 6th, Carmel-by-the-Sea | 831-626-3054  
[BennettSculptureCarmel.com](http://BennettSculptureCarmel.com)



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*It is appreciated!*  
— The Bennett Family



Voted "Best Restaurant in Monterey"  
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When you've been in business for over fifty-five years, you learn a thing or two about customer service. From the very beginning, we've always said, "If we make you feel like you're at home, we've made a million dollar mistake." That's because at The Sardine Factory, our goal is to make you feel even *better* than at home—otherwise, *why would you go out?* Our guests are our number one priority and without loyal patrons like you, we wouldn't be here today. We appreciate you all so much and thank you for your support.

We're incredibly thankful to readers of The Carmel Pine Cone for recognizing our efforts at The Sardine Factory with an award for the "*Best Wine List!*"

At The Sardine Factory, our staff works tirelessly to provide award winning food, wine, and service that creates a dining experience that's second to none. From the front of the house to the back of the house, it's because of their dedication to excellence that we may celebrate these awards together.

To all our staff at The Sardine Factory: We're truly honored by your dedication to bringing the very best to our customers each and every day. We could not do this without you. Thank you from the bottom of our hearts.

We love you all!

Ted Balestreri & Bert Cutino





THANK YOU FOR VOTING US

# Best Real Estate Company



We are thrilled and honored to announce that Sotheby’s International Realty has been recognized with the prestigious Golden Pine Cone Award for the “Best Real Estate Company”. This accolade is a testament to our unwavering commitment to delivering the highest standard of service and expertise in the real estate industry.

We are deeply grateful to all our clients, partners, and the entire community.

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- CARMEL VALLEY 831.659.2267
- PACIFIC GROVE 831.372.7700





# The Golden Pine Cones

October 27, 2023

## AMAZING

From page 27 GPC

and online versions via livestream, although the studio hosts several classes daily. In addition to group glasses, the studio offers private, individual instruction, corporate events, workshops and special events.

### ■ Best Golf Course

**Pebble Beach Golf Links** — 1700 17 Mile Drive, Pebble Beach – hours vary by season – (831) 574-5609, [pebblebeach.com](http://pebblebeach.com)

Pebble Beach Golf Links is voted in again as a readers’ favorite, which is not a surprise considering it’s a universal favorite among golfers. Boasting over a century of top-notch golf with breathtaking views, the links opened for play in 1919. Who wouldn’t want to walk in the footsteps of Jack Nicklaus, Arnold Palmer and a host of legendary players, not to mention the celebrities who’ve appeared during the Crosby Clambake, now known as the AT&T Pebble Beach Pro-Am. Since the pro-am arrived here in 1947, it’s been played by presidents, show business A-listers, professional athletes from other sports and corporate bigwigs.

Rated the No. 1 public course in the United States by pretty much everyone, and steeped in history like no other American course, Pebble Beach hosted its sixth U.S. Open in 2019 — more than any other location over the last five decades. Four more U.S. Opens are already on the books for 2027, 2032, 2037 and 2044. This year saw the course’s first U.S. Women’s Open, with plans for three more in 2035, 2040 and 2048.

### ■ Best Museum

**Monterey Museum of Art** — 559 Pacific St., Monterey - 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. Sunday through Thursday - (831) 372-5477, [montereyart.org](http://montereyart.org)

The Monterey Museum of Art was founded in 1959, and, according to its website, its collections “reflect and support the museum’s mission to celebrate and promote the art of California and cover the period from about 1875 to the present.” The museum’s vision is “a collaborative center where art and community engage” — and engage it does.

In addition to offering 15-20 exhibits annually, the museum regularly hosts community events for the whole family to enjoy, from La Mirada Halloween Bash, to a Winter Art Market in December. Year-round First Fridays offer after-hours access to the museum with music and socializing.

Even after the museum closes for the day, art lovers can sit in the mural garden, where a welcoming bench awaits, and enjoy a book or simply revel in the presence of nature and beauty.

### ■ Best Library

**Harrison Memorial Library** — Mission and Sixth – 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. Monday through Friday – (831) 624-4629, [ci.carmel.ca.us/library](http://ci.carmel.ca.us/library)

“If you have a garden and a library, you have everything you need,” Cicero said, long before Carmel was founded. Since the Harrison Memorial Library also has a garden, it checks both boxes for the city. Opened in 1928, Harrison Memorial Library was designed by renowned California architect Bernard Maybeck and financed by a bequest from Ella Reid Harrison as a memorial to her husband, California Supreme Court Justice Ralph Chandler Harrison.

In 1992, the library began to rely solely on private gifts for books, supplies, electronic resources and computer equipment. Today, it says private support “has become the foundation of the library’s free public services.” In addition to books and a beautifully manicured garden, the library offers many community resources and lectures, such as writing workshops and a free, community-wide puzzle exchange. (If you can’t get enough of the online archives on The Pine Cone’s website, you can find the rest of the newspaper’s 100-plus years through Harrison Memorial Library’s website, too.)

### ■ Best Inn/B&B

**Carmel Garden Inn** — Fourth and Torres – (831) 624-6926, [carmelgardeninn.com](http://carmelgardeninn.com)

Carmel Garden Inn has once been voted by Pine Cone readers as the Best Inn/B&B around. Everything about this place is quaint and screams — or delicately whispers — “Carmel-by-the-Sea.” With 10 cozy guest rooms with wood-burning fireplaces in a charming garden setting, what’s not to love? Guests enjoy the breakfasts, especially the home-made granola and summer vegetable frittatas. The Inn offers complimentary wine and cheese in the afternoon to complete a stress-free vacation or staycation.

Just three blocks from Ocean Avenue, Carmel Garden Inn is walking distance from everything, including Carmel Beach where you can watch the sunset or enjoy a stroll with your pooch, who is welcome at the Inn. “Many of the rooms are designated pet friendly. Sheeted dog beds, food and water bowls, treats — we understand. We are dog people, too,” says the inn’s management.

### ■ Best Hotel

**La Playa Hotel** — Camino Real and Eighth - (800) 582-8900, [laplayahotel.com](http://laplayahotel.com)

Set in a mansion built in 1905, La Playa Hotel offers a modern luxury experience in charming downtown. A short walk from Carmel Beach — your Favorite Beach — La Playa is perfectly located for guests to enjoy everything Carmel has to offer. Not only that, they can splurge with plush platform beds, a complimentary Champagne brunch and a spacious garden with a heated pool. All 75 rooms offer boutique charm and the promise of pampering.

The employees at La Playa pride themselves on excellent service and strive to make every guest’s experience unique and memorable. Locals can frequently be found enjoying cocktails and light bites at Bud’s Bar.

*Continues next page*



## Where Neighbors are like Family

Nestled on six beautifully landscaped acres just a short walk from downtown Pacific Grove, Canterbury Woods is a senior living community offering the charms of a small-town where your neighbors are like family.

Be involved, get creative and discover a variety of opportunities to connect with your fellow neighbors. Choose eclectic apartments to cozy cottages with month-to-month agreement and no entrance fee for maximum financial stability.



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From previous page

■ Most Dog-Friendly Hotel

**Cypress Inn/Terry’s Restaurant & Lounge** — *Lincoln and Seventh – 11:30 a.m. 9:00 p.m. Monday through Saturday, brunch 11 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. Sunday – (831) 624-3871, cypress-inn.com; (831) 620-7454, carmelterrys.com*

Once again voted by readers as Carmel’s most dog-friendly hotel, Cypress Inn has charmed visitors since its opening in 1929. The décor feels so Golden-Age-of-Hollywood sophisticated, you’re bound to be enchanted. Continuing the legacy of late co-owner, legendary singer, actress and animal lover Doris Day, the hotel’s philosophy takes pet friendliness to the next level. “By combining Mediterranean grace and

charm with warm hospitality and exemplary service, Cypress Inn has drawn everyone from kings, queens and Hollywood royalty, to the everyday traveler, and especially all those who like to travel with their pets,” the inn says. Doggie pick-up bags and a wash station are available in the hotel’s courtyard, and the staff keeps a list of pet sitters on hand for when Mom and Dad are ready for a break.

Pets of all shapes and sizes are welcome to enjoy the same hospitality as their owners, so bring your furry family members for a real treat. Speaking of treats, there are always little snacks for your pooch in the lobby.

If you’re hungry, Terry’s Restaurant and Lounge loves feeding people, using fresh organic produce from local farms whenever possible, and sustainable wild-caught seafood and grass-fed meats.

But, getting back to the dogs, bring your buddy to “Yappy

hour” Sunday through Thursday from 4 p.m. to 6 p.m. on the patio to meet other canines-about-town. Weekly live music is one of Carmel’s not-so-best-kept secrets, featuring local musicians from 6 p.m. to 9 p.m. on Thursdays and Sundays and 6:30 p.m. to 9:30 p.m. on Fridays and Saturdays.

RETAIL

■ Best Florist

**Fleurs du Soleil** — *598 Fremont St., Monterey – 9:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Tuesday through Saturday – (831) 656-0455, fleursdusoleil.com*

Customers come into Fleurs du Soleil, not just to order a fresh, natural, picked-from-the-garden arrangement, but also for the experience. Walking into the floral design studio and retail boutique across from El Estero Park is like getting a glimpse of Filoli or other historic gardens. With influences from the south of France and the Monterey Peninsula, Fleurs du Soleil designers curate bouquets to create an alchemy of natural beauty with the substance and form, color and design inherent in fine art.

Although floral designer and owner Kim England locally sources most of her flowers, she also introduces blooms from all over the world, which she finds at the San Francisco Flower Market.

■ Best Furniture Store

**Mum’s Place** — *246 Forest Ave., Pacific Grove – 10 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. Monday through Saturday – (831) 372-6250, mumsfurniture.com*

Step into Mum’s and you’ll find a showroom filled with a full range of furniture styles, plus accessories and objets d’art. For nearly 40 years, Mum’s has been dedicated to bringing in a wide variety of designs to satisfy locals’ needs, tastes and budgets.

“Design and quality are important, but so is value,” said owners Mugo and Talin Tersakyan. “Our vision is to bring in the latest and enduring designs at accessible prices.”

Among classic, traditional, transitional, country French and contemporary collections at Mum’s Place, clients can customize their choices with more than 80 furniture lines and some 5,000 fabrics.

See SUPERLATIVE page 32 GPC



Thank You  
for Voting us  
Best Candy Shop

2023



Cottage of Sweets

A Traditional British-Style Sweet Shop

831-624-5170 | cottageofsweets.com | Ocean Avenue btwn Monte Verde & Lincoln, Carmel-by-the-Sea



**THANK YOU** Carmel Pine Cone readers for once again voting **ARMANASCO PUBLIC RELATIONS, INC.** Best Public Relations Company on the Monterey Peninsula!



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IN MONTEREY COUNTY

2023



Thank You !!

We appreciate all the support from our club members,  
fans and friends who voted for us.





G O L D E N   P I N E   C O N E S

SUPERLATIVE

From page 30 GPC

■ Best Golf Shop

**Pebble Beach Pro Shop** — 1700 17 Mile Drive, Pebble Beach – 6:30 a.m. to 6:30 p.m. daily – (831) 622-8723, [pebblebeach.com](#)

Pebble Beach Golf Links is known the world over for its championship pedigree and breathtaking views, and while these attributes draw guests to the resort from around the globe, it is the friendly staff of the Pebble Beach pro shop who are there to welcome first-timers and returning guests alike.

Each round played on the famed course is unique to the player, but one thing all of them enjoy is a warm greeting and welcome back after they hole out on the iconic par-5 18th.

Each morning, the team is up with the sun and there until well after the final group has teed off. Whether someone needs more golf balls, an extra layer of clothing or a few calming words of encouragement before they approach the First Tee, the Pebble Beach pro shop staff lives up to the same world-class standard as the course itself.

■ Best Hardware Store

**Ace Hardware** — 290 Crossroads Blvd., (831) 293-8050; 401 Mid Valley Center, Carmel Valley, (831) 250-5666; 229 Forest Ave., (831) 372-3284 and 1136 Forest Ave., Pacific Grove, (831) 646-9144 – hours vary by location – [acehardware.com](#)

Imagine a beautiful Saturday afternoon when you’ve brought home a special piece of art from one of the local galleries and you want to hang it immediately — but you don’t have the right hook. Or, less aesthetically, you’ve discovered a plumbing problem that you know would be an easy fix if you just had the right stuff. Whether it’s duct tape, WD40 or some other antidote, Ace Hardware has you covered. Although each shop is a member of the largest retailer-owned hardware cooperative in the business, these stores, locally owned and managed, give customers a sense of shopping where everybody knows your name — with the benefit of a big business. In an era when it’s hard to find specialized service or even someone to work the register, a company that says, “Ace is the place with the helpful hardware folks” invites confidence.

■ Best Housewares Store

**Shoshin** — San Carlos between Fifth and Sixth – 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday through Friday, 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Saturday and Sunday – (831) 877-6300, [shopshoshin.com](#)

Shoshin owner Alexis Smith named her interior design firm and shop after the concept of “beginner’s mind” from Zen Buddhism as a reminder to herself and her clients and customers that an openness to new ideas can yield exciting design discoveries. As last year’s Best New Business, Shoshin is quickly growing a devoted customer base that enjoys the shop’s mix of new and vintage housewares and furnishings with an ever-evolving array of unique and high quality items.

■ Best Pet Store

**Diggidy Dog** — NE Corner of Ocean at Monte Verde – 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Sunday through Thursday, 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. Friday and Saturday – (831) 625-1585, [diggidydog.com](#)

It only makes sense for a dog-loving community to have a dedicated dog boutique. Since 2003, this shop has catered to canines but also focuses on felines, providing unique, functional, and healthy products for dogs and cats. While its primary focus is on the animals, a lot of what the shop sells delights people as much as — if not more than — it does their pets. Diggidy Dog’s wide array of quality treats, toys, apparel, collars and leashes is sure to satisfy the most discerning dog or finicky feline — and their person. Yet surely the biggest attractions are the Westies who hang out there daily, and a new addition, Danny Boy. He’s an English cream golden retriever. The trio might make this the happiest store in town.

■ Best Garden Shop

**Griggs Nursery** — 9220 W. Carmel Valley Road, Carmel Valley – 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday through Saturday, 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Sunday – (831) 626-0680, [griggsnursery.com](#)

Gardeners have long known that digging your hands into the soil has a centering, nurturing effect. Locals count on Griggs Nursery for houseplants and succulents, seasonal annuals, perennials, trees and shrubs, to upgrade the places where they enjoy spending their days. For 20 years, Griggs has been thriving in its Carmel Valley location, helping to improve the local landscape one plant at a time. “We know what works here, so we can grow the variety and quality we want for our customers,” the Griggs family said. “A garden shop is evergreen, and there’s always something in bloom.

■ Best Camping/Skiing/Surfing Store

**On The Beach Surf Shop** — 693 Lighthouse Ave., Pacific Grove – 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. Sunday through Thursday, 10 a.m. to 7 p.m. Friday and Saturday – (831) 646-9283, [onthebeachsurfshop.com](#)

Kelly Sorenson was just 20 years old in 1986 when he and Mike Locatelli founded On The Beach Surf Shop on Ocean and Mission. Three years later, he became the sole owner of the company and, in 1993, opened a second store on Lighthouse Avenue in Monterey. Six years later, he closed the Carmel Store. Today, On The Beach sprawls across nearly 6,000 square feet of tropical-themed retail space designed by Sorenson and created by contractor Chris Murren. With bamboo and beach sand throughout, tiki huts filled with clothing, and classic surfboards from the Pete and Cathy Noble collection, On The Beach, said Sorenson, feels like a surfer’s paradise, with gear from all the coolest surf and skate companies. “What means the most is seeing the California surf community make On The Beach their hangout and source to live the lifestyle,” he said.

■ Best Place to Buy Athletic Wear

**The Treadmill** — 111 Crossroads Blvd. – 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. daily – (831) 624-4112, [thetreadmill.com](#)

For more than 40 years, The Treadmill in the Crossroads shopping center has endeavored to be the embodiment of a friendly, community-driven, trustworthy local business that supports and anchors the active community in and around Carmel, Carmel Valley, Big Sur and Monterey. Since 1983, the family-owned and operated store has been known to locals as an outstanding place to find premier clothing and footwear brands. After visiting and talking with the shop’s experienced and knowledgeable staff, it becomes clear why Carmel Pine Cone readers have voted The Treadmill the go-to place for everything you need to support your healthy lifestyle, year after year.

■ Best Pharmacy

**Carmel Drug Store** — Ocean between Dolores and San Carlos – pharmacy 9 a.m. to 6 p.m. Monday - Friday, store 8 a.m. to 10 p.m. daily – (831) 624-3819, [carmeldrugstore.com](#)

Independently owned and serving the community since

See **PRIMO** page 34 GPC



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*the platinum experience*

Celebrating Our 20th Season!

Kevin Nealon

Béla Fleck, Zakir Hussain & Edgar Meyer  
ft. Rakesh Chaurasia

# SUNSET 2023 2024 PRESENTS



Sewam  
American  
Indian Dance



Jake Shimabukuro:  
*Christmas in Hawai'i*



Lula Washington  
Dance Theatre



An Evening with  
Anne Lamott

**Sunset Cultural Center's 20th Anniversary Season is here!** Join us for *The Platinum Experience* as we celebrate 20 years of bringing people together with an unforgettable Sunset Presents line-up of music, dance, comedy, theater, and so much more!

Located in downtown Carmel-by-the-Sea, Sunset Cultural Center is the Central Coast's premier destination for worldclass performances with superior acoustics, local concessions, and free parking. Join the celebration by visiting our new website [sunsetcenter.org/20seasons](https://sunsetcenter.org/20seasons) or by scanning the QR code.



**Thank you, Carmel Pine Cone readers, for voting Sunset Cultural Center the Best Concert Venue on the Monterey Peninsula!**

## MARQUEE EVENTS

### **Straight No Chaser**

Sunday, October 29, 2023 • 3pm

### **Mannheim Steamroller**

**TWO SHOWS!**

Saturday, December 30, 2023

2pm & 7:30pm

## BEYOND BROADWAY

### **The Other Mozart**

Saturday, March 9, 2024 • 7:30pm

### **The Simon & Garfunkel Story**

Sunday, April 7, 2024 • 3:00pm

### **Broadway's Next Hit Musical**

Thursday, May 23, 2024 • 7:30pm

## CULTURAL AFFAIRS

### **Sewam American Indian Dance**

Friday, November 3, 2023 • 7:30pm

### **Mardi Gras Mambo**

Thursday, February 8, 2024 • 7:30pm

### **Pride Anthems**

Saturday, June 1, 2024 • 7:30pm



Straight No Chaser

## MUSICAL MASTERS

### **Béla Fleck, Zakir Hussain & Edgar Meyer featuring Rakesh Chaurasia**

Tuesday, November 14, 2023 • 7:30pm

### **JALC Live: Sing and Swing featuring Bria Skonberg & Benny Benack**

Friday, January 26, 2024 • 7:30pm

### **Classic Albums Live: Sticky Fingers**

Thursday, February 1, 2024 • 7:30pm

### **One Night of Queen**

Friday, February 23, 2024 • 7:30pm

### **Trailblazing Women of Country: From Patsy to Loretta to Dolly**

Thursday, March 7, 2024 • 7:30pm

### **Bruce Hornsby & yMusic Present: BrhyM**

Thursday, April 4, 2024 • 7:30pm

## FUN FOR ALL

### **Jake Shimabukuro: Christmas in Hawai'i**

Sunday, December 17, 2023 • 7:30pm

### **Lula Washington Dance Theatre**

Friday, March 22, 2024 • 7:30pm

### **Mike Super: Magic & Illusion**

Friday, May 3, 2024 • 7:30pm

## WIT & WISDOM

### **In Conversation with Amy Sedaris**

Friday, November 10, 2023 • 7:30pm

### **Kevin Nealon**

Saturday, January 27, 2024 • 7:30pm

### **Letters Aloud: Love Me or Leave Me**

Wednesday, February 14, 2024 • 7:30pm

### **An Evening with Anne Lamott**

International Women's Day  
Friday, March 8, 2024 • 7:30pm



Classic Albums Live:  
*Sticky Fingers*



 **SUNSET CULTURAL CENTER**

San Carlos St at Ninth Ave, Carmel-by-the-Sea • Box Office (831) 620-2048 • [sunsetcenter.org](https://sunsetcenter.org)





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## PRIMO

*From page 32 GPC*

1910, Carmel’s classic drug store and family pharmacy invites you to “shop back in time.” Known for quality products and service, this drugstore might just be the most convenient stop in town and is chock-full of everything folks might need or maybe forgot on their way into town. The back of the shop looks like the old-fashioned pharmacy it is, yet it provides state-of-the-art products, including veterinary medicines for pets. The front of the store offers greeting cards, postcards and books by local authors, and you can find high-end bath and body products, including Bonny Doon Farm’s soaps, salves and lotions. If only the place had a soda fountain, it would complete the hometown experience.

### ■ Best Children’s Clothing Store/Boutique

**Heaven A Child’s Boutique** — *Lincoln between Ocean and Seventh – 10 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. Monday through Thursday, 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. Friday & Saturday, 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. Sunday – (831) 624-6550*

Ash and Monique Vasanji, who hosted the grand opening of Heaven in 2001, are celebrating the 23rd anniversary of their European-style children’s boutique, designed for the customer who has exquisite taste and seeks quality and style for their little ones. “Throughout the years,” Monique said, “our family has remained committed to bringing in really special clothing, shoes, and gifts for the children of our community and beyond. We are so grateful for the support and recognition.” Located on Lincoln in the site of the legendary Village Straw Shop, Heaven beckons customers through double doors into a gracious, well-lit salon appointed with very select children’s apparel. It’s as if you’ve wandered into the custom wardrobe of a favored child. Perhaps yours.

### ■ Best Men’s Clothing Store

**Khakis of Carmel** — *Carmel Plaza – 9:30 a.m. to 6 p.m. Monday - Saturday, 10:30 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. Sunday – (831) 625-8106, khakisofcarmel.com*

Gentlemen who shop at Khakis stand out in a crowd — but only if they want to. The shop’s timeless sense of good taste means you can make a quiet statement or don something more fashion-forward for an evening in town. Customers out for an afternoon walk often shop the classic display windows at Khaki’s as if it were an art exhibit, and then head inside to collect quality classic and couture menswear. Yet this shop’s success seems to be rooted in providing the ultimate in customer service. Khakis of Carmel is the award-winning pursuit and passion of Jim and Connie Ockert, whose combined creative and entrepreneurial talents have created a sartorial salon that’s stood the test of time. “We have worked tirelessly to be innovative in these ever-changing times, and to curate a really different, interesting product selection that suits today’s customer,” said Jim. And, he said, they are honored to be chosen as Golden Pine Cone winners.

### ■ Best Men’s Shoe Store

**Hedi’s Shoes** — *Ocean and Mission (additional locations at 3630 The Barnyard, and 330 Alvarado St. and Del Monte Shopping Center in Monterey) – 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. daily – (831) 624-5580, hedi.com*

Haydar “Hedi” Movahedi opened his first Carmel shoe store more than 30 years ago. Since then, he’s cobbled together comfort, quality, convenience and cool, paired with customer service from experienced staff who understand fit, form and function. Their goal is to make sure customers feel just as good as they look as they stroll along Scenic Road or enjoy brunch at the Mission Ranch. Featured among various brands offering dressy, casu-

*Continues next page*

# Thank You!

50 YEARS IN CARMEL-BY-THE-SEA

## BEST JEWELER - KIRKOR KOCEK



Kirkor Kocek is concentrating. He’s in that place where nothing exists outside of the singular piece of jewelry he’s creating—nothing but his vision, his materials, and his history, which influences his craft. Everything and everyone who has come before him remains ever present as he works. And thus, each creation carries a sense of who he is and what he represents.

Kocek, who celebrated his 50th anniversary of Kocek Jeweler, Inc., is grateful to his past and also his present, the community who celebrates and collects his artistry.

*“Where I grew up, where I have traveled, and where I live now informs my work,” he said, “becoming a symbol and reminder of my own legacy.”*

Born Kirkor Kocekian in Istanbul, the artist began learning the craft of fine jewelry when he was just 11 years old, having raised his hand in class to accept an opportunity to apprentice under a master jeweler. After a stint in the Turkish Army, he felt it was time to leave the country to which he never felt a connection, and come to California. While he was working with a jeweler who created pieces for Van Cleef & Arpels on Rodeo Drive in Beverly Hills, a chance visit to Carmel-by-the-Sea launched the creative life Kocek was meant to live.

**Kocek Jeweler, INC**

San Carlos between Ocean & Seventh, Carmel  
(831) 624-8485 • [www.kocekjeweler.com](http://www.kocekjeweler.com)



# GOLDEN PINE CONES

## From previous page

al, or rough-wear shoes, are Ecco, Pikolinos, Mephisto, Paul Greene, HOKA, Birkenstock, NAOT, Ara, Dansko, Joseph Seibel, Rieker, Remonte, Olukei, and Finn Comfort, plus a complement of Kühl clothing and accessories.

## Best Women’s Clothing Boutique

**Debra C** — 129 Crossroads Blvd. – 10 a.m. to 6 p.m.  
Monday through Saturday, noon to 5 p.m. Sunday – (831) 624-9400 – [debrac.com](#)

Debra Couch, clad in a cashmere twinset over a slim pant, pulled together with a fabulous alligator belt, makes it look easy. “It is,” she says, particularly if you shop at Debra C, her eponymous boutique of European designer apparel for women. She started with a store in Beverly Hills in 1997. Then, in 2012, she opened a second store at the Crossroads. She said that the important thing, whether you are looking at the many French and Italian collections exclusive to Debra C, or even its own private label, is that you don’t have to look any further to find what you want. “It’s all about the way it’s put together, to give the total chic, elegant look. And we pride ourselves on great customer service, thanks to our wonderful, talented staff.”

## Best Resale/Consignment Shop

**Yellow Brick Road Benefit Shop** — 26388 Carmel Rancho Blvd. – 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Monday through Saturday – (831) 626-8480, [yellowbrickroadbenefitshop.org](#)

Circa 1989, Shirin Snyder, wife of Rev. John Snyder, then pastor of Carmel Presbyterian Church, had a dream. She wanted her church to become more closely connected to the people of Monterey County. By establishing Yellow Brick Road Benefit Shop, she found meaningful and productive ways to offer some people a chance to give back while providing an opportunity for others to score bargains and raise funds to support locals in need. Thrift shoppers love coming here because they know they can find designer clothing (occasionally with the original tags still attached), interesting accessories and all sorts of household goods, all in a clean, well-organized environment. Yellow Brick Road has grown into three locations: the main store (clothing, household items and collectibles), a bookstore and a furniture and art store. It’s generated more than \$7 million, which has been given back to Monterey County through grants to nonprofit organizations and student scholarships.

- Best Women’s Accessories
- Best Place to Buy Designer Clothes
- Best Vintage Clothing Store

**Foxy Couture Carmel** — San Carlos 2SW of Fifth – 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. Thursday through Monday – (831) 625-9995, [foxycouturecarmel.com](#)

Since 1991, Susan Galvin has recycled vintage and contemporary designer clothing into a business which, more than 10

years ago, became Foxy Couture Carmel, a sustainable luxury designer vintage consignment store. “We are sustainable because everything in our store is pre-owned,” she said. “We recycle and repurpose timeless products from design houses whose allure typically doesn’t change that much. These luxury fabrics and designs have been gently worn or not at all.” Galvin takes pride in the special things she sleuths out all over the world. “We are honored to receive this award from The Carmel Pine Cone, the cornerstone, along with the Carmel library, of our community,” she said.

## Best Women’s Shoe Store

**Lloyd’s Shoes** — Ocean and Dolores – 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. daily – (831) 625-1382, [lloydsshoes.com](#)

For 43 years, Lloyd’s shoes has been a great place to find stylish footwear. In fact, if you want to know what’s “in” this season, just check out what owner Tess Calhoon is sporting. Perhaps the Chie Mihara super-cool platform bootie in black patent leather. Crafted in Elda, Spain, the brand’s bestseller in

Europe feels very fashion-forward and edgy. Calhoon prefers to pair them with her kick-flair or straight-leg jeans. On other days, Calhoon and quite a few of her customers slip on slides with little heels or maybe booties in calf hair and leather by Cydwoq (a play on “sidewalk”), whose vegetable-dyed leather handmade works of art look like Spain meets Lebanon, but they’re made in the United States. Honestly, by the time Tess Calhoon gets home to her young family, she’s already slipped on her Uggs, the legendary feel-good sheepskin boot with soft fleece lining and a comfortable “your feet will thank you” fit. Everyone must agree, since Calhoon can’t remember when she’s carried or sold more of the casual footwear that has become an all-occasion boot.

## Best Jewelry Store

**Kocek Jeweler** — San Carlos between Seventh and Ocean – 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Tuesday through Saturday – (831) 624-8485, [kocekjeweler.com](#)

Continues next page

# Monterey Bay Eye Center

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Ryan Ranch Monterey



Roger C. Husted, M.D. • Kasey N. Nakajima, O.D. • Anna J. Shi, M.D. • Leland H. Rosenblum, M.D.



2019-2023

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# Congratulations

# Dr. Rosenblum!

## BEST OPHTHALMOLOGIST 2023

2008

2009

2010

2012

2013

2014

2015

2016

2017

2018

2019

2020



Monterey Bay Eye Center

[montereybayeyecenter.com](#) | 831.372.1500



From previous page

This month, Kocek Jeweler, Inc. is celebrating its 50th anniversary in the heart of Carmel. More than 60 years ago, the owner and acclaimed designer, Armenian native Kirkor Kocek, began his apprenticeship at a jewelry store in the Covered Bazaar in Istanbul, Turkey. Decades later, his clients have included Clint Eastwood, Ronald Reagan, Bette Davis, Bob Hope and former Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger.

He gave his most cherished design to the late Pope John Paul II, a cross modeled after the one buried with Father Junipero Serra at the Carmel Mission. You can see a photograph of it in the store. Kocek has become an icon of Carmel, winning numerous business awards and supporting local nonprofits.

Best Shopping Center

**The Crossroads Carmel** — Highway 1 at Rio Road — open daily — (831) 625-4106, [thecrossroadscarmel.com](http://thecrossroadscarmel.com)

Where can you grab a cup of coffee and a pastry before pe-

rusing the best books, then shop for groceries, gifts, gadgets, athleisure wear and designer apparel — all without having to move your car? The Crossroads Carmel, the wonderfully eclectic collection of boutique stores, restaurants and services, has served Monterey Peninsula residents and visitors for about five decades. Nearly all the businesses in the Crossroads are locally owned and/or operated, so you can count on unique stores and dining experiences. Our readers believe it truly is the perfect place for one-stop shopping.

Best Antique Shop

**Wittpenn’s Antiques** — San Carlos between Seventh and Eighth — 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. daily, closed Wednesdays — (831) 624-1336, [wittpennsantiques.com](http://wittpennsantiques.com)

This place definitely warrants wandering with patience and attention to detail. At Wittpenn’s Antiques, there is so much to see and something for everyone to discover. Owned by Chip and Kathy Wittpenn, this treasure trove is a short stroll from Ocean Avenue, near Sunset Center. Just the windows of this

little gem feature enough eye-catching collectibles to keep shoppers occupied for a while. Browse a wide selection of antiques and specialty items, including sterling silver, furniture, books, vintage musical instruments and more. With 18 years in Carmel and still going strong, the owners wanted to thank the city and all the customers who make the shop a fun, special place to be.

Best Bookstore

**River House Books** — 208 Crossroads Blvd. — 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. Monday through Saturday, 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Sunday — (831) 626-2665, [riverhousebookscarmel.com](http://riverhousebookscarmel.com)

A repeat Golden Pine Cone winner for good reason, River House Books offers its customers what massive online retailers will never be able to — the chance to hold and leaf through a brand new book before purchasing it. A family-owned, independent bookseller, River House offers an excellent selection of works, from the classics to architecture to youth favorites and gardening. Its employees are highly knowledgeable and friendly and happy to help. From River House Books itself: “Choose from an exciting and changing selection of new works in the humanities and sciences, best-selling fiction and nonfiction, children’s classics, youth favorites, travel, foreign and domestic magazines and newspapers, plus gift-worthy architecture, art, cooking, gardening, interior design, photography, sports and recreation and wine books.”

Best Bike Shop

**Carmel Bicycle** — 26543 Carmel Rancho Blvd. — 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. Tuesday through Saturday, 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. Sunday — (831) 625-2211, [carmelbicycle.net](http://carmelbicycle.net)

Established in 1988, Carmel Bicycle began with a motivation to share a passion for cycling, according to the business. Conveniently located in Carmel Rancho, Carmel Bicycle offers a great selection of bicycles, clothing and accessories, from manufacturers including Trek, Giant, Saris, Kuat, Bontrager, Feedback Sports, Endura and more. Owners Netty and Rob have been recognized industry leaders with integrated thinking and open minds — all the while maintaining their belief in what they do. “Cycling is good for you,” the shop explains. “So come let us share with you what we have to offer. We are what you see, and we love what we do.” With enthusiasm like that, you can guess that Carmel Bicycle is perfectly positioned to help you find just what you’re looking for. The shop also offers professional bike service. “So, whether it’s a minor tune-up or a major overhaul, where we go completely through your bicycle and get it running like new, you can count on us to do the job right the first time, every time,” Carmel Bicycle says, adding that walk-ins for bike services are welcome but appointments are helpful.

Best Car Dealer

**Porsche Monterey** — 1781 Del Monte Blvd., Seaside — 9 a.m. to 6 p.m. Monday through Saturday, 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. Sunday — (831) 920-0744, [porschemonterey.com](http://porschemonterey.com)

If you’d like to own one of the automobile industry’s most prestigious marques, Porsche Monterey’s got it. From the twin-turbo eight-speed 2024 Porsche 911 (starting at \$114,400), which produces nearly 380 horsepower, to the 2024 Porsche Cayenne SUV (starting at \$79,200), Porsche Monterey offers the German manufacturer’s most popular models. The shop also has a selection of certified preowned cars — some almost new — on hand. “Porsche Monterey offers an exceptional selection of hard to find, eclectic, and bespoke automobiles,” the business says on its website. It goes on to say that “having such a selection” makes it “even easier to get your dream car, regardless of where you live.”

Best Auto Repair Shop

Best Gas Station

**Lemos 76** — 544 Carmel Rancho Blvd. — 7 a.m. to 8 p.m. Monday through Saturday, 7:30 a.m. to 8 p.m. Sunday — (831) 624-2925, [lemos76.com](http://lemos76.com)

Whether you need to fill up your car before heading to Carmel Valley or are in need of a repair, Lemos 76 — a repeat Golden Pine Cones winner in both categories — has it all. The family-owned/operated station is a local fixture. “For 61 years, our five-star station has been serving the community with our full-service garage/smog testing, 24-hour pay at the pump and full- and self-serve at the pumps,” Lemos says on its website. The gas station is well known for its great customer service. Lemos also has a stocked snack shop serving yummy sandwiches from Bruno’s Market in Carmel and irresistible donuts from Red’s Donuts in Seaside. How can you go wrong?

Best Car Wash

**El Estero Car Wash** — 590 Fremont St., Monterey — 8 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. Monday through Saturday, 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Sunday — (831) 373-1801, [elesterocarwash.com](http://elesterocarwash.com)

El Estero Car Wash has been repeatedly voted Best Car Wash over three decades, so it’s obvious the folks there are

2023

2022

2021

2020

2019

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2014

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2012

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Continues next page



# GOLDEN PINE CONES

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doing it right. When it comes to the wash itself, El Estero uses a soap called Envirosoft Foam,” which the business says is made from a “high quality microcellular closed-cell foam,” which it maintains is a “significant development” for cleaning vehicles because it’s gentle on their finishes.

“It does not absorb water, chemicals or dirt, providing the highest level of safety, cleaning and shine” and has been used on more than 750,000 cars that have gone through El Estero, according to the business. El Estero also offers numerous interior and exterior detailing services, such as waxing with clay treatment, headlight renewal to make those dull and cloudy headlights bright again, and carpet shampoo and leather and vinyl seat conditioning.

■ Best Place for Brides to Shop

**Epiphany Bridal Boutique** — *Mission between Fifth and Sixth – 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. – (831) 626-7200, epiphany-boutique.com*

Calling itself the California central coast’s “premier bridal” shop, Epiphany Bridal Boutique offers bridal gowns, bridesmaids’ dresses, dresses for mothers in the wedding party, and rental suits and tuxedos for the groom and groomsmen. In its own words, Epiphany loves what it does and that’s apparent on its website.

“As we enter our 15th year in business, our goal is and always has been, to make the bride, our bridesmaids, moms, prom girls and all the lovely ladies who enter our doors have the most wonderful shopping experience,” Epiphany says. The Carmel business — which also has a store in San Luis Obispo — knows very well that what one wears makes a difference in how one feels. A dress, it explains, isn’t just a dress.

“It’s an expression of who you are and how you present yourself to the world. These

are dresses that you will wear to the most important events in your life.”

■ Best Gift Shop

**Ami Carmel** — *Dolores between Fifth and Sixth – 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. daily – (831) 620-1600, amicarmel.com*

Ami Carmel is on a roll. Not only did the gift shop win a Golden Pine Cone in 2021 for Best New Business, it won Best Gift Shop in 2022 and has secured the same title in 2023. Ami Carmel, owned by Annee Martin, offers jewelry, artwork, gift cards, accessories, home décor and even clothing.

“We come to this business with a deep, personal connection to one another, and we want to share our vision with the people, not only in our brick and mortar store in Carmel-by-the-Sea, but online as well,” the shop explains.

■ Best Candy Shop

**Cottage of Sweets** — *Ocean between Monte Verde and Lincoln – 10 a.m. to 9 p.m., Sunday through Thursday, 10 a.m. to 10 p.m., Friday and Saturday – (831) 624-5170, cottagesweets.com*

Many residents and frequent tourists find visiting the Cottage of Sweet as irresistible as its homemade chocolate fudge. “I’ve taken trips to Carmel with my family starting when I was a little girl back in the early 70s,” Jennifer said on social media. “We’ve always had to stop by my favorite, Cottage of Sweets.” Besides plenty of shop-made candy, Cottage of Sweets also offers a large selection of pre-packaged British candy, such as Mars bars, and a selection of other chocolate, such as Flake, Wispa and Crunchie. While a candy shop seems the perfect use for the quaint and oh-so-Carmel cottage that’s home to Cottage of Sweets, the diminutive structure has a lengthy history dating to 1922, when it was a weaving shop. A side window was used to sell tickets to the Court of the Golden Bough

Theatre until it burned down in 1938, Cottage of Sweets explains on its website. A Canadian man, Wally Cullomore, decided that the town needed a candy shop, so he set about creating just that, history tells us. “So, in 1959 the curtain was raised on a much-loved performance,” the store says. We are now the award-winning [best-smelling and best-tasting] shop in Carmel,” Cottage of Sweets proudly proclaims.

*Continues next page*

# la Balena

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# La Playa Hotel

## Voted Best Hotel

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■ Best Carpet and Flooring Store

**Carpets & Floors** — 471 Lighthouse Ave., Monterey – 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., Monday through Friday, by appointment Saturday, closed Sunday – (831) 372-2300, [carpetsandfloor-smonterey.com](#)

With a large selection of flooring from carpet to hardwood to luxury vinyl tile, Carpets & Floors in Monterey means there’s no need to go to a big box home improvement store seeking those things. “We are pleased to present an extensive collection of the finest floor coverings made,” Carpets & Floors says. “And we are dedicated to helping you find a solution to your flooring needs. Our collection is based on what

we believe are some of the most important things to consider when dressing floors — quality, durability and sustainability.” As the business touts, the staff at Carpets & Floors is topnotch and more than willing to help. It’s also a no-pressure kind of place. “May we invite you to visit our showroom to see, touch and learn about our wonderful flooring options. The collection is large — feel free to take your time, browse, ask questions, take home samples, ask for a floor design consultation and/or an expert measure,” Carpets & Floors says. “Most of all, please enjoy.”

■ Best New Business

**Olivia & Daisy Books** — 13766 Center Street, Carmel Valley – 11 a.m. to 5 p.m., Tuesday to Saturday, noon to 4 p.m., Sunday – (831) 620-9290, [Oliviaanddaisy.com](#)

The owner of Olivia & Daisy Books, Kelsey Boyte, calls the shop a “bespoke bookstore for all ages in the heart of Carmel Valley.”

Not only will you find that Olivia & Daisy Books highlights staff picks and children’s favorites, it carries a selection of “Carmel Valley Local Favorites,” including “The Fraud,” by Zadie Smith, and “A Thousand Acres,” by Carmel Valley’s Jane Smiley. “We carry literary fiction, nonfiction, memoir, mystery, nature writing, cookbooks, children’s books and so much more,” the shop says. “Bestsellers and new releases are prominently featured alongside hidden gems and sleeper hits that are sure to inspire, challenge and delight.”

And if a book you’re looking for isn’t in stock, Olivia & Daisy will order it and you can pick it up within a few days.

Services and Health Care

■ Best Place to Work

**Carmel Realty Company** — Dolores south of Seventh – 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday through Friday – (831) 622-1000, [carmelrealtycompany.com](#)

Established a whopping 113 years ago, Carmel Realty Company — the oldest real estate business in town — is a consistent Golden Pine Cone winner, having received the award many times in multiple categories. With a rich history and family heritage and a reputation for integrity, Carmel Realty said it “operates upon the principles of integrity, work ethic, teamwork, collaboration, communication and customer service.” The business adds that it’s “very excited and proud of the company, the vision and our team of professionals who have been handpicked, proven and benchmarked as the best in the business.” In the century-plus it’s been in business, Carmel Realty has established solid relationships with homeowners, visitors, buyers, sellers and tenants. “We leverage our experience and network to make connections between buyers and sellers that no other company on the Peninsula can match,” the company says.

■ Best Place to Volunteer

■ Best Family-Friendly Activity

**Monterey Bay Aquarium** — 886 Cannery Row,

Continues next page

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2023



2009

2010

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2019

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2022

2023



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Monterey – 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. daily – (831)  
648-4100, [montereybayaquarium.com](http://montereybayaquarium.com)

Ask most tourists about their trip to the Monterey Peninsula, and it's a good bet they'll say that one of their destinations is the Monterey Bay Aquarium. One of the world's best places to see marine life up close and personal that's not actually underwater, the aquarium offers so much to take that it can be overwhelming — in a good way. Located at the site of a former sardine cannery that John Steinbeck wrote about, the aquarium is a magnet for those who are fascinated by what lies beneath the waves. More than 2 million people each year visit the world-famous destination, which was the first in the world to host a kelp forest.

From “playful sea otters, flashy fishes, mesmerizing jellies and swirling sardines,” the Monterey Bay Aquarium offers a lot to take in. There’s plenty of educational information. Some exhibits are interactive, and all are entertaining — making it a perfect spot to take the whole family.

You might want to check out “Into the Deep,” a new exhibit which takes visitors on a descent into the dark abyss that’s “mostly out of sight, but thriving with life.” You should also venture to the aquarium’s Open Sea exhibit to see passing tuna, schools of shiny sardines, and “sea turtles swim lazily across the 90-foot window.” Can’t make it to the aquarium just yet? Check out its website for its many live cams, including the famous sea otter cam, which makes it easy to watch the “sea dogs” frolic in their enclosure, or take in the shark and jelly cams. Fun stuff.

## ■ Best Place to Get Married

**Carmel Mission Basilica — 3080 Rio Road — 10 a.m. to 3:45 p.m. Wednesday and Thursday, 10 a.m. to 4:45 p.m. Friday and Saturday, 11:30 a.m. to 4:45 p.m. Sunday, closed Monday and Tuesday — (831) 624-1271, [carmelmission.org](http://carmelmission.org)**

The Carmel Mission Basilica is repeatedly voted Best Place to Get Married, and it's not hard to understand why, considering its rich history and beautiful setting.

The Basilica is the second of the upper California Spanish missions, founded in Monterey in 1770. But only a year later, it was moved by Father Junipero Serra to its current location. “Here at the Mission, we know that this is both a wonderful time in your lives as well a stressful time,” the Carmel Mission says about tying the knot there. “The church seeks to help you prepare yourselves for the great day of your wedding as well as helping you with spiritual, psychological and practical things that will make your wedding day a Sacrament that will last a lifetime!” There are restrictions, though, Only Catholics may wed there, and couples must obtain permission from their local Catholic pastors to get married outside of their parishes at the Basilica. And because it’s an active parish, the Basilica’s schedule only allows weddings to occur on most Fridays and Saturdays.

### ■ Best Place to Get Married (non-church)

## Mission Ranch Hotel and

*Continues next page*

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**Restaurant** — 26270 Dolores – (831) 624-6436, [mission-ranchcarmel.com](http://mission-ranchcarmel.com)

Why do Pine Cone readers think the Mission Ranch is a great place to get married? Well, for starters, it’s pretty photogenic. Just imagine the possibilities with Point Lobos, Carmel River Beach and the Pacific Ocean as natural backdrops. And that’s not even including the potential for adorable, photo-bombing sheep. In its tranquil setting a few steps from Carmel Mission, Mission Ranch and its experienced and professional staff offer myriad possibilities for the big day. “Ceremonies can take place on a lush green lawn, with a dramatic entrance for the bride as she crosses over the picturesque bridge and pond, or on our more intimate brick patio,” says the Ranch. “The wedding reception and meal service are held inside the historic barns, creating an out-of-the-ordinary place to celebrate.” The Ranch also reminds couples that it’s a special place for a rehearsal dinner — “idyllic, truly distinctive and a great prelude to any wedding.”

■ Best Retirement Community

**Del Mesa Carmel** — 500 Del Mesa Drive – (831) 624-1853, [delmesacarmel.org](http://delmesacarmel.org)

Secluded in the quiet hills above Carmel Valley Road, Del Mesa Carmel has been among California’s most impressive active adult retirement communities since 1967. The campus offers 289 condominium units amid specimen trees, shrubs and perennial gardens, stunning views of the Santa Lucia Mountains, Carmel Valley and Point Lobos, 24-hour security, and a wide range of fun, educational and healthy activities for its residents — all of which make this local treasure a multiple Golden Pine Cone recipient.

■ Best Electrician

**Cate Electrical** — Dolores at Seventh – 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Monday - Friday – (831) 624-5361, [cateelectrical.com](http://cateelectrical.com)

This family-owned and -operated business, founded 63 years ago, is a multi-time Golden Pine Cone winner thanks to its friendly, efficient, honest and trusted service to the community. Cate Electrical can handle everything from service calls, to home remodels and landscape lighting, among other services. Customers frequently comment on the genial attitude, professionalism, promptness and fairness of Cate’s electricians.

■ Best Plumber

**After Hour Plumbing & Drain** — 5 Harris Court, Bldg. N-6, Monterey – Open 24/7 – (831) 204-4450, [afterhourplumbingmontereyca.com](http://afterhourplumbingmontereyca.com)

There are few things more annoying than that drip-drip-drip sound in the middle of the night, or coming home from a few days away only to find your toilet’s been running the whole time. In an area where running water is like liquid gold (or seems to cost that much), customers of After Hour Plumbing & Drain have lauded this local company with a sky-high 4.8-star online rating, calling its staff and services “professional and fast, tidy, accommodating and effective.” After Hour accommodates virtually every type of plumbing and drain issue with 24/7 service.

■ Best Architect

**Samuel Pitnick Architects** — 1357 Ord Grove Ave., Seaside – (831) 241-1985, [samuelpitnick.com](http://samuelpitnick.com)

After earning a bachelor’s degree in architecture at USC and graduating with honors, Peninsula native Samuel Pitnick has worked on a diverse range of award-winning projects, including single- and multi-family residences, retail, commercial, educational, recreational and healthcare. These projects spread from California to Hawaii, New York, Europe and Asia. Pitnick is a LEED-accredited professional and an advocate for sustainable and environmentally responsible design, striving for a harmonious balance between nature and architecture. He moved back to his hometown of Carmel in 2014, and his primary focus is doing custom residential design throughout the Monterey Peninsula.

■ Best Interior Design Business

**Sea Blush Staging** — Junipero, 2SW of Fourth – 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday through Friday – (530) 574-8774, [heatherpalmerdesign.com](http://heatherpalmerdesign.com)

How is it possible that you have the same collection of furniture as that tasteful, elegant house on HGTV, but in your living room it resembles the back end of a second-hand store? The secrets are known mostly to interior designers. Heather Palmer launched Sea Blush Staging in Carmel-by-the-Sea in April 2022, offering a wide range of luxury and concierge services that include home staging, color consulting, decluttering, downsizing, furniture selection, holiday decorating and space planning. Palmer earned a business administration and management degree from the University of San Diego, and has been self-employed as a lead interior designer since

Continues next page



2018

2019

2020

2023

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# GOLDEN PINE CONES

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2019. Sea Blush Staging is a repeat winner of the Golden Pine Cone award in this category.

## Best Home Technology

**House Wires** — “Serving the greater Monterey Peninsula” – (831) 659-8324, [housewires.com](http://housewires.com)

You know those times when your router won’t talk to your modem or you can’t get the internet in your spare bedroom? Thank goodness for the techies. Award-winning House Wires has provided thoughtful and targeted technology for more than 20 years to Carmel, Carmel Valley, Pebble Beach, Big Sur, Monterey, Pacific Grove, Seaside, Sand City, Marina, Castroville and Salinas.

Their specialties include cable installation, home audio systems, home automation, home theater design, smart homes, smart lighting, installation of surround sound, TVs, and total system designs. That means you can warm up the living room while you’re sitting in traffic on Carmel Hill, and then hear the crashes of players colliding in the Niners game from your comfy recliner. House Wires’ motto is, “Integrity is core to everything we do.”

## Best General Contractor

**McNickle Construction** — 26425 Laureles Grade Road, Carmel Valley – (831) 915-3393, [mcnickleconstruction.com](http://mcnickleconstruction.com)

Owner Ryan McNickle’s stated goal is to carry his customers through the process of building a new home, making their dreams become reality. High-end carpentry projects are a personal passion, he said, along with helping design and build his client’s perfect home or remodel project. A product is only as good as its design and assembly, said McNickle, who utilizes talented artisan tradesmen, designers and architects from all over the United States.

## Best Painting Company

**Cypress Design & Build** — 1664 Contra Costa St., Sand City – 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday through Friday; 9:30 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. Saturday – (831) 867-6459, [cypresscab.com/painting](http://cypresscab.com/painting)

Is there anything that freshens up a room faster than a new coat of paint? And good fences make good neighbors, but not if they’re ugly (the fences, not the neighbors). Never fear, because Cypress takes pride in fast, clean, experienced interior or exterior painting, deck stains, fence waterproofing, and graffiti removal throughout Monterey County.

This Sand City-based business was the readers’ choice for Best Painting Company, but Cypress Design & Build also takes on and assists with remodeling ideas, unique kitchen islands, ADA-accessible conversions like door widening, wheelchair ramps and lifts, hallway remodels and bedroom expansions, and other projects. Go to the website to request a quote for any job.

## Best Landscaper-Gardening Service

**Grassroots Landscaping** — 1594 Costa St., Seaside – 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday through Friday – (831) 899-3568

When people notice your house from the street, you want it to be for all the right reasons. This highly rated Peninsula business specializes in full yard service, landscaping, pressure washing, move-out services for realtors, and hauling. Owner Charles Smith, in his 17th year as a local landscaper, has built a stellar reputation as a hardworking, self-motivated, and fair businessman who takes an “Old-World approach” to his clients. “My word is my bond, and a handshake is a contract,” Smith said.

See **IMPORTANT** next page

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G O L D E N   P I N E   C O N E S

IMPORTANT

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■ Best Real Estate Company

**Sotheby’s International Realty** — 3775 Via Nona Marie, Ste. 100, (831) 624-1566; Ocean between Dolores and San Carlos, (831) 624-9700; 312 West Carmel Valley Road, Carmel Valley, (831) 659-2267; 574 Lighthouse Ave, Pacific Grove, (831) 372-7700 – [sothebysrealty.com](http://sothebysrealty.com)

That real estate is big business here is news to nobody. Even the tourists figure it out as soon as they pass a real estate office’s window display of photos. That means you don’t need a good company, you need a great one — and this year,

Pine Cone readers chose Sotheby’s. Established in 1976, it has 1,075 offices in 81 countries with 26,000 sales associates who generate \$167 billion in annual sales. Sotheby’s sterling reputation is built on a tradition dedicated to innovating the luxury real estate industry. With 119 sales associates at three Peninsula offices, the agency has plenty of lavish properties available. If your homesteading ambitions include places to stay in Tahiti or Fiji, search the website for international listings and view Sotheby’s large inventory of houses, condos, townhomes, villas and more.

■ Best Real Estate Rental Company

**Carmel Realty** — Dolores St., between Seventh and Eighth avenues – 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday through Friday – (831) 622-1000, [carmelrealtycompany.com](http://carmelrealtycompany.com)

As any landlord or tenant can tell you, renting is a tricky business that involves two of the most intimate things people deal with — money and living spaces. With 110 years of local history, Carmel Realty actually predates the incorporation of the City of Carmel. Since then, it’s been establishing relationships with homeowners, visitors, buyers, sellers and tenants by building an unmatched reputation for excellence in its field. This multi-time Golden Pine Cone honoree is celebrated in 2023 for its rental services. The company boasts an extensive selection of long-term rentals in Pebble Beach, Carmel, Carmel Valley and the greater Monterey area and offers an exceptional selection of luxury vacation rentals, too.

■ Best Real Estate Lender

**Chad Hawker at Synergy One Lending** — Dolores 2 SW of Seventh, Unit D – 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday through Friday – (831) 521-9378, [S1L.com/branch/carmel](http://S1L.com/branch/carmel)

A senior loan officer and area manager of the Carmel branch of Synergy One, Chad Hawker is a Carmel native who brings the unrivaled work ethic and dedication he built as a world-class Ironman triathlete to the lending business. Hawker and his well-trained team help clients navigate quickly and seamlessly through the process of securing a loan to purchase or refinance a home, utilizing the company’s trademarked Modern Mortgage Experience, along with cutting-edge technology and a friendly, accommodating, expert staff. Hawker and Synergy One Lending are repeat winners of the Golden Pine Cone.

■ Best Title Company

**Chicago Title** — 26609 Carmel Center Place – 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday through Friday – (831) 277-9081 – [chicagotitlemonterey.com](http://chicagotitlemonterey.com)

Chicago Title Company, a local residential and commercial services firm, says it provides customers with access to highly qualified attorneys, builders, lenders, buyers, commercial services and sellers in the real estate industry. Founded in 1874, it has built a national reputation for excellence and serves customers from five offices located in Carmel, Monterey and Salinas. Our readers likely recognized the company’s expertise and reliability when they made it their top choice for title insurance and real estate transactions, supporting customers through personalized services and more than a century of underwriting experience.

■ Best Personal Bank

**Chase Bank** — 26378 Carmel Rancho Lane and 27845 Berwick Drive – 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday Through Friday, 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. Saturday – (831) 624- 8224, (831) 625-2400, [chase.com](http://chase.com)

Chase Bank has multiple convenient locations in the area, including offices in Monterey, Seaside and Pacific Grove, and according to its website, provides financial services to millions of Americans. Its products and services include personal banking, credit cards, mortgages, auto financing, small

See **PRESTIGIOUS** next page

2023

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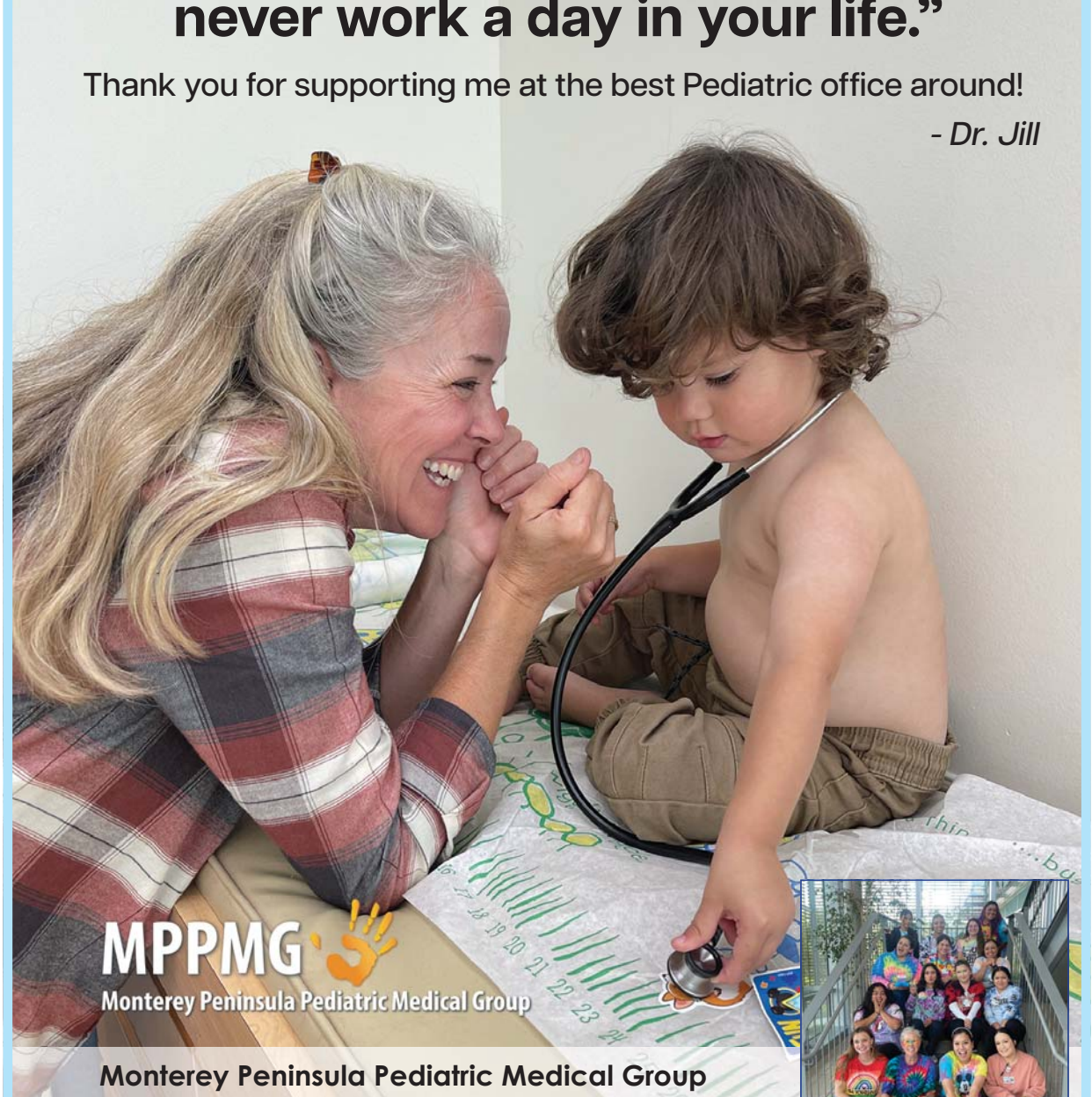
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# GOLDEN PINE CONES

## PRESTIGIOUS

From previous page

business loans, investment advice, and payment processing. Known for its exceptional customer service, Chase Bank accommodates customers’ diverse financial needs and goals as it strives to ensure a personalized banking experience.

### ■ Best Business Bank

**Monterey County Bank** — four locations, including 3785 Via Nona Marie – 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. Monday through Thursday, 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Friday – (831) 625-4300, [montereycountybank.com](http://montereycountybank.com)

Serving the local community since 1977, Monterey County Bank is the oldest locally owned and managed business bank in the county. Its longevity is due in no small part to longtime President and CEO Charles Chrietzberg’s personal knowledge of the Monterey Peninsula and his passion for serving local businesses.

During the pandemic, Monterey County Bank was dedicated to helping businesses secure government loans and grants, forging partnerships, and allowing the Monterey County economy to continue to thrive.

Offering a wide range of services including business checking, savings accounts and credit options, Monterey County Bank is committed to providing all its clients with a comprehensive selection of services, with branches in Carmel, Monterey, Pacific Grove, Rancho, and Salinas, and it promises to continue its high level of service after its upcoming merger with PCB Financial Inc.

### ■ Best Investment House/Advisor

**Monterey Private Wealth Management** — 2340 Garden Road, Suite 202, Monterey – 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday through Friday – (831) 372- 3426, [montereyprivatewealth.com](http://montereyprivatewealth.com)

The Pine Cone readers’ choice for the leading private wealth management company in the community, Monterey Private Wealth Management’s team of financial advisors takes pride in its expertise in the financial industry. Services like investment strategies and management, financial planning, and business retirement plans are entirely transparent, with no hidden fees or costs. Using a comprehensive planning process, Monterey Private Wealth assists local clientele

with cultivating diverse portfolios and strategic investments to ensure satisfaction, affirming “our loyalty is to our clients.”

### ■ Best Accountant

**Finn & Cohen CPAs** — 425 Pacific St., No. 302,

Monterey – 8 a.m.- 5 p.m. Monday through Friday – (831) 375- 5166, [fc-cpa.com](http://fc-cpa.com)

Finn & Cohen, a professional tax and accounting firm, says it has served clients throughout Monterey and the broad-

Continues next page

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G O L D E N P I N E C O N E S

From previous page

er California area with a team of highly qualified accountants for nearly three decades.

The firm’s services include tax management, accounting, advisory services, trust planning, and tax preparation. Its mission statement says in part, “Our mission is to help clients maintain financial viability in the present while taking a proactive approach to achieve future goals.”

Best Veterinarian

**Carmel Valley Veterinary Hospital** — 13738 Center St., Carmel Valley — 7:30 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. Monday through Friday, 8 a.m. to noon Saturday — (831) 659- 2286, carmelvalleyvet.com

The picturesque views of Scenic Drive simply would not be complete without the sight of dogs frolicking along Carmel Beach, accompanied by pet owners who care a great deal about their furry companions. For owners who want to ensure quality care for their pets, Carmel Valley Veterinary has been serving the community since 1975 with services ranging from dental care, diagnostics, surgical services and boarding, to grooming. The practice boasts a talented staff — including veterinarians, veterinary technicians, and licensed veterinary assistants — to cater to all pet ailments and keep your best buddy in the best of health.

Best Pet Boarding

**Casa de Amigos Animal Hotel** — 715 Foam St., Monterey — 7 a.m. to 7 p.m. daily — (831) 373- 0482, casadeamigosanimalhotel.com

With a unique lodging experience designed to suit pets’ needs and comfort, Casa de Amigos allows your best friends to experience a retreat of their own while you’re away, including a stay in a state-of-the-art facility and access to thoroughly trained staff. A recent change in management has brought about various renovations and upgrades that will ensure your pet’s stay is accommodating and plush. Our dog-loving readers know that the boarding, doggie daycare, and full grooming services will not disappoint, as the people at Casa de Amigos are dedicated to facilitating a fun-filled, safe and interactive haven for your pets to enjoy.

Best Pet Care

**Home Away from Home** — 1231 10th St., Monterey — 7 a.m. to 6 p.m Monday through Friday — (831) 392- 6296, monterepetspa.com

Pet care is no joke around here, as it is seems that everyone strolling the streets of Carmel has a furry friend. The Carmel Pine Cone readership has named Home Away from Home the paws-down best pet care spa, as it provides a nurturing and quality experience to every pet under its care. An all-encompassing menu of services, including escort transportation services, flea treatment, pet boarding, grooming, bathing and dog walking, allows pet owners to choose from a premium selection of amenities to pamper their pets. Home Away from Home ensures VIP treatment for you and your four-legged friend, as the dedicated staff fosters a loving environment that every pet deserves.

Best Auto Body Shop

**Gene’s Import Auto Body** — 531 Shasta St., Sand City — 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday through Friday — (831) 899- 0343, genesimportautobody.com

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A perennial favorite of Golden Pine Cone voters, Gene’s Import Auto Body remains the preferred auto-body repair facility for Monterey Peninsula car owners, as it has been since 1979. It’s the only business in the area with direct referrals from Tesla, and specializes in European brands as well, including Mercedes-Benz, BMW and Audi. But the fine folks there will service any car, including brands such as Ford and Toyota. Known for friendly service to car owners experiencing stressful circumstances, this family-owned business is prepared for all situations, from bumper and windshield repairs to major body damage. Gene’s advertises that its ultimate mission is to provide customers with “the highest level of professional service and quality repairs at a reasonable price,” with numerous five-star online reviews and compliments from satisfied customers.

Best Dry Cleaners

**Vapor Sudden Service Cleaners**  
— 1193 10th St., Monterey – 7:30 a.m. to 6 p.m. Monday through Friday, 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. Saturday – (831) 375-5221, vaporcleaner-smonterey.com

A repeat Golden Pine Cone winner, Vapor Sudden Service Cleaners is one of the oldest continually operating cleaning services on the Monterey Peninsula, cleaning up for more than 100 years. Since the business opened in 1921, it’s offered a range of services, from cleaning and alterations to laundering shirts and cleaning and restoring leather. Today, the business takes a sustainable and environmentally friendly approach, avoiding the use of harmful petrochemical solvents on clothes. Instead, this business uses pure liquid silicone, setting it apart with its odor-free GreenEarth dry-cleaning process. With this method, Vapor Sudden Service Cleaners assures potential customers that “your fine silks, cashmere, wool, lace, beads, sequins

and even garments labeled ‘Do not dry clean’ are safe with us.” With rapid service and free pickup and delivery throughout the Monterey Peninsula, clients are bound to receive ready-on-time and ready-to-wear results. Vapor Sudden Service Cleaners is committed to sustainability every step of the way — even its website provides a sustainable “tip of the day.”

Best Travel Agent

**Paula Arnold** — Carmel Monterey Travel, 601 Abrego St., Monterey – (831) 649-4292, carmelmontereytravel.com

Paula Arnold is a beloved and trusted travel advisor with the Carmel Monterey Travel group of advisors, an independent, family-owned business that has been guiding the Monterey Peninsula community for 40 years. Known for her personalized service in the business and leisure travel sectors, Arnold is a “go-to” for her extensive knowledge of the best locations for every occasion — from honeymoons to business retreats to family reunions. Her knowledge of special, off-the-beaten track locations is valued by customers, as is her persistence in finding the most cost-effective way to go. She remains calm in the heat of a crisis — if a flight is canceled or something else happens to go awry — customers rave about having her to troubleshoot.

Best Hair Salon

**March Hare** — SE corner Mission and Fifth – 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Tuesday through Saturday – (831) 624-3024

Customers say that March Hare is the place for consistently excellent haircuts and hair color. The salon specializes in natural-ingredient Aveda products, which avoid the use of harsh chemicals. The stylists at March Hare are trained to work with all hair types — thick, fine, curly or unruly. This cozy salon in the heart of Carmel is beloved as a

welcoming space, and is often the first one recommended to someone from out-of-town. Stylists stay up with trends and are known for their ability to please seemingly everyone, from tough-to-satisfy teens to busy professionals. Customer reviews praise March

Hare’s staff for their “knowledge of great products, passion for styling, love of aromatherapy and the gracious space” of the salon. They are a local go-to for special-occasion

Continues next page

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hair styling, whether for a prom princess, bride or mother-of-the-bride. Men are most welcome and appreciate their services too.

■ Best Skin Care

**Carmel Laser Aesthetics & Spa** — 3602 The Barnyard, Suite A-11 – 9:30 a.m. to 5 p.m. Tuesday through Friday – (831) 626-6228, [carmellaser.com](http://carmellaser.com)

A wide array of the latest laser technology is available at Carmel Laser Aesthetics & Spa, a full-service medical spa that offers a wide array of treatments. The staff there offers a full complement of services to restore skin to a youthful appearance, including photo rejuvenation, laser skin resurfacing, chemical peels, skin tightening, laser hair removal, leg vein treatments, cellulite reduction, Botox and dermal fillers. Christina Joyce, RN, performs all of the treatments and has decades of experience and training in facial aesthetic procedures. The spa’s website describes her approach to aesthetics as “less is more.” She is certified for the Palomar Icon Laser and has completed complex skin treatment certifications. Customer reviews praise Joyce for being gentle, minimizing pain, and making “you look like a movie star.” She and co-owner Dr. Dana Welle are partners in the business that customers say leaves them feeling confident and glowing.

■ Best Nail Salon

**Top Nails** — 26344 Carmel Rancho Lane, No. 2 – 9 a.m. to 6 p.m. Monday through Saturday – (831) 625-8609

Whether you want to treat yourself to a pampering sea-salt leg scrub or are seeking dazzling fingertips displaying true works of art, Carmel’s Top Nails is the spot on the Peninsula for all your mani-pedi desires. Praised by customers for being clean and friendly, Top Nails is a family-run business that offers a range of nail and spa treatments, including manicures, pedicures and foot and hand massages. Customers praise the fashion-forward nail colors and styles, and the manicurists’ ability to create intricate nail polish designs — everything from American flags to snowflakes, flowers, candy stripes, and the ever-popular ombre fades of multiple colors. Reviewers hail them as “clean, professional and reasonable” with sleep-inducing foot massages. Conveniently located on Carmel Rancho Lane near the Barnyard with ample parking, Top Nails offers a menu of services for all budgets, from acrylic and gel nails to paraffin wax treatments. Need a last-minute nail refresh? Top Nails happily accepts walk-in clients. Pine Cone readers say Top Nails is the local place to go to help your feet and hands look and feel their best.

■ Best Spa

**Refuge** — 27300 Rancho San Carlos Road, Carmel Valley – 10 a.m. to 10 p.m. Monday through Friday, 9 a.m. to 10 p.m. Saturday and Sunday – (831) 620-7360, [refuge.com](http://refuge.com)

Guests flock to the Refuge to zone out day or night in its array of thermal pools, sauna and steam rooms, where dramatic temperature changes relax and rejuvenate tight muscles and restore calm. Once guests are physically loosened and softened, there is an array of clean, cozy spaces to nap or practice mindfulness. Try the outdoor fire pits and hammocks or the indoor zero-gravity chair sanctuaries. Take part in the Refuge’s recommended thermal cycle, which guides guests through a thermal pool circuit of warm and hot, to cool and cold, all to achieve a Scandinavian-style therapeutic effect. Refuge urges clients to begin the process by heating up in its cedar sauna with Himalayan salt wall, one of two co-ed, eucalyptus-infused steam rooms or one of its hot pools. Let one of the numerous warm waterfalls cascade onto your shoulders before taking a quick dip in one of

*Continues next page*



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# GOLDEN PINE CONES

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four plunge pools, which range from chilly to icy.

There is a strict no-talking policy and the entire space is electronics-free, leaving only the soothing sounds of waterfalls and birds. Refuge offers an enhanced experience with a Swedish or deep tissue massage. If you'd like to find refuge in this relaxing oasis, reservations are highly recommended.

Best Dentist

**Eric Brown** — 2 Via Joaquin, Monterey, (831) 375-2322 and 108 Mid Valley Center, Carmel Valley, (831) 574-8252, eric-browndds.com

Gentle, friendly, kind, comfortable and welcoming. Those words that aren't always used to describe dental offices are descriptions offered by patients reviewing their experience at the offices of Dr. Eric Brown. With two area locations to serve Peninsula residents, this general and family dentistry practice offers a complete range of services including cleaning and prevention, tooth restorations, oral and maxillofacial surgery, and orthodontics.

Struggling with sleep apnea or painful TMJ? Brown and his staff can assist. Chip or break a tooth, or lose a filling or crown? The practice provides complete service for dental emergencies and has online instructions for exactly what to do — and what not to do.

Want an even-toothed smile good enough for the cameras, or to brighten your smile after too much coffee or red wine? There's a full array of cosmetic dentistry services, from porcelain veneers, bridges and inlays, to teeth whitening. The office uses the most modern technology, including digital tooth scanning. The overall objective of the team, which includes dentists Brown and Dr. Nate Ward, is to reduce the anxiety that often accompanies visits to the dentist.

When patients leave this practice smiling, Pine Cone readers are sure it's sincere.

Best Dermatologist

**Mary Dahl** — 977 Pacific Street, Suite A, Monterey — 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. Monday through Thursday — (831) 644-9740, marydahlmnd.com

For two decades, Dr. Mary Dahl has been treating the skin of the sun-loving, outdoor-oriented population of the Monterey Peninsula. Serving a coastal community of people who can be hard on their skin, she is trusted to provide thorough exams and treatment for a wide array of conditions. Specializing in dermatopathology, Dahl is the equivalent of a skin detective, seeking out the cause of and recommending treatments for rashes, nail infections and inflamed seborrheic keratosis — a benign type of skin tumor akin to a wart. Have a worrisome mole? She specializes in examining skin for signs of skin cancer. Teens and adults experiencing acne are also welcome at Dahl's practice. Patients praise her for taking the time to answer their questions and for her patient and caring explanations. Dahl's practice provides preventive health care and medical treatments and offers skin-rejuvenating clinical facials, teen and acne facials, and dermal infusion exfoliation treatments.

Best Ophthalmologist

**Leland Rosenblum** — 21 Upper Ragsdale Dr., Suite 200, Monterey — 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday through Friday, (831) 372-1500, montereyeye.com

Serving the Monterey Peninsula for almost three decades, Dr. Leland Rosenblum and the Monterey County Eye Associates are a repeat Golden Pine Cone favorite. In private practice on the Monterey Peninsula since 1994, Rosenblum specializes in cataract, glaucoma and oculoplastic surgery (employed to improve drooping eyelids, blocked tear ducts, or other eye reconstruction). Rosenblum has extensive credentials,

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From previous page

including as previous chairman of the department of ophthalmology at Community Hospital of the Monterey Peninsula, and a UCSF assistant clinical professor at Natividad Medical Center in Salinas. Patients praise him for providing thorough explanations of ocular surgical procedures and for reducing the nervousness that often accompanies eye treatments. With practices in Monterey, Salinas and King City, people throughout the county can benefit from the deep expertise of Monterey County Eye Associates. Have a question about your changes in your close-up vision (it’s called presbyopia), cataracts or glaucoma? Rosenblum addresses some of the most common questions — and, yes, fears — in a helpful blog on the practice’s website. Rosenblum leads a large team that can support every eye need, from general examinations to Botox to create a more youthful wink.

### Best Optometrist

**Blink Optometry** — 217 Crossroads Blvd. – 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday through Friday – (831) 250-6999, [blinkcarmel.com](http://blinkcarmel.com)

With the grand beauty of the Monterey Peninsula, it’s important to have the correct eyewear to take it all in and protect your eyes from that bright sunshine and ocean reflection. Blink Optometry is a full-service vision care center and optical boutique carrying a wide variety of contact lenses and eyeglass frames. Optometrists Telma Barseghian and Trevor Fogg have practiced optometry on the Peninsula for decades, treating patients from infancy to — ahem — maturity. They provide a variety of services, including fitting glasses and contact lenses, treating eye infections and diseases, removing foreign bodies, and helping with diabetic eye disease. Fogg, a lifelong contact lens wearer, has experience fitting all kinds of contacts, including bifocal and astigmatic lenses, and is certified in corneal refractive therapy. When she’s not in the office at Blink, you might find Barseghian co-managing cataract and laser surgeries with local surgeons. Located in Carmel’s Crossroads shopping center, Blink accepts a wide array of health insurance and is known for attentive service — the nice people there even refill your Blink eyeglass cleaner bottle for free.

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### Best Orthopedist

**Chris Meckel** — 12 Upper Ragsdale Drive, Suite A, Monterey – 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday through Friday – (831) 648-7200, [msjhealth.com](http://msjhealth.com)

Creaky knees and stiff hips holding you back from the activities you love? Dr. Chris Meckel can help you return to our local trails and golf courses. A reputation as a trusted physician who takes the time to listen and answer patients’ questions has earned orthopedic surgeon Meckel another Golden Pine Cone for his work as a hip and knee replacement specialist. He is the co-founder of Monterey Spine & Joint and has nearly 20 years of experience in joint replacement surgery and solutions to osteoarthritis. Having grown up on the Peninsula, graduating from Carmel High School in 1984, Meckel is happy to serve the community where he was raised. He is known and appreciated for his expertise in arthroscopic surgery (the type that employs buttonhole-sized incisions) and minimally invasive, computer-assisted knee replacements. He earns high praise — and regular five-star ratings — in online reviews. As to comments from patients, the words “great,” “excellent” and “very pleased” stand out. One patient described their experience this way: “Dr. Meckel is friendly, professional and kind. Answered all my questions thoroughly and promptly. The office staff is efficient and helpful.” Similarly, another wrote: “He and his staff provided excellent guidance and support throughout the planning, surgery and recovery.”

### Best Pediatrician

**Jill Airola** — 2 Upper Ragsdale Drive, Suite B210, Monterey – 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday through Friday, 9 a.m. to 12 p.m. Saturday, Sunday by arrangement – (831) 333-0999, [mppmg.com/dr-jill-airola](http://mppmg.com/dr-jill-airola)

Most kids might not find a trip to the doctor to be fun, but we hear they love seeing “Dr. Jill,” as Jill Johnson Airola is widely known. She’s been in practice in Monterey County for 22 years, and a visit to Airola’s office often begins with an upbeat, cheerful greeting and sense of humor. One of seven physicians who are part of the Monterey Peninsula Pediatric Medical Group, Airola is praised by parents as “fun and joyous to be around.” One mom lauded the clinic’s responsiveness with urgent appointments, and specifically Airola, for making “my daughter comfortable and excited to be at the doctor’s office.” Another mother of a newborn praised

Airola’s support for new, anxious parents. The practice is colorful and lively, with physicians taking part in dress-up days. The website shows each physician in a photo as a child themselves, making it clear that they’ve been there and they can relate. Parents say that the warm, welcoming atmosphere is accompanied by deep expertise and attention to detail. Prior to moving to the Monterey Peninsula, Airola was an assistant clinical professor of pediatrics, specializing in emergency medicine at Texas Children’s Hospital in Houston. Airola is known for her thorough explanations of each stage of a child’s development. And for parents wanting to know even more, the practice recommends an array of helpful resources on its website.

### Best Primary Care Physician

**Peter Franklin** — 550 Camino El Estero , No. 204, Monterey – 8:30 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday, Wednesday and Thursday, 8:45 a.m. to 4 p.m. Tuesday, 9 a.m. to 12 p.m. Friday – (831) 375-5151, [montereybaydoctors.com](http://montereybaydoctors.com)

You know you have found a truly local Monterey Peninsula family physician when he specializes in scuba diving medicine and is a diving-certified physician. Peter Franklin has been practicing dive medicine for more than 20 years and works with the divers of the Monterey Bay Aquarium. He conducts pre-dive physicals to assure that scuba recreation lovers are in the best possible condition to handle the stress of deep-water immersion. Franklin specializes in identifying the underlying issues that may arise during diving to help his patients return to the water safely.

However, dive medicine is just one of dozens of specialties of this full-service medical clinic. Others include preventive medicine, men’s health issues, pediatrics for children over the age of 5, and management of a host of chronic health conditions including hypertension, diabetes and osteoarthritis. Franklin also offers an optional concierge program for a limited number of patients who want a more personalized approach to health management. Franklin’s website has resources specific to Peninsula issues — like advice for dealing with poison oak and ticks. If you are seeking a truly local physician, Peter Franklin, with offices across from Lake El Estero and the Monterey YMCA, is The Pine Cone readers’ choice.

### Best Plastic Surgeon

**Douglas Sunde** — 856 Munras Ave., Monterey – 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday - Friday – (831) 372-0200, [drsunde.com](http://drsunde.com)

Dr. Sunde has been The Pine Cone readers’ choice for more than a decade, a fact he will tell you brings him some pride. The Chicago-area native graduated with distinction from Stanford University, after which he attended medical school at UC San Francisco, where he was part of the medical honor society. Sunde performs cosmetic and reconstructive surgery using the most current treatments and techniques. In 2020, he was recognized by Montage Health Foundation with a Physician Scholar grant to “provide training in plastic surgery, particularly hand surgery, to Stanford University Medical School residents and fellows.” Montage noted that Sunde

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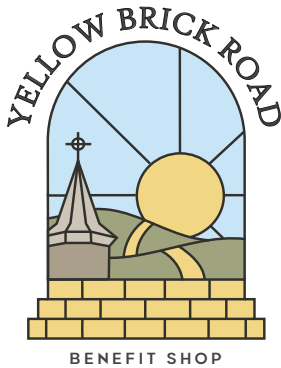
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# GOLDEN PINE CONES

From previous page

“conducts the training at the Palo Alto Veterans Administration Hospital, operating on veterans during day-long teaching sessions 10 times each year.”

## Best Physical Therapist

**Balance Physical Therapy & Human Performance Center** — 2260 N. Fremont St., Monterey and 21 Upper Ragsdale Road in Ryan Ranch, with additional locations in Prunedale, Watsonville and Salinas – call for hours and appointments – (831) 372-4782, [balancept.com](https://balancept.com)

Balance Physical Therapy — a multiyear winner of the Golden Pine Cone — has for more than 20 years been providing locals with services, ranging from treating and managing chronic joint or back pain, to improving their golf game. Among other services, sports injury and concussion rehab are available, as well as custom orthotic shoe inserts. Balance PT offers specialized services for recovery from sports injuries, plus an evaluation, treatment and fitness program by and for golfers that specifically targets performance on the links. Its many qualified therapists are patient and encouraging, emphasizing that a lot of people’s problems can be solved without further medical intervention.

## Best Chiropractor

**Aaron Gaily of The Back and Neck Pain Center of Monterey** — 1299 Pacific St., Monterey – (831) 657-0191, [chiropractormontereyca.com](https://chiropractormontereyca.com).

Now a seven-time Golden Pine Cone winner, Aaron Gaily opened The Back and Neck Pain Center of Monterey in 2003, aided by his wife (office manager) and mother (general assistant), who both still work at the practice along with fellow chiropractor Ryan Wong, massage therapists and various assistants. Gaily, who grew up in Carmel Valley, is proud of growing the practice “from scratch,” but says “relieving pain is my No. 1 goal.” He’s a graduate of Northern Arizona University and received his doctorate in chiropractic (with honors) at Southern California University of Health Sciences.

## Best Divorce Lawyer

**Sarah Cavassa** — 50 Ragsdale Drive, Suite 201, Monterey – (831) 655-6868, [cavassaoconnell.com](https://cavassaoconnell.com)

Sarah Cavassa of Cavassa O’Connell is certified by the

State Bar as a specialist in family law, including divorce, custody and support. She also prepares and reviews pre- and post-marital agreements. Cavassa favors securing settlements for her clients when reasonable ones can be attained, but she takes cases to trial when necessary. She represents clients in Monterey and the neighboring counties of Santa Cruz and San Benito, as well as occasionally Santa Clara and Alameda

counties. Cavassa graduated from the University of Washington and Monterey College of Law, where she is now a professor, teaching community property and working with the Heisler Moot Court program. She has served on the Board of Trustees of the Monterey County Bar Association and is part

Continues next page



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G O L D E N P I N E C O N E S

From previous page

of the Monterey County Women Lawyers Association.

■ Best Estate Planning Attorney

**Jeannette Witten at Hudson-Martin PC** — 26515 Carmel Rancho Blvd., Ste. 200 – 8:30 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. Monday through Friday – (831) 480-6608, [Hudsonmartin.com](http://Hudsonmartin.com)

Witten, managing partner of Hudson-Martin, views estate planning as a “positive area of the law” and a “neat opportunity to get to know people.” Whether clients have a goal of establishing a trust to take care of a disabled child or more generally figuring out how to distribute assets to the next generation, Wit-

ten views her role as listening and gently guiding them to reach their goals. She also does her best to explain trust provisions in layman’s terms, so that her clients feel sure of what they’re signing. She has been practicing law since 1998 and is licensed in California and Pennsylvania.

Witten is an avid hiker and runner and has run several marathons, including the Big Sur International four times. A mother of twins, she volunteers with and serves on the board of Pacific Repertory Theatre. She and her family live in Carmel.

■ Best Lawyer If You Need to Sue Somebody  
■ Best Defense Attorney

**Andy Swartz** — 550 Hartnell St., Suite A-1, Monterey – (831) 373-3235 or (800)

624-9911, [swartzkennedylaw.com](http://swartzkennedylaw.com)

Andy Swartz of Swartz & Kennedy has won the Golden Pine Cone many times, showing that readers trust him with bothersome and potentially costly legal matters. He’s done defense work all along, too. “I’m probably a better defense attorney,” Swartz said. But at age 75, he’s gently phasing out his practice, noting, “I’m pretty sure I’ve tried my final case.” During his half-century in Monterey (since 1973), Swartz has won multiple high-profile and multimillion dollar cases. He has conducted a wide range of civil litigation for both plaintiffs and defendants, including personal injury, defamation, and business and real estate disputes. He has also been active in ensuring law is practiced ethically, having served on the State of California Committee on Professional Conduct and Responsibility, also known as “the ethics committee.” He waxes elegiac when considering his Monterey County legal peers and sometime-opponents, as well as local judges, complimenting them as “prepared” and “plain-speaking... actually respond[ing] to questions.” The Swartz & Kennedy law firm enjoys the highest peer ratings and holds membership in several elite forums. Swartz earned degrees from the University of Pittsburgh and the University of Santa Clara School of Law (graduating magna cum laude), where he was on the staff of the law review.

■ Best Public Relations Company

**Armanasco Public Relations** — 585 Abrego St., Monterey – (831) 372-2259, [armanasco.com](http://armanasco.com)

David Armanasco established Armanasco Public Relations in 1985. In 2013, Armanasco became a partner of California Strategies, a public strategy firm that serves organizations around the state, nation and globe as they intersect with all levels of government. Armanasco and California Strategies work on public

affairs issues in the areas of finance, energy, environmental regulations, green technology, infrastructure, transportation, land use, water, health care and communications. According to its website, the firm has “grown to become the largest, most effective, and well-known PR firm in Monterey County.”

Its local client list includes businesses and agencies such as the Barnyard, Safeway, Tanimura & Antle, CSUMB, Stevenson and Santa Catalina schools, Cal Am, the cities of Seaside, Marina, Gonzales and San Jose, Quail Lodge, the Cypress Inn and dozens of others. The agency also gives back — its pro-bono client list includes plenty of familiar names, like the Alliance on Aging, the Boys & Girls Club of Monterey County, the Carmel Foundation, the Diocese of Monterey and the Point Lobos Natural History Association.

■ Best Insurance Agent

**Connally Farmers Insurance** — 404 W Franklin St., Ste. 102, Monterey – (831) 424-0829, [Agents.farmers.com/ca/monterey/jessica-connally](http://Agents.farmers.com/ca/monterey/jessica-connally)

Insurance agent Jessica Connally has been with Farmers Insurance for 10 years, and purchased and consolidated two local agencies about 18 months ago when their former owners retired. The agency manager is her husband, Jeremy Connally, who cites “exceptional” and experienced staff members as the reason Connally has won the Golden Pine Cone. In what can be an increasingly difficult climate and area to obtain insurance, the Connally agents look for ways to help clients get the coverage they need, using their local knowledge and insurance savvy.

■ Best Shoe Repair

**Federico’s Drive-In Shoe Service** — 542 Abrego St., Monterey – 8 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. Monday through Friday – (831) 649-3322, [federicoshoes.com](http://federicoshoes.com)

See **RESPECTED** next page



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# GOLDEN PINE CONES

## RESPECTED

From previous page

Is your favorite pair of party shoes looking a little worse for wear? Are your cowboy boots so down at the heel your spurs drag? Did you step in a puddle and stain your most comfortable suede pumps? Repeat winner Federico’s Drive-in Shoe Service, in business since 1939, can probably restore your footwear to glory.

Besides repairing leather and suede shoes and boots, the Federico’s staff offers polishing, shining and dyeing services. The talented professionals there can also repair handbags, luggage, horse saddles, furniture and other leather items.

They even get long-distance business from people who take advantage of Federico’s award-winning service by mailing their shoes in for some TLC.

- Best School
- Best Principal
- Best Teacher

**All Saints Day School** — 8060 W. Carmel Valley Road, Carmel Valley – (831) 624-9171, [asds.org](http://asds.org)

The Episcopal K-8 school has won this trifecta more than once, with some logic: While nearly all schools have buildings and campuses, it’s their staffs that make them special. All Saints offers low student-teacher ratios and can boast of students who’ve won state and national honors in history, as well as prizes in science and engineering. The school’s 10 core values, listed on its website, are: Nurturing the growth of the whole child, inspiring lives of gratitude and grace, pursu-

ing academic excellence, fostering freedom of inquiry and ethical expression, encouraging independent thinking, challenging students to live courageously, respecting the importance of family and community, building a community of service, honoring the sacred dignity of all life, and igniting a life of learning.

Speaking of buildings and campuses, one of principal Scott Fujita’s recent accomplishments has been the success of a fundraising campaign that has allowed All Saints to build or improve a turf field, outdoor amphitheater, tennis/pickleball courts, a running track, a Carmel River observation center (taking advantage of the campus’ bankside location), a revamped organic garden and a new preschool and pre-kindergarten playground. On a less glamorous but practical note, the funds raised have also been used to connect underground to the new sewer line being installed along Carmel Valley Road. Fujita, a former pro football player, apparently knows how to take the ball and run with it. The Imagine Campaign is in its final phase, raising funds to build a new fieldhouse and classroom facility.

Kindergarten and first-grade teacher Sydney McKechnie is known for her high academic expectations of students, tempered with affection. Her pupils are well-versed in the relationship between cause and effect, but also what McKechnie calls “funzies.” She dresses up for every holiday and is reportedly “obsessed with glitter.” She’s the school’s resident tooth-puller and keeps a running tally on her blackboard; she’s also usually the first teacher to sign up for the dunk tank at the school’s fall festival. At the same time, she structures lessons so as to reach all types of learners — visual, aural and kinetic. Her students are known for moving on to higher grades with a strong educational foundation.

## ■ My Favorite Nonprofit

**The Carmel Foundation** — SE Corner of Eighth and Lincoln – 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Monday through Friday – (831) 624-1588, [carmelfoundation.org](http://carmelfoundation.org)


Whether you’re looking for a fun recreational activity or need some help obtaining vital services, The Carmel Foundation is a good place to start for those 55 and older — and you don’t even have to live in town. The friendly volunteers will guide you as you choose from a long list of activities and services. The Foundation offers a host of com-

panionable pastimes, including book groups, games—such as bridge, chess, Scrabble and poker—walks on local trails, yoga, and more.

It also offers bus tours to San Francisco Bay area locations, so you can enjoy shopping and cultural activities without the hassle of driving and parking. But the Foundation isn’t just about recreation — there are support services for housing, homebound meals, weekday lunches, blood pressure checks, legal services, health insurance counseling and more.

You already knew this was a great place to retire — now you know one of the big reasons why.

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**Chris Counts:** Carmel Valley, Big Sur, Arts & Entertainment and scholastic sports  
[chris@carmelpinecone.com](mailto:chris@carmelpinecone.com)

**Kelly Nix:** Pacific Grove, Pebble Beach, Monterey, Seaside, state government, civil courts and water  
[kelly@carmelpinecone.com](mailto:kelly@carmelpinecone.com)

**Letters to the editor are only accepted by email and should be sent to**  
[mail@carmelpinecone.com](mailto:mail@carmelpinecone.com)



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