

The Golden Pine Cones



October 25, 2024

Amid all the election tumult, small-town quality offers comfort

HERE AT The Carmel Pine Cone, we take election security very seriously. The virtual ballot box is as secure as it can possibly be. A whole bunch of online subscribers, duly registered at some point before the voting closed, got together to produce the most important balloting outcomes you'll read about this year — The Golden Pine Cones.

There are a few new categories, like Best Roofer and Best Tree Service (you really shouldn't have one without the other around here), and you'll read about a brand-new retail business called Wally's. Restaurant voting has produced what we believe is a record six-category win for one establishment, and a breakthrough champ has sprouted up as the best place to buy produce.

Keeping it simple

If you're already tired of the noise about those other elections — the ones where the ballots are due on Nov. 5 — our readers have recommendations on spots to get a good book, a wonderful cup of coffee, some exceptional chocolate, and find trails that will get you into the woods and up onto hilltops far from the nearest pollsters. They've bent over backwards to find the finest yoga class, the most luxurious spa, and the beachiest beach (sorry, we've used up most of our superlatives). If all else fails, there's a travel agency that will book you onto a cruise somewhere far from the shouting crowds. Closer to home, readers favor a restaurant in Big Sur where the wifi's a bit spotty, and that's considered a good thing.

Pets are well represented by their people, who voted for veterinarians, groomers and other related businesses that really get those tails wagging. Discerning car owners endorsed places to get the dings out of a Dusenberg or stop a fine vintage Chevy Nova's engine from knocking. And speaking of vintage, there's an awful lot of highly recommended wine, not to mention cocktails and a stellar bartender, here, too.

You voted, and you waited patiently while the ballots were carefully tallied by a real, decidedly overqualified human be-

ing, so you can rest assured that the results are valid. Secure in that knowledge, please enjoy reading all about the winners of the 2024 Golden Pine Cones.

FOOD AND WINE

■ Best Neighborhood Market

Bruno's Market & Delicatessen — *NE Junipero and Sixth – (831) 624-3821, brunosmarket.com*

Fermin and Ryan Sanchez's Bruno's Market has been a downtown institution for decades and wins praise from Pine Cone readers every year. It's stocked with everything you might hope to find at a local market — freshly baked bread from area bakeries, the best hot sauces in a variety of flavors, locally made jams and everyone's favorite gourmet ice cream, to name a few. Out of detergent and don't want to get in the car? Looking for a missing ingredient? Want a snack or a good bottle of wine to take to the beach? Bruno's has you covered. Considering its convenient downtown location and easy parking, it's the ideal spot to pick up necessary supplies and picnic items, and its deli is famous for turning out freshly made, delicious — and gigantic — sandwiches made to order. Carmelites, as well as the city's many visitors, always appreciate being able to find exactly what they need. And now, thanks to famous local sculptor Steven Whyte, Carmel Cares, donors and the Madden family, customers can take a seat next to a brilliant bronze sculpture of one of the market's biggest fans, the late John Madden.

■ Best Fruits and Vegetables

Elroy's — *15 Soledad Drive, Monterey – (831) 373-3737, elroysfinefoods.com*

For the first time since anyone can remember, a store beat

out local farmers markets in this category, so it's saying a lot that Pine Cone readers picked this beautiful gourmet market as their favorite spot to find the best fruits and vegetables on the Monterey Peninsula. Opened in August 2020 in the historic Monte Vista Market spot by Jay and Chloe Dolata, Elroy's — named for their pet pup — offers a carefully curated selection of the best prepared foods and ingredients, all with environmental sustainability and social responsibility in mind. They turn to the area's abundant local farms to source the best produce money can buy, and it shows.

■ Best Seafood Market

Sea Harvest Fish Market & Restaurant — *100A Crossroads Blvd., and 598 Foam St., Monterey – (831) 626-3626, seaharvestfishmarketandrestaurant.com, facebook.com/seaharvestmontereyca*

Capitalizing on the abundance of local waters, the Pacific and beyond — and meeting a widespread demand for high-quality seafood — Sea Harvest opened four 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 harvested bounty from the sea. "We purchase only from the healthiest sustainable fisheries from all over the world," they claim. The knowledgeable staff will help you select the best and freshest choices, and will offer cooking tips, too, if needed. The owners also reopened a fish market in Moss Landing at 2420 Highway 1, bringing their services back to North County.

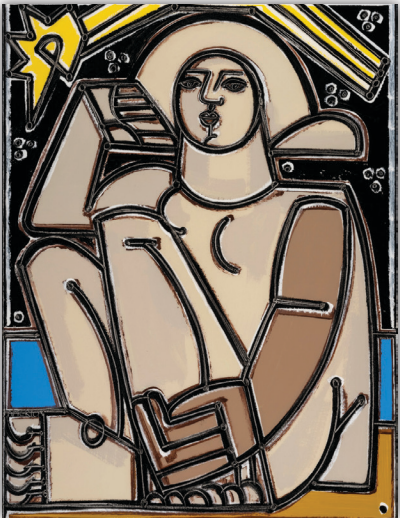
■ Best Butcher

The Meatery — *1534 Fremont Blvd., Seaside – (831)*

See **GOLDEN** next page



GALLERY MAR



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GOLDEN

From previous page

656-8810, themeateryseaside.com

Since Todd and Ada Fisher purchased The Meatery, they have worked hard to ensure it offers the best of everything a business with that name should. It should have prime cuts of the highest quality beef, pork and poultry from local and sustainable farms where animals are well treated — and it does. “Happy cuts for happy cooks,” is one of their slogans, after all.

“Our mission is simple: to provide home cooks with accessible butcher services that prioritize the health and happiness of our animals and the sustainability of small farming practices,” the Fishers say. “As a family-owned and operated business, we take great pride in the quality of our products and the care we put into our food. We believe that happy animals make for better meat, and that sustainable farming practices are not only good for the environment but are essential for the long-term health of our communities.” Online ordering is available, and The Meatery offers fresh house-made sausages, too, along with prepared foods and sandwiches.

■ Best Bakery

■ Best Place to Get Ice Cream

Carmel Bakery — *Ocean between Dolores and Lincoln, and at the Portola Hotel in Monterey* — (831) 402-7373, chefpepe.com/carmel-bakery

Founded in 1899, Carmel Bakery lays claim as California’s oldest bakery in its original location, and Rich Pèpe and his family have owned it since 1986. Practically famous for its lavish window display full of pastries and other baked goodies, Carmel Bakery always has a line out the door — especially in the morning — and last year, Pèpe opened a second Carmel Bakery location in the plaza next to the Portola Hotel at the foot of Alvarado Street in Monterey, serving up signature coffee drinks, baked goods, breakfast and lunch items there, as well. Carmel Bakery also took the prize this year for Best Place to Get Ice Cream, and it’s difficult to argue with that, considering Marianne’s of Santa Cruz is the featured producer and is a longtime local favorite. “Each flavor is a tribute to our commitment to quality and enjoyment,” they say.

■ Best Bread

Ad Astra Bread Co. — *479 Alvarado St., Monterey* — adastrabread.com

At this point, pastry-chef-turned-bread-baker Ron Mendoza is a Monterey institution. He quickly became well known locally years ago for his incredible 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” — several years ago. 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. It’s hard not to get excited about cutting a fresh slice from one of the best loaves in town. In addition to its busy and popular location in Old Monterey, Ad Astra’s products can be found at local farmers markets, stores and restaurants.

■ Best Caterer

Paradise Catering — *Carmel Valley* — (831) 6593417, paradisecater.com

Carmel Valley residents Jon Kasky and Nancy Rohan have been catering together for more than 30 years and are finally being recognized for their talented use of the best ingredients — including fruits, vegetables and herbs grown in the 1-acre garden at their

home in the Village — to create beautiful and memorable dining experiences for clients and their guests. In their cooking, which is elegant but not at all fussy and embodies the farm-to-table philosophy, the couple draw on their experiences learning from highly regarded chefs Wolfgang Puck and Alice Waters, as well as from their travels around the world. “With organic in mind, we source our food from local meat and produce companies (or our own garden!) and serve real food with no-fuss ingredients and a perfect balance of seasonings to create the farm-to-table experience we are known for,” they say.

■ Best Wine Store

The Cheese Shop — *Carmel Plaza* — (831) 625-2272, thecheeseshopinc.com

The Cheese Shop is, of course, absolutely amazing as a source of exceptional cheese, with hundreds of different offerings in every taste, texture and flavor, produced from cow, sheep or goat milk — or any combination thereof — and from every origin imaginable. But it’s also the go-to place for wine, and longtime owner Kent Torrey knows his stuff. He keeps his store stocked with many hard-to-find bottles, as well as affordable but high-quality options — and he knows about every producer in his inventory. Need advice? He’s the one to talk to, but he makes sure everyone who works at The Cheese Shop is extremely knowledgeable, as well. Fledgling sommeliers have flourished in his employ, and his customers benefit from that knowledge and the well-curated selection. After all, “Eat cheese, drink wine, live life happy!” is The Cheese Shop’s motto.

■ Best Tasting Room

■ Best Monterey County Pinot Noir

■ Best Monterey County Merlot

De Tierra — *Mission south of Fifth* — (831) 622-9704, detierra.com

Under the leadership of Jeffrey Meacham and Andrew Schoenfeld, who purchased De Tierra a couple of years ago but have long been connected to the winery and its vineyards, De Tierra has thrived, and its tasting room can always be counted on for fun, informative, lively and delicious experiences, whether you’re looking for a traditional tasting flight, a round of trivia or some live entertainment.

Best Monterey County Pinot Noir is a highly competitive category, considering the incredible wines produced here and the fact that Monterey County has more acres of pinot noir vines than any other in the state. De Tierra earned top honors for its iterations this year, as well as for its merlot. “De Tierra, as our name suggests, focuses on providing the best representation ‘of the land,’” they say. “Great wines begin in the vineyard, and it is our goal to translate the defining flavors of place into great wine.”

■ Best Monterey County Chardonnay

■ Best Monterey County Sauvignon Blanc

■ My Favorite Monterey County Wine

Bernardus — *5 W. Carmel Valley Road, Carmel Valley* — (831) 298-8021, bernardus.com

As Pine Cone readers have said for years, Bernardus Winery produces some of the best chardonnay and sauvignon blanc in Monterey County — but really, its entire portfolio is impressive. Longtime winemaker Dean DeKorth retired last year and was replaced by the talented and affable Jim McCabe, who has been on the team for many years. 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.

As for the chardonnay, well, Bernardus produces several — one that blends fruit

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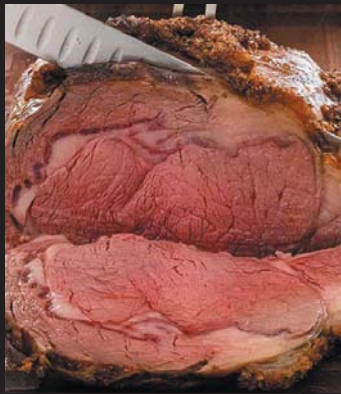
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Best Neighborhood Market 2024

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Best Butcher
2023
14 TIME WINNER



Best Deli
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Michael Chang
as Best Chef
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Best Restaurant
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Best Cocktails
2024 & 2023



Best Restaurant
for Seafood
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Best Desserts
2024



Best Wine List
2024

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

HONORED

From page 2 GPC

grown in some of the best vineyards in the county, and others showcasing single vineyards, including its own Ingrid’s Vineyard in front of Bernardus Lodge (which hasn’t had a direct affiliation with the winery for a decade). With Bordeaux varietals growing on its estate vineyard in Cachagua, and long-running relationships with some of the county’s most highly regarded winegrowers, Bernardus also produces a highly regarded red blend, merlot, cabernet sauvignon and several pinots noir, so it’s no surprise the winery also took My Favorite Monterey County Wine this year.

Best Monterey County Rosé

Dawn’s Dream Winery — *NW San Carlos and Seventh – (831) 659-2649, dawnsdreamwinery.com*

At this point, many Monterey County wineries produce such delicious rosés that this category has become very competitive, too, Pine Cone readers consistently say their favorite is Dawn’s Dream. Owned by Dawn Galante, the winery produces a dry rosé that goes with just about everything — especially Carmel Beach on a sunny afternoon. A winner annually for more than a decade, the rosé is often sold out, but this year, it’s still in stock at \$39 per bottle (or \$88 for a magnum, also known as “party size”). “Brilliant, pale pink in color, this star in Dawn’s portfolio draws you in with scents of wild strawberry, rose petals and delicate orange zest,” the winery says. “Flinty, light peach and tangerine notes follow, finishing with orange blossoms and a crisp acidity.” Dawn’s Dream is socially conscious, too, as Galante founded it with a mission of supporting charities benefiting women and children.

Best Monterey County Cabernet Sauvignon

Galante Vineyards — *Dolores between Ocean and Seventh – (831) 624-3800, galantevineyards.com*

Just as Dawn Galante’s rosé has won the hearts of Pine Cone readers for years, so too have several of the red wines — the cabernet sauvignon for 2024 — produced by husband Jack’s Galante Vineyards. While the Galantes sold their vineyards and winery to a young couple several years ago, Galante continues to focus on sharing the finest wines from their

former Cachagua estate and other sources, and letting the fruit express itself in each vintage — efforts that have been rewarded with praise year after year. Galante Family Wines celebrated its 30th anniversary this year and offers several current releases of cabernet sauvignon, as well as some precious library bottles.

Best Place for a Beer

Alvarado Street Brewery — *Carmel Plaza at Ocean and Mission, 426 Alvarado St., Monterey, additional locations in Marina and Salinas – (831) 293-8621, (831) 655-2337, asb.beer*

With Alvarado Street’s stellar lineup of locally made brews, from perennial favorites like the 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 ... again. 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 also offer great spaces for dining and drinking outdoors. ASB serves in the taproom at its Salinas production facility, the pitch in Marina where Monterey Bay Football Club plays its home games, and Alvarado on Main in a former bank on South Main Street in Oldtown Salinas.

- Best Cocktails
- Best Restaurant for Seafood
- Best Desserts
- Best Wine List
- Best Chef
- Best Restaurant in Carmel

Foray — *NE San Carlos and Fifth – (831) 250-6100, forayrestaurant.com*

In what might be a record sweep, a single restaurant garnered Golden Pine Cones in six categories this year. Chef Michael Chang and wife Caroline Singer opened Foray in late 2022 and have 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 provide a space that is elegant, contemporary but not cold, and intriguing. As a sommelier, Singer has also curated an interesting and diverse wine list that includes bottles from all over the globe. And Chang, whose cuisine is beautiful to look at and capitalizes on 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 Best Chef for the second year in a row. Captivating readers this year, especially, are his seafood dishes (what he can do with scallops is nothing short of amazing) and selection of sweets, including a stunning candy cap mushroom brioche bread pudding. “A feast for the eyes” may be cliché when it comes to commenting on food presentation, but when you’re describing dishes at Foray, it’s absolutely on point.

Best Happy Hour

Bar Napoli — *Dolores and Seventh – (831) 626-6335, chefpepe.com/restaurants/little-napoli*


Imbibers at Bar Napoli have plenty of options to enjoy for a happy two hours from 4 to 6 p.m. Wednesday through Sunday. Feel like you’re in Napoli-by-the-sea amid the terracotta tiles of the charming downtown establishment. For \$8, enjoy a signature cocktail like the Carmel Cola made with Ramazzotti Amaro, Top Note ginger beer, cherry bark/vanilla bitters, and lime or a classic negroni, barrel-finished in “Doc Pèpe’s Lab.” The cocktail menu is run by master mixologist Christian Pèpe and offers a full menu. Small bites include truffle gnocchi, saffron-risotto arancini with marinara sauce, or meatball lollipops, to name a few. During happy hour, pizzas are \$14 and house wines, well drinks and draft beers are \$6.

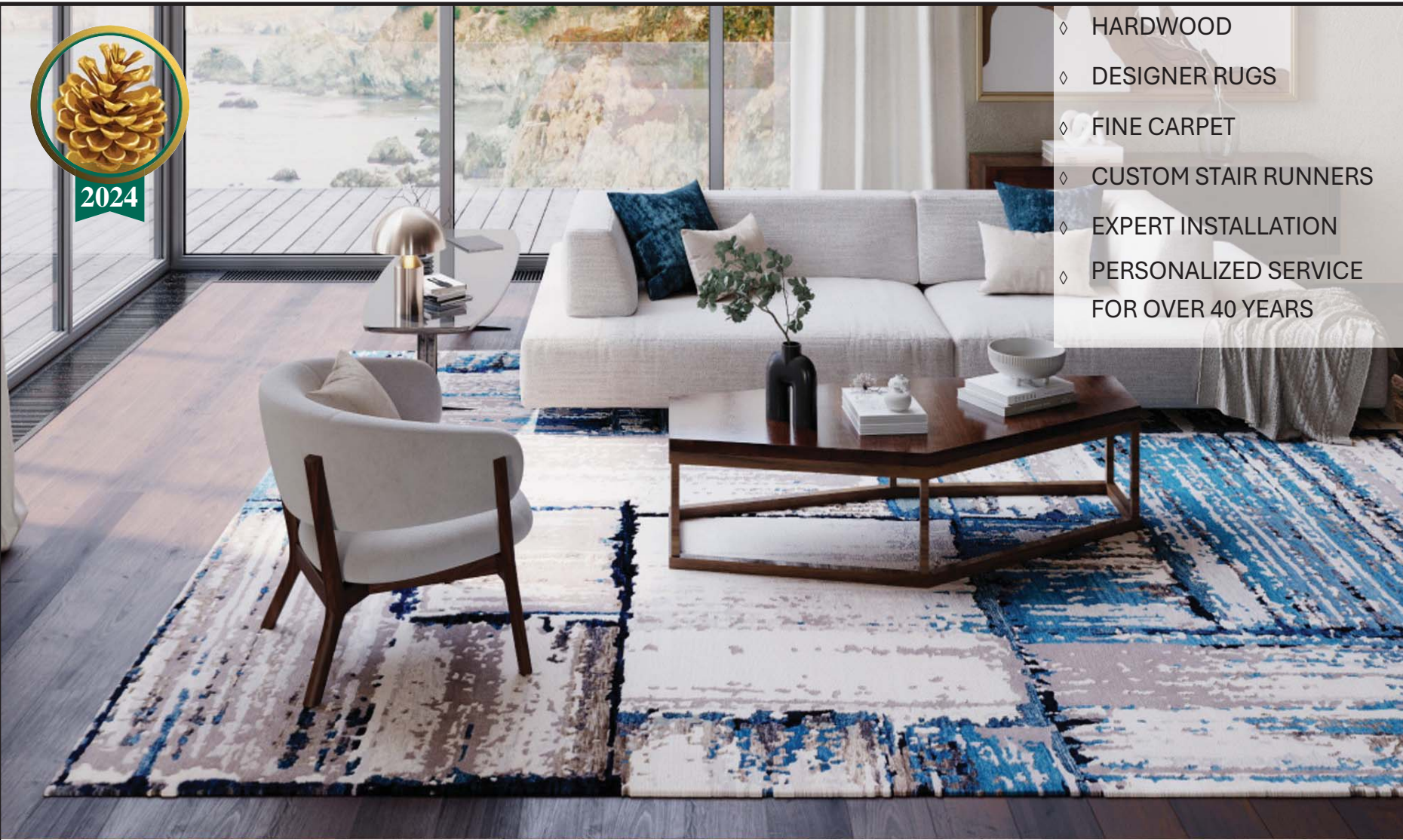
- Best Family Restaurant
- Best Restaurant for Vegetarians
- Best Sandwich or Burger
- Best Restaurant Service

SUR at the Barnyard — *3601 The Barnyard – (831) 250-7188, surcarmel.com*

Sur is easy to get to, and its Barnyard location makes parking a cinch. It’s got a boisterous and happy vibe that’s welcoming to adults and kids alike, and the service, which


See **LOVED** page 6 GPC





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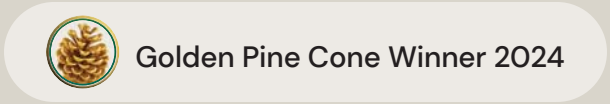


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F O U R T A N É

C A R M E L - B Y - T H E - S E A

Best Jewelry Store on the Monterey Peninsula



LOVED

From page 4 GPC

gets rave reviews on social media, is cheerful, personal and attentive. The servers have a rep for thoughtful problem-solving and cheerfully meeting customers’ needs.

Grownups can start with a cocktail like the Mango Tango made with reposado tequila, mango puree and Cointreau, or one of several other tropical-themed drinks. Or they might enjoy the Bixby Bourbon, which combines bourbon, orgeat (almond syrup), Grand Marnier and lime. In honor of some of the area’s most famous annual visitors, The Monarch is made with gin, blood orange, lemon and simple syrup.

Vegetarians can find lots of love, too. The appetizer menu alone includes the restaurant’s signature cheese bread — crispy ciabatta, white cheddar and parmesan, white corn, savory herbs and seasonings, fried artichokes, and crispy Brussels sprouts. There’s a nice selection of salads, and in addition to the eggplant parmesan, there’s a veggie ratatouille bowl and an Asian rice bowl.

Meat lovers are hardly lost in the fog. We’re not sure which are our readers’ favorites, but you can choose from fillet mignon sliders, chargrilled with pecorino truffle queso and caramelized onions, served on sweet island bun, the house bacon cheeseburger with a half-pound of all-natural Angus beef with bacon and cheddar, and the Japanese Diablo Burger with Japanese ground beef, bacon, onion rings and a spicy sauce. And we haven’t even gotten around to the longish list of seafood selections or fried chicken served with a waffle or mashed potatoes and gravy. This is the sort of place where you’re almost expected to steal something off someone else’s plate — but please, stick to your own table.

Best French Restaurant

La Bicyclette — *Dolores and Seventh* – (831) 622-9899, [labicycletterestaurant.com](#)

The Georis family of restaurateurs and vintners brings us yet another Golden Pine Cone winner. La Bicyclette is a favorite of locals, tourists and celebrities — Taylor Swift and her NFL player boyfriend, Travis Kelce, dined there earlier this year. The restaurant is rustic, charming, excellent and bi-cycle-themed. Whether you pop in for pizza from the wood-fired oven or indulge yourself in one of the exquisite entrees, you are sure to leave delighted.

“La Bicyclette features European country cuisine, hand-crafted using local ingredients and Old World artistry,” according to the restaurant’s website. The kitchen is tiny — everything is prepared on a six-burner stove or in the pizza oven. The menu is updated weekly to allow for the freshest seasonal ingredients for dishes such as salade de betteraves, a beet salad featuring baby greens, rainbow beets, triple-cream brie, oranges and candied walnuts tossed in a Champagne vinaigrette; poisson Saint Tropez with pan-seared freshly caught fish, roasted fingerling potatoes, sauteed spinach and crispy leeks, or steak au poivre, pan-seared filet mignon with a peppercorn cognac sauce and truffle pommes frites alongside a mixed green salad. You can’t skip the wine — the list has something for everyone — or dessert, like the pot de mousse au chocolat that is meant to be shared.

Best Chinese Restaurant

Tommy’s Wok — *Mission between Ocean and Seventh* – (831) 624-8518, [tommyswokcarmel.com](#)

If you want do something that’s quintessentially Carmel, pick up Chinese takeout from Tommy’s Wok and watch 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 has been repeatedly voted Best Chinese Restaurant by Pine Cone readers. Tourists manage to find it, too, giving it rave reviews on social media and travel sites for great food, solid value and excellent service.

Guests at Tommy’s Wok expect substantial portions that won’t break the bank, and they get them. You’ll find all your favorites — pot stickers, spareribs, egg rolls, sizzling plates and soups, chow mein and mu shu chicken — plus a few that might be new to you. Be a little more daring and give one of the lamb dishes a try, or bite into the satisfying texture of battered and fried prawns served with honey-glazed walnuts. Szechuan, Hunan and Mandarin dishes are served up piping hot and ready to go.

Best Indian Restaurant

Aabha — *3690 The Barnyard* – (831) 250-5940, [aabhaindian.com](#)

Bringing the exotic flavors and dishes of India to our own backyard, Aabha is a repeat Golden Pine Cone winner. Executive chef and proprietor Bhupender Singh’s food is as warm as he is, and from the coconut lentil soup, to decadent butter

chicken and saag paneer, every dish is sure to satisfy a diverse range of palates. One 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 flatbread) 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 serves its wildly popular lunch buffet from noon to 3 p.m., so you can sample a variety of dishes without having to commit to one.

Best Italian Restaurant

Best Pizza

Best Bartender

Vesuvio — *Junipero and Sixth* – (831) 625-1766, [chefpepe.com/restaurants/Vesuvio](#)

Part of the Pèpe Family group of restaurants, Vesuvio is a favorite among locals and visitors alike. Serving classic Italian dishes like eggplant parmesan, truffled gnocchi, and saffron risotto arancini (filled and fried rice balls), all with local flair, the restaurant has won several spots in our readers’ hearts. The bar features housemade spirits from “Doc Pèpe’s Lab,” and for dessert you can enjoy the limoncello mousse cake.

It’s no wonder Vesuvio won Best Pizza, as the chefs who make it have been trained and specialize in the art of creating the traditional Neapolitan variety. Take your pick, from the classic margherita, to a white truffle pie with mushrooms, cambozola, mozzarella, truffle oil and caramelized onions, or the diavolo, made with soppressata, Calabrian chili, and two kinds of cheese. Gluten-free crust is available.

The rooftop bar is the perfect place to enjoy a bite and a drink, especially when the weather is nice, but when it’s not, there are plenty of heaters to keep you warm. Bartender Jay Wallace has been at Vesuvio for 12 years and bartending for more than 30. “I got started as a teenager in the UK at my local pub,” he explained. Be sure to ask him for the “The Drop,” his favorite among the signature cocktails, made with Pèpe-cello limoncello, Doc Pèpe’s Lab citrus vodka, Pèpe raspberry shrub, or his personal favorite, a Sazerac, the classic New Orleans cocktail made with rye whiskey. “This is one of the best places in the world to be a bartender,” he said, because of the interesting people he gets to meet and interact with across the bar.

Best Japanese/Sushi Restaurant

Akaoni — *Mission btwn. Fifth and Sixth* – (831) 620-1516

Akaoni is a no-frills sushiya (sushi restaurant) in the heart of downtown. It is quaint, to say the least, seating about 20 people, but what it might lack in size, it makes up for in quality and freshness. The restaurant is staffed by the owner and his wife, who are the sushi chef and server, respectively. The fish is sourced locally or from the Tsukiji Fish Market in Tokyo. Order from the daily specials written on the chalkboard or from the live tank, and delight in the freshness of the seafood. Enjoy classic sashimi, sushi and other Japanese dishes, such as house-made tofu, tempura seafood or vegetables, soups, or steamed dishes like clams or shrimp dumplings. You can get a glass of the Japanese beer, Asahi, as well as cold and hot sake, and wines. For dessert, don’t miss the green tea ice cream with red bean or vanilla mochi, a delicate Japanese rice cake.

Best Mediterranean Restaurant

Dametra Café — *SE Ocean and Lincoln* – (831) 622-7766, [dametracafe.com](#)

“Our kitchen is really small but with a big heart. Our ingredients are fresh and bought locally, but without a doubt, the best ingredient of them all is love.” So say Dametra Café owners and multiple Golden Pine Cone winners Faisal Nimri and Bashar Sneeh. A culinary version of a “Small World” (without the song), it offers fare from Greek, Italian, Spanish, Moroccan, Turkish, French, Israeli and Lebanese cuisines and consistently attracts a queue of hungry diners.

The Greek pita bread is satisfying, especially paired with cucumber-yogurt tzatziki sauce on the starter menu. Calamari with marina sauce evokes Italy, while Spanish-style grilled jumbo prawns, a French take on smoked salmon, and Damascus labneh cheese from Syria are just a few other ways to get warmed up for the main course.

There are, of course, kebabs, gyros, shawarma and kofta (seasoned ground beef wrapped in lavash bread), but you’ll also find an All-American cheeseburger, a fresh mozzarella sandwich and lasagna, not to mention a variety of other pastas and generous salads. The international theme continues through dessert — if you have room — with baklava sharing the bill with tiramisu and triple fudge cake.

Best Thai Restaurant

Krua Thai — *730 Munras Ave., Monterey* – (831) 655-9797, [kruathaimonterey.com](#)

Krua Thai’s website tells the story of the Susawee family,



THANK YOU Pine Cone Readers

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See WINNERS page 8 GPC



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GOLDEN PINE CONES

WINNERS

From page 6 GPC

who immigrated to the Peninsula in 2003 from their native Thailand and opened a restaurant that’s on the way to pretty much everything in and around Old Monterey. You can walk to banks, city offices, the Path of History that winds from Custom House Plaza to Colton Hall, and, of course, that large collection of medical offices on Cass Street, affectionately referred to as “Pill Hill” by some locals.

If all that walking works up an appetite, this restaurant has you covered. Nearly every item on the menu costs less than \$20, which is nice if you’re watching your wallet. All the usual suspects — pad Thai, tom yum, a collection of curries in many colors — are there, along with Vietnamese rolls (tofu, noodles, cucumber, and cilantro in a rice paper skin), chow mein and pot stickers. There are several duck dishes and vegetarian options, and among the restaurant’s signature items is a deep-fried rainbow trout with apple relish. Wine is available by the glass and bottle, along with Corona, Heineken, and two Thai beers, Chang and Singha.

■ Best Mexican Restaurant

■ Best New Restaurant (opened in last 12 months)

Nicolás Cocina de Herencia — *Carmel Plaza – (831) 574-8802, nicolascocina.squarespace.com*

It took years longer to open than originally anticipated, but when it did, Nicolás Cocina de Herencia impressed with its beautiful, expansive space, menu of delicious, sophisticated Mexican fare, and full bar stocked with some of the best tequilas around. Brought to the Peninsula by the owners of the highly popular Villa Azteca on South Main Street in Salinas, Nicolás is described as “a modern Mexican restaurant that blends the family’s deep culinary heritage with an innovative approach to fine dining.” Reflecting its founders’ love and appreciation for family, tradition and cuisine, the menu features “flavors passed down generations,” and every dish is prepared “with the same love and attention that Chef Susana’s father, Nicolás, the family’s patriarch, bestowed upon his land in Mexico, ensuring a dining experience that feels both intimate and extraordinary.” This unique restaurant is a welcome addition to Carmel’s culinary landscape and truly is a family affair.

■ Best Restaurant for Steak

Grasing’s — *NW Sixth and Mission – (831) 624-6562, grasings.com*

Grasing’s — the namesake of chef-proprietor Kurt Grasing — sailed past the quarter-century mark last year, and in addition to serving his fine food in the dining room, he caters private jets at Monterey Regional Airport as well as cruises. And now our readers, who have honored Grasing’s in the past in several categories, that it’s the place to be for steak.

That’s with good reason — coveted cuts of prime beef occupy their own section of the dinner menu. The filet mignon comes in 6- and 9-ounce portions, there’s a 12-ounce aged New York, and a big old ribeye that weighs in at just over a pound.

There’s also a 32-ounce bone-in ribeye for two that comes with rosemary-goat cheese scalloped potatoes and cabernet-shallot sauce, and a choice of two Japanese wagyu steaks. While wagyu translates simply to “Japanese cattle,” its reputation for heavy marbling and tenderness has made it a sought-after delicacy.

There are other things on the menu, of course. You might want to start your dinner with some oysters, for example, or maybe some crispy pork belly or crab cakes. Our readers say you should go for the steaks, but it’s really hard to go wrong at Grasing’s.

■ Best Salad

Carmel Belle — *San Carlos between Ocean and Seventh – (831) 624-1600, carmelbelle.com*

Carmel Belle in the Doud Arcade appears to be perpetually busy, but there always seems to be room for one more diner. What’s so great about the salads? Like other menu items, they’re made with organic ingredients whenever possible, “purchased from local farmers markets, farmers, and/or distributors that support small farms,” the proprietors say. There are seven salads, from the orchard, with mixed greens topped with stone fruit, pecans and goat cheese and served with lemon vinaigrette, to the traditional Greek, with romaine, feta, tomato, red onion and cucumber. The chicken Cobb comes with free-range Mary’s chicken, and other selections include a market vegetable offering, a farmers salad, a walnut-blue cheese-apple combo, and mozzarella and roasted tomato salad — clever, since roasting wonderfully concentrates flavor and brings out the best in the tomatoes.

The Belle Bowl gets an honorable mention for its use

of quinoa and arugula, as does a veggie plate with truffled mushrooms, roasted tomatoes and goat cheese crostini complementing market vegetables.

■ Best BBQ

The Crossroads Barbeque — *241 Crossroads Blvd. – (831) 250-7616, thecrossroadsbbq.com*

You wanna know how good this place is? By mid-October, you couldn’t even pre-order a smoked Thanksgiving turkey because they were already sold out. But don’t worry, there’s still plenty of food available from breakfast (sandwich or taco options) through dinner. Choose from tri-tip, pulled pork, brisket, chicken, St. Louis-style pork ribs, and burnt ends — the flavorful trimmings from smoked brisket. Choose regular or large orders, or get it in a sandwich. Regular is just about right for most people, but if you want the large, nobody is judging.

Prices range from \$13.50 for a regular chicken meal to \$46 for a full rack of ribs with two sides and bread. Home-style potato salad is chunky and flavorful, baked beans are sweet and savory — just like you might remember from BBQs past — and there’s mac-and-cheese (extra amazing when topped with pulled pork) and creamy crunchy cole slaw. Have one of the rotating beers on tap, which might include some from Alvarado Street Brewery, maybe a cider or an amber from Santa Cruz Mountain Brewing. For dessert, homemade bread pudding and berry cobbler from old family recipes are not to be missed, even if you must take them to go. Feeding a crowd? Order a family pack and buy additional sides by the pint.

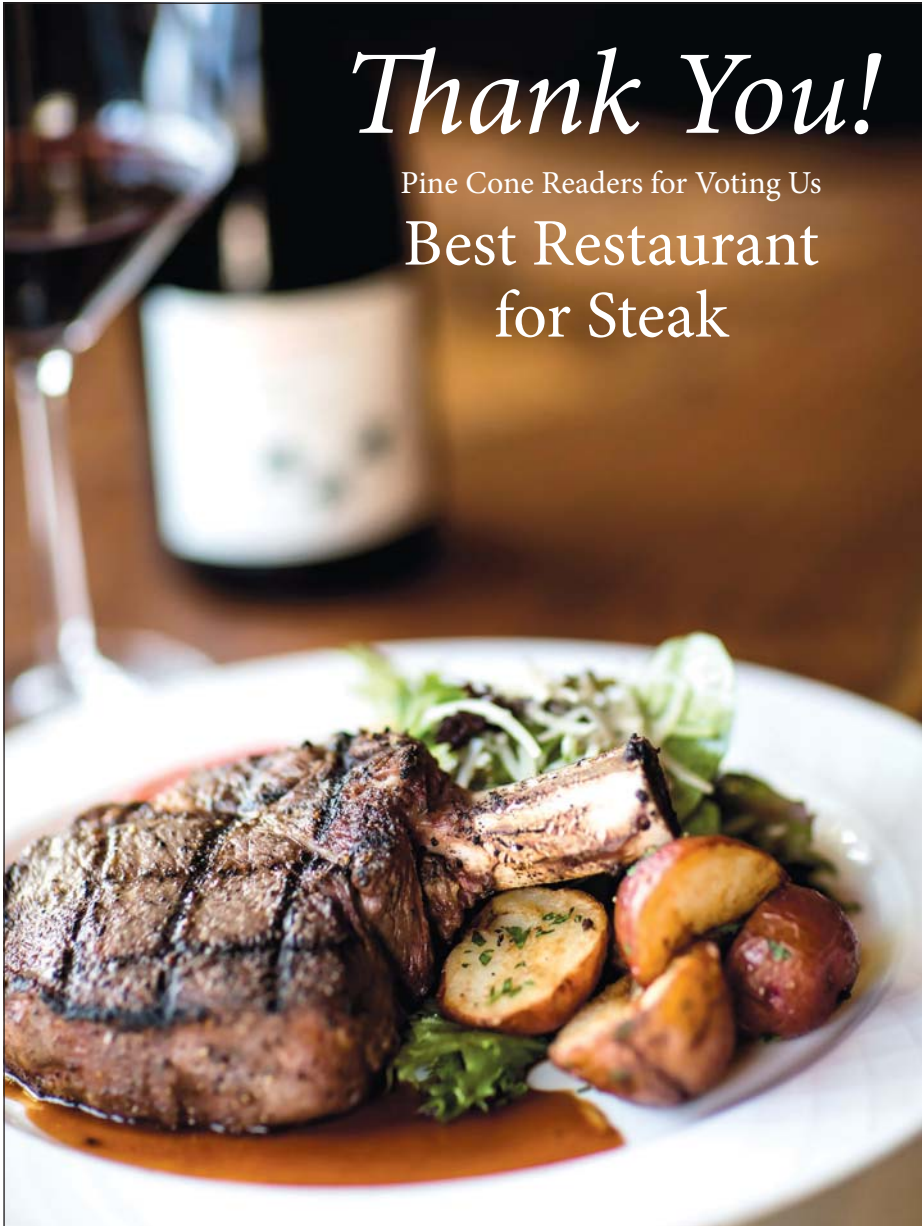
■ Best Fish & Chips

Brophy’s — *San Carlos and Fourth – (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. What’s that you say? It’s just fried fish and French fries, for heaven’s sake, even a fast-food joint can pull that off! Don’t say that around here unless you want to find yourself in the Police Log for starting a brawl.

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 crust doesn’t shatter or disintegrate at first bite. It should be golden brown on the outside, while staying


Continues next page



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From previous page

moist and tender on the inside. The chips should be crisp, but 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 the remoulade sauce that comes on the side, along with the cole slaw. You should probably order an ice-cold brew, too.

■ Best Breakfast

From Scratch — 3626 The Barnyard – (831) 625-2448, fromscratchrestaurant.com

For nearly half a century, From Scratch has been helping locals and tourists start their days with bellies full of happiness. Chef/owner Steve Grebing bought it 1995, and in January 2022, Matthew, his oldest son, took over. Per the restaurant’s website, “Matthew and his wife Nicole value and appreciate every patron we serve and this will remain the same From Scratch everyone loves!”

The front page of the menu reminds diners to have a little patience — when you call a place From Scratch, people tend to expect things to be made, well, you know. Sip on coffee, an espresso drink or a cocktail while you peruse the offerings. There’s cinnamon French toast, an assortment of flapjacks, eggs every which way, sides that include grits and house-made cheddar cheese biscuits, and nearly a whole page devoted to omelet combos.


While you can get breakfast all day, there are also two pages of sandwiches, salads and other lunch items. From Scratch doesn’t take reservations and it’s usually hopping, even on the weekdays, so bring some friends or a copy of The Pine Cone and relax. It’s worth the wait.

■ Best Coffee

Acme Coffee Roasting Co. — 485B Palm Ave., Seaside – (831) 393-9113, acmecoffeeroasting.com

“Resist corporate coffee,” advises Acme. With graphics and product names that evoke the inside of a garage that specializes in hot rods, there’s no doubt that they’re serious about getting everyone fueled up. The Seaside spot is a little hard to find the first time — it’s actually a little hidden in an alley — but once you find your way there, you can reward

See FAVORITES page 12 GPC



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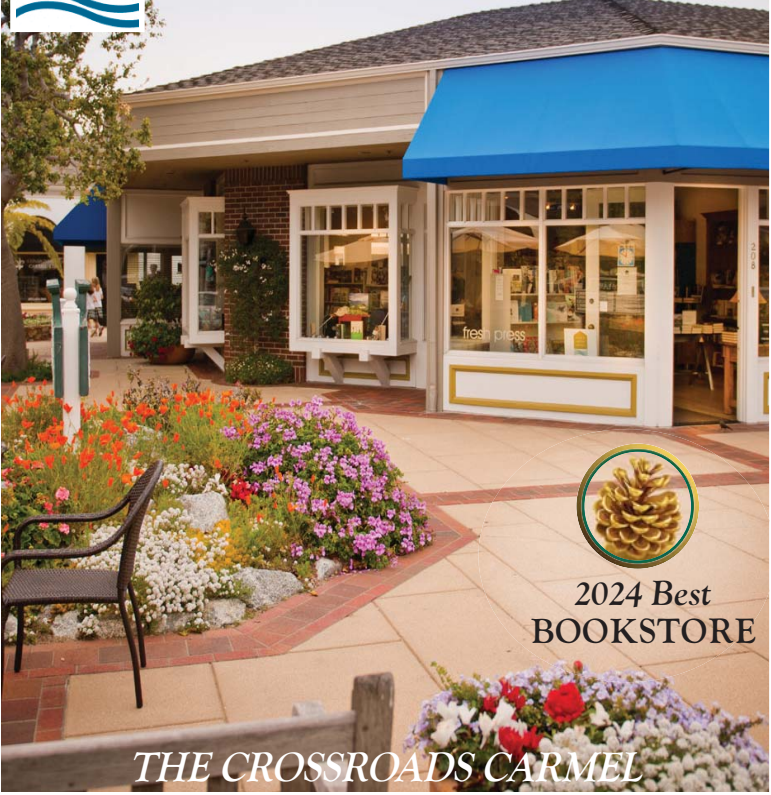
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GOLDEN PINE CONES

FAVORITES

From page 9 GPC

yourself with a cup of joe made from freshly roasted beans. Yes, there is a difference. If Seaside’s not on your daily errand list, you can find the coffee at numerous local spots like Passionfish or the Bagel Kitchen in P.G., Parker-Lusseau bakery, Deetjen’s Big Sur Inn, The Santa Lucia Preserve, Community Hospital, and Bear + Flag in Carmel Valley. Or buy the beans at Grove Market, Cornucopia, Elroy’s Fine Foods or Carmel Valley Market. The company calls Road Dog, “A well-balanced cup made for varying palates,” Ninety Weight is the Italian blend (“heavy body with low acidity”), while Power Glide is a lighter roast. Check out their other varieties at the website, where you can have your beans shipped to the house. No need to even get out of your pajamas.

Best Coffeehouse

Carmel Valley Coffee Roasting Co. — *Ocean between Lincoln and Monte Verde, 3720 The Barnyard and 246 Crossroads Blvd. — (831) 626-2913, (831) 620-0844 and (831) 626-8784, carmelcoffeeroasters.com*

Big Vinney, a 1940s-vintage Farina Italian coffee roasting machine, is probably responsible for caffeinating half the Monterey Peninsula by now. For more than a quarter century, CVCRC has been supplying retail and wholesale customers a wide variety of outstanding brews with names like Foglifter, Jamaican Me Crazy (flavored with vanilla, caramel and coffee liqueur), Cone Peak organic espresso, and a light roast called Mission Trail. The company’s website reminds everyone, “We roast and ship within hours and days, not weeks. The difference between fresh-roasted and less than fresh coffee is staggering,” which is not an overstatement to true coffee lovers.

A good coffeehouse is more than just

great coffee, though. There has to be great service, offered with a cheerful attitude that’s tempered by the knowledge that not everyone’s a morning person. There has to be a convivial atmosphere, and if there’s music, it has to be pleasant and not so loud you can’t have a conversation. It’s nice if you can find fresh snacks and sandwiches, too. Our readers believe CVCRC is the place for all that and more.

Best Special Occasion Cake

Layers Sensational Cakes — *9 Soledad Drive, Monterey — (831) 655-1544, layerscake.com*

Why are Pine Cone readers drawn to Layers’ luscious desserts? Just have a peek at the website or follow them on Instagram, where you can see a large collection of photos. There are traditional wedding and birthday cakes, but you can also find one in the shape of an Air Jordan sneaker — with a shoelace dangling realistically from one side — confections decorated with gold leaf and real flowers, and even a disco cake with, yes, a mirror ball perched up top.

Order a special dessert for a holiday meal or bring one to a party at work to be a real office hero.

In this case, beauty is more than frosting-deep — although the frosting is quite tasty. Varieties include traditional yellow, strawberry shortcake, carrot cake, Funfetti, red velvet, German chocolate, Oreo cookie and many more. You can get layers in different flavors, and completely customize your confection right on the website, or call for a consultation. They usually have some same-day availability, too, just in case you forgot it was your mother-in-law’s 29th birthday, again.

Continues next page

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GOLDEN PINE CONES

From previous page

■ Best Deli

5th Avenue Deli — *Fifth and San Carlos*
— (831) 625-2688, 5thavedeli.com

A lot of locals pop into 5th Avenue Deli to pick up chili, a salad, a sandwich or other quick but gourmet goods for lunch, but this longtime favorite near the downtown post office also sells picnic accessories, wine, packaged foods, gift baskets and other items to please just about anyone who enjoys great snacks or an elegant al fresco experience. Simply put, 5th Avenue Deli is far more than your average deli. In addition to custom-made sandwiches, the best soups in town, and a well-stocked salad and taco bar, 5th Ave offers catering, boxed lunches for customers on the go, sandwich platters and other culinary services. On any given day, you'll find regulars clustered outside the door as they wait for their goodies from the family-run establishment, and it's particularly popular during the work week as one of the few spots in town to get great food to go at reasonable prices.

■ Best Brunch

■ Best Place to Get Married (non-church)

Mission Ranch Hotel and Restaurant — *26270 Dolores St.* — (831) 624-6436, missionranchcarmel.com

We were shocked — shocked, we say — to discover that some foodies disdain Sunday brunch. The late celebrity chef, author and raconteur Anthony Bourdain gave the haters a voice by proclaiming most, but not all, Sunday brunches were made up of recycled leftovers and cooked by the kitchen's B-team (since the A-team typically works Friday and Saturday nights). It's too bad Bourdain apparently never made it to the Monterey Peninsula, where the meal has been elevated

to an art form. So, when Pine Cone readers say Mission Ranch has the best, you know it has to be pretty special. Let's start with that magic word, "buffet." You don't have to sort through the menu, trying to settle on just one. And that's good, when you can choose from prime rib, made-to-order omelets, French toast or baked salmon. There's a full bar (drinks aren't included in the \$45/person price) and a dessert table where you can take more than one.

The view is incredible, too — so much so that getting married there has become quite popular. There are two historic barns, patio and lawn areas for ceremonies and receptions. The lush green lodge and historic bridge make beautiful backdrops, and the patio barn has a built-in stage and dance floor, along with a wall of glass doors that open out onto the brick patio, from which you can see grazing sheep, Point Lobos and the ocean. What a great start to "happily ever after!"

■ Best Outdoor Dining


The Bench — *1700 17 Mile Drive in The Lodge, Pebble Beach* — (800) 877-0597, pebblebeach.com/dining/the-bench

The 18th Hole at Pebble Beach is in front of you, with the ocean just beyond and a lovely view of Point Lobos. You're sitting around a fire pit, maybe with a warm blanket, as the fog creeps in. Food is playful, diverse and accessible, even when it sounds fancy — portobello mushroom fries are crispy on the outside and meaty on the inside, and duck fat fries with truffle salt truly elevate the humble potato. Thanks to a wood-fired oven, the menu includes flatbreads, roast shrimp and roasted beets. There's an impressive wine and beverage selection, too.

Why "The Bench"? The Pebble Beach Co. website harkens back to the days when Japanese owners were in charge of the iconic property, noting, "To symbolize the return

See SUPER page 16 GPC

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From page 13 GPC

of Pebble Beach to American ownership in 1999, a commemorative bench has been placed overlooking the 18th Hole, where this acquisition was consummated. The bench honors the vision of its owners to preserve this national treasure for future generations.”

■ Best Place to Take Clients

The Sardine Factory — 701 Wave St., Monterey – (831) 373-3775, [sardinefactory.com](#)

This is one of those restaurants that’s done things so well for so long (since 1968, to be exact) that it has lists of the “best of” lists it’s been on. If you want to impress a client, our readers say, look no farther than this spot, with tuxedoed staff and white linen tablecloths. You and your colleagues will be well taken care of.

There’s plenty of expert advice available to navigate the 60-page wine list, for starters. The menu includes fine-dining classics like oysters Rockefeller, escargot, and prime beef, as well as a wide selection of salads and other entrées, and you should definitely order the sorbet in an ice swan as a palate cleanser between courses. If you can, save room for dessert. The chocolate-dipped ice cream bonbons over dry ice are shareable and fun, and the Flaming Sardine, a signature Galliano cocktail that is flamed at the table, is also a dramatic end to the meal.

■ Most Romantic Restaurant

Casanova — Fifth between Mission and San Carlos – (831) 216-3811, [casanovacarmel.com](#)

The Georis family renovated this restaurant in 1977 with what they describe as traditional Belgian architectural influences. The spot’s namesake, of course, is 18th-century

Venetian Giacomo Casanova, whose romantic exploits were legendary. Van Gogh’s table, which the website describes as “the table at which Vincent Van Gogh enjoyed his daily meals while boarding at the Auberge Ravoux in France,” is there, too Once you’re done swooning over the charming history and cozy décor, it’s time to order.

Casanova gathers ingredients from small, organic farms and local fisheries and makes all that attention to detail appear effortless. The menu, which is a love letter from the kitchen, woos you with the promise of French onion soup and lures you in deeper with duck leg confit. An excellent wine list is available along with help to find just the right glass or bottle. In “History of my Life,” Giacomo Casanova wrote, “Cultivating whatever gave pleasure to my senses was always the chief business of my life; I never found any occupation more important.” The restaurant in this magical village seems to have taken that sentiment to heart.

■ Most Dog-Friendly Restaurant

■ Most Dog-Friendly Hotel

Cypress Inn/Terry’s Restaurant & Lounge — NE Lincoln and Seventh – (831) 624-3871, [cypress-inn.com](#); (831) 620-7454, [carmelterrys.com](#)

Once again, Cypress Inn has been voted by readers as Carmel’s most dog-friendly hotel, paws down. It has charmed visitors since its opening in 1929. Continuing the legacy of the late co-owner, legendary singer, actress, and animal lover Doris Day, the hotel’s philosophy takes pet friendliness seriously. Doggie pick-up bags and a wash station are available in the hotel’s courtyard, the staff keeps a list of pet sitters on hand, and there are always little snacks for your pooch in the lobby. Four-legged friends staying overnight get special blankets, so they can stay warm, too.

Terry’s Restaurant and Lounge welcomes

your furry besties, and the staff there loves feeding people, too, with lunch and dinner menus that feature options like grilled steak salad, the famous Cypress Burger, or truffle-mushroom ravioli in a saffron cream sauce. The bar menu, available all day, offers filling and tasty small bites.

“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.

■ Best Restaurant for a Special Occasion

Pangaea Grill — Ocean Avenue between Lincoln and Dolores – (831) 624-2569, [pangaeagrillcarmel.com](#)

It’s understandable that Pine Cone readers chose this easy-to-find spot on Ocean Avenue for special celebrations. The colorful dishes and clever plating always evoke a party. 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 to declare the original land mass untouchable.

In the spirit of global dining, the breakfast menu offers Asian specialties like kimchee fried rice and dumpling egg soup alongside steak and eggs. Lunch might be tuna poke, a quesadilla, shrimp scampi or tempura shrimp salad. At dinner, the menu can take you Italy with Alfredo, Asia with lettuce wraps, spring rolls and dumplings, or just to Monterey Bay with some sand dabs. Not only can everyone at Uncle Fred’s birthday party get just the kind of food they want, they can wash it down with beer, wine or a special cocktail, like the Doc Ricketts, with banana-infused bourbon and chocolate bitters. Whether you’re celebrating an anniversary or just Tuesday night, this is the right place to do it.

■ Best Restaurant in Big Sur

Nepenthe — 48510 Highway 1, Big Sur – (831) 667-2345, [nepenthe.com](#)

More than 800 feet above the ocean, Nepenthe, a frequent Golden Pine Cone winner, 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 said to cause forgetfulness and relieve sadness. Of course, that may also be related to the lack of wifi and the spotty cell reception.

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 in a range of prices, 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 Carmel Valley

Café Rustica — 10 Del Fino Place, Carmel Valley – (831) 659-4444, [caferustricacv.com](#)

Even though it’s nestled out in Carmel Valley Village, you’d think you were in the Alsatian countryside. Café Rustica has been a destination for locals and tourists since 2000, and Julien Belliard took it over in 2006. He describes the cuisine as “country European,”

See **STUNNING** page 18 GPC

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offering a variety of dishes, like Hungarian goulash, escargot, classic roast chicken, and ratatouille, among others. There's something for everyone, from pork to steak, to light dishes like salads, grilled meats and fish, and pastas. There's also a wide variety of wood-fired pizzas that are characteristically thin-crust and slightly charred to perfection. The ingredients are sourced locally, and dressings and sauces are made in-house. Don't forget to round out your meal with one of their desserts, like country apple galette (a rustic, free-form pie), fresh lemon pudding cake, or an old-fashioned root beer float. Café Rustica is the perfect place to enjoy the Carmel Valley sun when Carmel-by-the-Sea is socked in fog.

■ Best Restaurant in Pebble Beach

Peppoli — *In the Inn at Spanish Bay* — (831) 233-3489,
pebblebeach.com/dining/peppoli

Does bagpipe music clash with Italian food? Apparently not at Spanish Bay, where the piper appears outdoors at sunset while diners enjoy Tuscan cuisine at Pèppoli. Sit down to a classic Italian dinner after you've golfed a round at Spanish Bay, or any old day, for that matter. Pèppoli comes to us by way of a partnership between the Italian Antinori family — which has been producing wine since 1385 — the Pebble Beach Co., and restaurateur Rich Pèpe.

After you've taken in the nods to Mediterranean décor — golden-hued walls, ornate (but not rococo) chandeliers and subtle floral prints — you'll find the menu is just like what you'd find in Italy, with antipasti, soup and salad, pasta dishes, main dishes, and, of course, dolci (sweets). For starters, enjoy fritto misto, crispy calamari and rock shrimp with a spicy tomato sauce, and deconstructed bruschetta. Pastas include traditional lasagna, pappardelle Bolognese, and pesto rigatoni. The main dishes will have your mouth watering just reading the menu, from grilled fish, to a grilled Florentine-style T-bone steak for two, or traditional osso buco (veal shank). The wine list is excellent, as you might imagine.

■ Best Restaurant in Pacific Grove

Passionfish — 701 Lighthouse Ave., Pacific Grove — (831) 655-3311, passionfish.net

Known for sustainable seafood and an extensive wine list

at “realistic prices,” according to its website, Passionfish is committed to fresh, local ingredients, farmers and sustainable farms and fisheries. The “Last Hometown” seems like an apt place for a restaurant devoted to quality food, harvested nearby. It was recently purchased by a member of the family that owns The Fishwife in P.G., and they have wisely decided to stick close to the eatery’s original vibe, while introducing new special dishes now and then.

Diners' favorites include Nancy's buttery buttermilk biscuit from the starters menu. Gifts from the sea include Dungeness crab salad with avocado, spicy ginger vinaigrette and braised fennel, Alaskan halibut, served with roasted Brussels sprouts, squash, maple pecans, cranberries, lemon-herb oil and many others. If seafood isn't your jam, try the spoon-able 12-hour lamb breast with chickpea and Meyer lemon stew, or the chef's take on classic duck confit served with a honey reduction, smoked chile-potato cake, and grilled broccolini. For dessert, try the organic mint and espresso mud pie or the maple-banana bread pudding, then walk some of that off with a stroll through P.G., where you can take in the Victorian homes or the crashing waves along Ocean View Boulevard.

■ Best Restaurant in Monterey

Stokes Adobe — 500 Hartnell St., Monterey — (831) 264-8775, stokesadobe.com

Built in 1833 and purchased by James Stokes, a fraudulent “doctor” whose patients died with alarming regularity — though not alarming enough to stop them from seeking his services — 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. If they’re available, tables in the balcony above the bar are especially fun for people-watching. Food is elegant and straightforward. Starters include crispy potatoes and duck liver mousse. Entrees start at \$34 for cavatelli carbonara, a Roman classic that is damned near magical, featuring handmade pasta tossed with sugar snap peas and pancetta. Fish, chicken and pork are all on offer, and you can get a 7-ounce American wagyu steak or prime porterhouse, too. And there’s a lovely happy hour daily in the bar and on the patio from 4 to 5:30 p.m.

■ Best Restaurant in Seaside

Maligne — 600 Broadway, Seaside — (831) 601-1302,
restaurantmaligne.com

Winning again, Maligne is named in honor of a nickname owner Klaus Georis had as a child, and means “clever, sly, or even troublesome,” according to him. 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 the food comes on pretty china with floral patterns. The neighborhood is 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 beautiful and accessible — after all, eating shouldn’t be like a round of Jenga. Service is excellent, and even simple things like focaccia with the Georis family’s estate 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. You can get a three-course meal for \$40 and up, parking is easy and, if you haven’t been there in a while, you’ll find that Broadway’s been gussied up quite a bit in recent years.

RECREATION AND THE ARTS

■ Best Local Artist

Delia Bradford Fine Arts — *Sixth between San Carlos and Mission* — (831) 601-4957, deliabradford.com

The daughter of two professional artists who spent her childhood on a mountain in Big Sur, Delia has a passion for plein air painting, a style beloved by locals and visitors alike. Using the outdoors — where the natural light provides her with inspiration — as her studio, she creates impressionist landscapes and florals that showcase her passion and vitality for life and for nature. While her paintings are vibrant and colorful, they also exude peace and tranquility. You can visit Delia at her downtown studio, where you can often find her with a brush in hand.

See SUPREME page 20 GPC

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SUPREME

From page 18 GPC

■ Best Local Photographer

Ashley Beem — (805) 801-9054,
beemvideo.com

The owner of a videography business and a mother of two children, Ashley began photographing moms, along with their babies and children, in 2007. Since then, she has thrived “capturing the moments that fly by so quickly.”

Ashley focuses her camera on the interactions that occur between parents and their kids — and she keeps them loose. She’s much more interested in seeing them laughing and looking at each other than having them strike a perfect pose. “I like it when they come out of a shoot and say, ‘That was fun,’” she said.

■ Best Photo Gallery

Center for Photographic Art —
Sunset Center at San Carlos and Ninth —
(821) 625-5181, photography.org

Tracing its roots to the Friends of Photography group that was founded by Ansel Adams and others in the late 1960s, the Center for Photographic Art offers a busy slate of group shows, solo exhibits, receptions, contests and talks. Some shows revive interest in long-forgotten photographic processes from the late 19th century, while other displays push the medium beyond its known limits. The group’s gallery is located at Sunset Center, where executive director Ann Jastrab and a host of volunteers create a welcoming place to celebrate photography.

■ Best Sculpture Gallery

Steven Whyte Gallery — Barnyard
shopping center — (831) 620-1917,
stevenwhytesculptor.com

The last time sculptor Steven Whyte’s gallery won a Golden Pine Cone, it was located on Dolores between Fifth and Sixth. Today, you can find Whyte working on his large-format sculptures in his studio and gallery in the Barnyard shopping center.

Widely acclaimed for his heroic bronze sculptures that adorn many public spaces in England and the United States, Whyte is known locally for his mystery sculptures which take shape each spring at Devendorf Park during the annual Carmel Art Festival.

■ Best Art Gallery

Gallery MAR Carmel — Dolores
between Ocean and Seventh, and Dolores
between Fifth and Sixth — (831) 624-2000,
gallerymarcarmel.com

Two years after opening on Dolores between Ocean and Seventh, Gallery MAR took home its first Golden Pine Cone for Best Gallery in 2021. Since then, it’s added a second gallery just a short stroll north along Dolores. Gallery MAR specializes in museum-quality contemporary art, representing a distinctive array of national, regional and local artists, including Carmel Valley glass artist Nick Leonoff and painters Beau Frank, Annie Hooker and America Martin.

■ Best Performing Arts Company or Group

Pacific Repertory Theatre —
Monte Verde between Eighth and Ninth —
(831) 622-0100, pacrep.org

Founded in 1982 by longtime creative director Stephen Moorer, PacRep is the 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

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

Year with a rock 'n' roll tribute concert and mentors the next generation of actors through its School of Dramatic Arts. This year, PacRep wrapped up an ambitious \$10 million remodel of the Golden Bough Playhouse.

■ Best Concert Venue

Sunset Center — San Carlos between 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. Over the past year, the theater has hosted a bounty of big-time talent, including shows by Van Morrison and Bonnie Raitt, and concerts presented by local artists like the 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 Carmel Valley Road, Carmel Valley — (831) 293-7500, folktalewinery.com

It's difficult to imagine a more perfect garden setting to sip wine and enjoy live music. A sought-after venue for local acoustic musicians, the winery also hosts shows by up-and-coming musical acts from out of town. Featuring stunning views of the Santa Lucia mountains to the south, it was known as Chateau Julien before Gregory Ahn bought it in 2015 and renamed it Folktale. "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," its website explains.

■ Best Local Music Group (Classical)

Aria Women's Choir — ariamonterey.org

Founded in 2012 by conductor Sean Boulware, the choir comprises local women who sing historic and contemporary choral works. In 2015, the group presented a solo concert at Carnegie Hall. Accepting new members through an audition

process, the choir is dedicated to singing new works by women composers. It plays three concerts each year, performs mostly at Pacific Grove Methodist Church and Carmel Presbyterian Church, and is often accompanied by pianist Jon-Mark Hurley. The group presents its next concert Nov. 23 and 24 at Pacific Grove United Methodist Church.

■ Best Local Music Group (Rock, Jazz and Pop)

The Bubba Pickens Band — [instagram.com/bubbapickens](https://www.instagram.com/bubbapickens)

Continues next page



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From previous page

Still the favorites of Pine Cone readers, the somewhat elusive group takes home yet another Golden Pine Cone. Featuring six teachers in its expanded lineup, the band plays mostly bluegrass, with an array of influences like blues, jazz, gospel and folk sprinkled in, along with three-part harmonies. Their set list includes “original tunes, bluegrass takes on rock and pop classics, and heartfelt ballads.” If you want to catch one of their shows, follow their Instagram page.

Best Place to Take Visitors

Point Lobos State Reserve — Highway 1, 2 miles south of Rio Road — pointlobos.org

Called the “greatest meeting of land and water in the world” by 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. Fa-

mous for its rugged coastline, windswept cypress groves and ancient forest of Monterey pines, it’s remarkably accessible, and some of its trails 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 Family-Friendly Activity

Monterey Bay Aquarium — 886 Cannery Row, Monterey — (831) 648-4800, montereybayaquarium.org

Located at the site of a former sardine cannery that John Steinbeck made famous through his writings, the aquarium is one of the world’s best places to see marine life up close. More than 2 million people each year visit the site, where they can learn about the rich and diverse marine life that inhabits Monterey Bay and be dazzled by the spectacle. While everyone crowds around to see the playful sea otters, don’t

miss the “flashy fishes, mesmerizing jellies and swirling sardines.” Penguins and puffins provide adorable distractions, while the multi-story Outer Bay and Kelp Forest exhibits can be calmingly hypnotic. The aquarium offers an educational and entertaining experience for all ages.

Best Local Festival

West End Celebration — westendcelebration.com

The premier annual street fair in Monterey County, Sand City’s West End Celebration hosts performances by more than two dozen musical acts on three stages. Besides serving up an abundance of live music, the two-day festival features a colorful marketplace of local art and creativity that showcases more than 100 artists and food vendors.

The street fair was established in 2001 by county assessor and music promoter Steve Vagnini, who just stepped down from his role coordinating the event after more than two decades.

Best Church-Sponsored Event

Jewish Food Festival — 5716 Carmel Valley Road, Carmel Valley — carmelbethisrael.org

Presented yearly by Congregation Beth Israel in Carmel Valley, the Jewish Food Festival shines a spotlight on the many charms of “Jewish Soul Food,” with favorites like hot pastrami, brisket, latkes, blintzes, matzo ball soup and egg creams. Besides tasty food, the festival features “a tantalizing array” of cultural performances, and family-friendly activities. The congregation, meanwhile, is “an inclusive Jewish community open to people of all ages, races, and abilities, welcoming interfaith families, people who are single, and LGBTQ+.”

Best Place to Watch the Sunset

Best Place to Walk Your Dog

Best Beach

Carmel Beach — Ocean and Scenic — ci.carmel.ca.us

With its clean, white sand cooling your toes and a bank of fog framing the horizon, there can’t be many better places to watch the sun sink beneath the waves. Offering easy access at the west end of Ocean Avenue and from several points along Scenic Road, the beach is one of the best ways to spend some time without spending money. It’s also one of the most dog-friendly spots you will ever visit, and leashes are optional, assuming your pooch comes when he’s called. At sunrise and sunset and in between, canines of every imaginable shape and size can be seen dashing and splashing along the shoreline.

But don’t think about starting a beach fire with wood, because it’s against the law, although beach fires sparked by propane-fueled devices are OK. Then, maybe have a picnic — a DIY from Bruno’s Market on Junipero or The Cheese Shop in the Plaza — and simply enjoy the view.

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2023

2022

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2020

2019

2018

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2016

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GOLDEN PINE CONES

PRIMO

From page 22 GPC

■ Best Place to Read The Pine Cone

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■ Best Hiking Trail

Garland Park — 700 W. Carmel Valley Road, Carmel Valley – mprpd.org/garland-ranch-regional-park

Technically not a trail, but packed with lots of them, Gar-land Ranch Regional Park is the granddaddy of the Monte-rey Peninsula Regional Park District — the first of the dis-trict’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, through the open, flat area of the old floodplain, dog- and bike-friendly 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 map-le-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 might even see some deer or turkeys.

■ My Favorite Park

Devendorf Park — Ocean and Junipero – ci.carmel.ca.us/post/parks-1

Devendorf Park has long been Carmel-by-the-Sea’s main gathering place. Whether it’s an art festival, the farmers mar-ket, the annual Christmas tree lighting, or one of myriad other community events, it’s the place to be. J. Frank Devendorf, known as the “Father of Carmel-By-the-Sea” gave the land for the park to the city and a bust of him can be found there. There are plaques honoring those who gave their lives in World War II, and those who fought in Korea and Vietnam, as well as part of a beam salvaged from the 9/11 terrorist attacks. The lawn is neatly manicured and trees provide ample shade as koi swim placidly in a small pond. It’s the perfect place to bring a sandwich from Bruno’s or Nielsen Bros. Market and read a book. In what must be the exception that proves the city’s pet-friendly rule, though, dogs are not allowed.

■ Best Fitness/Health Center

Carmel Valley Athletic Club — 27300 Rancho San Carlos Road, Carmel Valley – (831) 624-2737, cvaclife.com

Established more than half a century ago, Carmel Val-ley Athletic Club gives members just about everything they need to reach their health and fitness goals (provided they actually show up and work out, of course), while providing a sense of community. CVAC offers state-of-the-art fitness equipment to help you stay in shape, as well as group ex-ercise 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 activi-ties for adults and kids, childcare, and a bocce ball court are among CVAC’s offerings. The cafe serves fresh and healthy options for gym-goers, from veggie wraps, to smoothies and the best sweet potato fries with saffron aioli (all right, not the most virtuous snack, but hey, you just worked out), and much more, including daily specials.

■ Best Yoga Studio

Om Studios — 631 B Cass St., Monterey – (831) 480-9293, omoasis.com

Om Studios is a locally owned yoga and fitness studio of-fering something for everyone, from yoga, to Pilates, to barre — which combines the first two disciplines with ballet for low-impact, full-body exercise sessions. Om Studios opened in 2008 and offers “all levels of classes that range from warm and sweaty to slow-down and chill-out,” according to its website. The menu includes intro-level Pilates and more ad-vanced sessions, as well as heated flow yoga, yoga sculpt, and yoga nidra — a guided meditation, often referred to as “yogic sleep,” with no prior yoga experience required.

Continues next page



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GOLDEN PINE CONES

From previous page

■ Best Golf Course

Pebble Beach Golf Links — 1700 17 Mile Drive, Pebble Beach – (831) 574-5609, 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 everywhere. Boasting more than 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 Bing brought the tourney here in 1947, it’s been played by presidents, show business A-listers, professional athletes from other sports and corporate big-wigs, although the PGA recently revamped it to make it more focused on pro golfing and less on celebrity antics. 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 on the books for 2027, 2032, 2037 and 2044. In 2023, it hosted its 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 – (831) 372-5477, montereyart.org

The Monterey Museum of Art was founded in 1959, and, according to its website, “cultivates curiosity in the visual arts and engages community with the diversity of California art — past, present, and future.” The museum’s vision is “a collaborative cen-

ter where art and community engage” — and engage it does. In addition to offering 15 to 20 exhibits annually, the museum regularly hosts community events for the whole family to enjoy, including kid-friendly tours, artist workshops such as a “Spooky Owl Illustration” and “afternoons with the curator.” Year-round First Fridays offer free after-hours access to the museum with music and socializing. Even after it closes for the day, art lovers can sit on a welcoming bench in the mural garden and enjoy a book or simply revel in the presence of nature and beauty.

■ Best Library

Harrison Memorial Library — NE Ocean and Lincoln – (831) 624-4629, 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. Harrison Memorial Library has books and a garden, checking both boxes for great attractions. Opened in 1928, the building was designed and built by local wunderkind Michael J. Murphy in consultation with renowned California architect Bernard Maybeck. It was financed by a bequest from Ella Reid Harrison as a memorial to her husband, California Supreme Court Justice Ralph Chandler Harrison, who, oddly, never lived in the city.

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, as well as the opportunity to borrow a day-use pass to California State Parks. (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 the library’s website, too.)

Continues next page

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Alvarado Street, Monterey

National Monument to John Steinbeck and Cannery Row

Cannery Row, Monterey

‘St. Anthony and Child’

Carmel Mission Basilica, Carmel

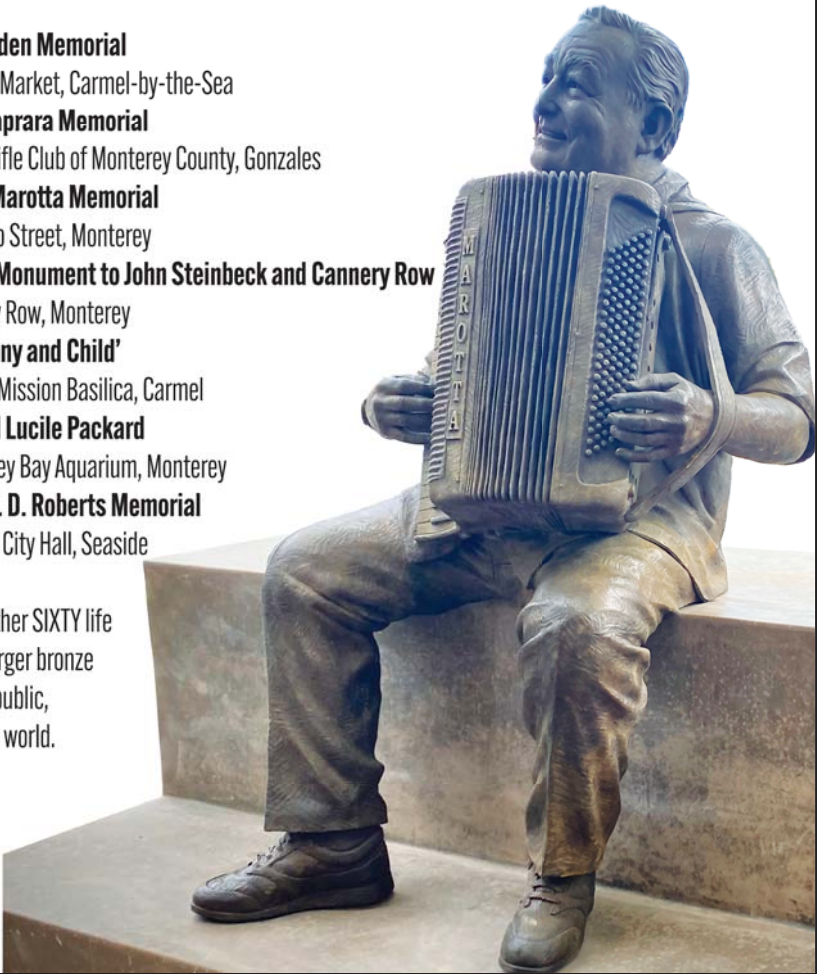
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From previous page

■ Best Inn/B&B

Carmel Garden Inn —
Fourth and Torres — (831) 624-6926,

carmelgardeninn.com

Carmel Garden Inn has once again 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 a charm-

ing garden setting surrounding 10 cozy guest rooms offering wood-burning fireplaces, what’s not to love? Guests enjoy the breakfasts, especially the homemade granola and summer vegetable frittatas. The inn offers complimentary wine and cheese in the afternoon to top off a day of stress-free vacationing or staycationing. Just three blocks from Ocean Avenue, Carmel Garden Inn is walking distance from downtown and Carmel Beach, where you can watch the sunset or enjoy a stroll with your pooch, who is welcome at the inn’s designated pet-friendly rooms. Staff members can recommend a pet sitter so Mom and Dad can have some alone time, too.

■ Best Hotel

La Playa Hotel — Camino Real and Eighth — (800) 582-8900, laplayahotel.com

In 1905, artist Christian Jorgensen began building a stone mansion as a gift to his wife, Angela, heiress to the Ghirardelli Chocolate fortune. Converted to a full-service hotel in 1922, La Playa is an historic Carmel fixture fully equipped with timeless and modern amenities. Not far from Carmel Beach — your Favorite Beach and the Best Place to Walk Your Dog — La Playa is within an easy stroll of almost everything Carmel has to offer. Not only that, but there are plush platform beds, a complimentary Champagne brunch, and spacious gardens with a heated pool. Other amenities include a wine and sangria reception in the afternoon, freshly baked chocolate chip cookies in the evening, and live music in Bud’s, its bar, on select evenings.

With a \$20 million renovation that included all 75 rooms completed just last year, the inn’s promise of “informal elegance with premium amenities” seems eminently attainable. Locals can frequently be found enjoying cocktails and light bites at Bud’s on the terrace. The next time you have out-of-town guests, our readers recommend you put them up at La Playa, or enjoy a staycation yourself.

RETAIL

■ Best Florist

Burst + Bloom — 238 Crossroads Blvd. — (831) 625-8111

Beneath a sign that reads, “Make it Simple but Significant,” floral artist Lauren Orman studies a blossom, picks a couple of leaves from the stem and lets them fall to the cement floor. Then she adds the flower to the table bouquets she’s making for a wedding reception, all similar but not quite the same. Orman, the owner of Burst & Bloom, creates custom floral designs — festive or fancy but not fussy. Many of the blooms are sourced from local gardens. “I appreciate so many different things about working with flowers,” Orman said. “I love working with a perishable product. I love that I am making something artistic, sculptural, but it’s also completely ephemeral. I like that I have to understand timing and surrender to it. Floral design is a completely Zen practice; I can’t get too attached to the product.”

■ Best Furniture Store

Mum’s Place — 246 Forest Ave., Pacific Grove — (831) 372-6250, mumsfurniture.com

Step into Mum’s, and you’ll find a showroom filled with a wide 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, 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 AMAZING page 29 GPC



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The Golden Pine Cones



October 25, 2024

AMAZING

From page 26 GPC

■ Best Golf Shop

Pebble Beach Pro Shop — 1700 17 Mile Drive, Pebble Beach – (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 share is a warm welcome and a 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 it's an extra towel, a warm sweater or a few calming words of encouragement before a golfer heads out to the 1st 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., 401 Mid Valley Center, Carmel Valley, and 229 Forest Ave. and 1136 Forest Ave., Pacific Grove – (831) 293-8050, (831) 250-5666, (831) 372-3284, (831) 646-9144, acehardware.com

Imagine a 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 store is a member of the largest retailer-owned hardware cooperative in the business, these shops, locally owned and managed,

give customers a sense of being where everybody knows your name, but 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 – (831) 877-6300, shopshoshin.com

Shoshin owner Alexis Smith named her interior design studio 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. Since being selected 2022's Best New Business by our readers, Shoshin has quickly grown a devoted customer base to its mix of new and vintage housewares and furnishings, which features an ever-evolving array of unique and high-quality items. Whether it's colorful throw pillow for the bedroom or a whole new look for your dining room, Smith offers sound advice and exceptional products to bring your vision to life.

■ Best Pet Store

Diggidy Dog — NE Corner of Ocean at Monte Verde – (831) 625-1585, diggidydog.com

It only makes sense, in a canine-centric community, to have a dedicated dog boutique. Since 2003, the 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 attraction are two Westies, plus an English cream golden retriever. The trio are shop dogs who just might make this the happiest store in town.

■ Best Garden Shop

Griggs Nursery — 9220 W. Carmel Valley Road, Carmel Valley – (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 plant in the places where they spend their days. For more than 20 years, Griggs Nursery has been thriving in Carmel Valley, 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," said Catherine Griggs. With the recent purchase of Suncrest Nursery in Watsonville, a 60-acre growing ground dedicated to interesting and exciting California natives and other low-water plants, Ken and Catherine Griggs are cultivating a larger variety of offerings, which they bring into the nursery weekly to the surprise and delight of customers. The only thing more important to a growing business than the plants, they said, is their dedicated, long-time staff.

■ Best Place to Buy Athletic Wear

The Treadmill — 111 Crossroads Blvd. – (831) 624-4112, thetreadmill.com

For more than 40 years, The Treadmill in the Crossroads shopping center has been the embodiment of a friendly, community-driven, trustworthy locally owned business that supports and anchors the active community in and around Carmel, Carmel Valley, Big Sur, Pebble Beach, Pacific Grove and Monterey. These special communities are best experienced outside of a car on a trail or footpath, and the folks here not only will help you find the best footwear for your chosen activity, but it will help you to keep cozy with the right gloves, hat and jacket.

Continues next page



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CARMEL VALLEY MANOR



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From previous page

Since 1983, the family-owned and operated location has been known to locals as the place to find premier clothing and ath-

letic footwear brands. After talking with the shop’s experienced and knowledgeable staff, it becomes clear why, year after year, Carmel Pine Cone readers have voted The Treadmill as the “go-to place” for everything you need to support your healthy lifestyle.

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Best Pharmacy

Carmel Drug Store — *Ocean between Dolores and San Carlos – (831) 624-3819, carmeldrugstore.com*

Independently owned and serving the community since 1910, Carmel’s classic drug store and family pharmacy invites you to “shop back in time.” Known for giving high-school kids their first jobs, the pharmacy also is renowned for providing both quality products and service. This drugstore just might be the most convenient stop in town. Located in the heart of Carmel, its narrow storefront is chock-full of everything folks might need or maybe forgot on their way into the village. 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. You can find high-end bath and body products, including Mason Pearson hairbrushes, made by hand in England, and Bonny Doon Farm’s soaps, salves and lotions in soothing lavender and invigorating lemon verbena. If only the place had a soda fountain, it would complete the nostalgic experience.

Best Children’s Clothing Store/Boutique

Starchild — *Ocean between Mission and San Carlos – (831) 625-0300*

Owner Kerith Harrison stepped through the welcoming double doors into Starchild this past February, and has enjoyed getting to know neighborhood supporters and visitors alike of this treasured, local boutique. A partnership with “Heaven A Child’s Boutique” on Lincoln, both boutiques are designed for the customer who seeks quality and style for their little ones.

“Both children’s boutiques were started more than 20 years ago by the Vasanji Fami-

ly,” Harrison said. “Since then, Starchild has been delighting children, from newborn up to age 8, as well as the adults who dress them. We are grateful for the support and recognition this award brings.” Starchild attracts children with their collection of world-renowned Jellycat plush toys and welcomes adult customers past the landmark red geraniums into the welcoming world of adorable children’s apparel and shoes. 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, Ocean and Mission – (831) 625-8106, khakisofcarmel.com*

Jim and Connie Ockert and their team at Khakis of Carmel have created what is considered the finest men’s store in America — but, of course, our readers were already hip to the outstanding quality and selection there, not to mention the service. Offering the very best in luxury menswear, Khakis offers an incredible selection of men’s clothing from Europe and especially Italy, including made-to-measure and bespoke garments, and a sportswear collection that includes Isaia, Canali, Pescarola, Eleventy, and Maurizio Baldassari, as well as fabrics from Loro Piana, Holland & Sherry, Ariston and customer favorite Peter Millar. Trained stylists help to create and define each customer’s personal look. “We travel the globe to search for unusual handmade luxury menswear products,” said Jim Ockert, “which emphasizes our own aesthetic for the modern man.”

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) – (831) 624-5580*

See SUPERLATIVE page 32 GPC

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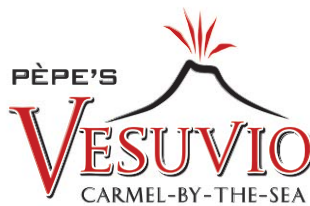
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SUPERLATIVE

From page 30 GPC

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. Walking is a preferred mode of transportation around here, and Hedi’s 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, casual, 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. – (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 shopping center.

The important thing, she says, is whether you are looking at the many French and Italian collections exclusive to Debra C, or even its own private label, you don’t have to look any further. “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
- Best Women’s Accessories
- Best Place to Buy Designer Clothes

Foxy Couture Carmel — San Carlos 2SW of Fifth – (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, and 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 – (831) 625-1382, lloydsshoes.com

If you want to know what shoes are in this season, check out what Lloyd’s owner Tess Calhoon is wearing. Perhaps her Chic Mihara super-cool platform bootie — her favorite style is back in stock. Crafted in Elda, Spain, the brand’s bestseller in Europe feels very fashion forward and edgy. Calhoon prefers to pair them with kick-flair or straight-leg jeans; although “Emily in Paris” design might draw attention with a flirty little dress.

On other days, Calhoon and pretty much her entire staff slip on one of her newest brands, Oncept, which she calls the perfect convergence of fashion and comfort. The company, based in New York City, uses the softest materials to make sneakers that are versatile, flexible and lightweight. “I’m most excited that my absolute favorite, the White Cloud 5, is back in stock after almost a year,” Calhoon said. “The best travel shoe, it’s lightweight, comfortable, and great for walking. For me, running after a 3-year-old, it’s an absolute must. I wear them daily.”

■ Best Vintage Clothing Store

SPCA Benefit Shop — 26364 Carmel Rancho Lane – (831) 624-4211 – spcamc.org/how-to-help/benefit-shop.html

Imagine finding a pair of mint-condition vintage boots, a gently worn jacket, and just-your-size jeans for less than the cost of a tank of gas and knowing your money will be used to support the compassionate treatment of animals through rescue, rehabilitation, protection and education via SPCA Monterey County. Recalling the hundreds of animals it placed during the pandemic and rescued during wildfires, it seems all that cool clothing supports a pretty nifty cause.

■ Best Jewelry Store

Fourtané Jewelers — Ocean and Lincoln – (831) 624-4684 – fourtane.com

Every piece has a story, and the person who wears this

Continues next page

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GOLDEN PINE CONES

From previous page

shop’s estate jewelry will write the next chapter. Sandy and John Bonifas, who purchased Fourtané Jewelers in the 1980s, have maintained the intimate, friendly and personalized atmosphere customers have appreciated since its inception in 1950. Although it’s one of the country’s leading providers of estate jewelry and watches, more important than the pieces, said John Bonifas, “are our dedicated, long-term employees and the relationships we build with our customers from all over the world. Especially in what has become such an impersonal business environment.” People buy these pieces not because they need them, he said, but because of the moments and memories they create.

Best Shopping Center

Carmel Plaza — *Ocean and Mission – (831) 624-0138, carmelplaza.com*

With so much to offer, it’s no wonder Carmel Plaza reached a wide diversity of voters. Nestled in the heart of downtown Carmel-by-the-Sea is Monterey Peninsula’s premier shopping and dining destination with more than 40 clothing shops, distinctive restaurants, gourmet boutiques, wine-tasting rooms, wellness studios, and more. Carmel Plaza truly is the destination for the best of everything, and it’s all in a sheltered outdoor setting where just sitting and watching people is a favorite way to pass the time. No wonder it’s this year’s recipient of the Golden Pine Cone for Best Shopping Center.

Shop at stores and boutiques including Anthropologie, Tiffany & Co., and Khakis of Carmel. Dine on an assortment of tasty cuisines from eateries like Flying Fish Grill, Pâtisserie Boissiere, Nicolás Cocina de Herencia, and Dutch Door Donuts. Sip and savor wines from three notable tasting rooms or enjoy a beer from Alvarado Street Brewery & Bistro. Head into Lula’s Chocolates and Car-

mel Honey Company for the perfect sweet treat. Grab a cup of coffee from Cafe Luna or Rise & Roam. Enjoy virtual golf and live entertainment at the Links Club. And don’t forget to stop by The Cheese Shop, a destination for many locals and visitors, renowned for its extensive fine cheese selection for more than 35 years.

Best Antique Shop

Wittpenn’s Antiques — *San Carlos between Seventh and Eighth (831) 624-1336, wittpennsantiques.com*

This place definitely warrants wandering, plus 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. Even 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 music instruments and more. After 19 years in Carmel, Wittpenn’s Antiques thanks Carmel and all the customers who make this a fun, special place to be!

Best Bookstore

River House Books — *208 Crossroads Blvd. – (831) 626-2665*

River House books is the go-to local bookstore for people of all ages looking for that special read. Nature lovers, chefs and hobbyists praise its selection of nonfiction, how-to and guidebooks. Teens appreciate the youth fiction selection, and there are picture books for reading aloud to grandchildren, nieces and nephews. Those who need a fix of news from around the world welcome its

Continues next page



Thank you Carmel Pine Cone readers for voting us Best Museum on the Monterey Peninsula!

We are grateful to share our passion for the arts and inspire the community with the diversity of California art—past, present, and future.



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

From previous page

robust stock of foreign and domestic magazines and newspapers. River House books is a repeat Golden Pine Cone winner for good

reason: It offers its customers what massive online retailers will never be able to — the chance to browse and hold a brand-new book before purchasing it. The staff has a soft spot for local authors, and you’ll frequently find one or more of them there, signing copies

of their latest releases. A family-owned, independent bookseller, River House offers a comprehensive selection of works, from the classics to architecture to gardening. Its employees are highly knowledgeable, friendly and happy to help.

tional selection of hard to find, eclectic, and bespoke automobiles,” it says on its website, adding that “having such a selection” makes it “even easier to get your dream car, regardless of where you live.” The shop also has certified preowned cars, retired loaners and demo vehicles. And it will service every Porsche make and model, “from the earliest air-cooled 356’s, to the rarest super cars such as 959, Carrera GT, 918, all the way up to the newest and most technologically advanced models.”

■ Best Bike Shop

Mad Dogs & Englishmen — SW Ocean and Mission, and 400 Cannery Row, Monterey – (805) 837-0033, maddogsandenglishmen.com

This comprehensive bike shop with locations in downtown Carmel and Cannery Row is perhaps best known for its sales and rentals of the adorable bicycle sidecars that carry dogs and children around town. It’s always a joyful sight to see furry friends, sometimes adorned in goggles, riding shotgun in the customized sidecars, which are ordered from Europe.

But Mad Dogs & Englishmen also carries a full complement of bicycle brands and types, from electric models, to beach cruisers. They also rent bikes and offer guided tours from both locations. And they have a full array of bike repair and tune-up services, including free service for life with a bicycle purchase and annual service memberships for those who put the miles on their wheels. Interested in trying a new bike style? Check one out by renting first. Or just drop by the Carmel flagship’s coffee bar to see what’s new.

■ Best Car Dealer

Porsche Monterey — 1781 Del Monte Blvd., Seaside – (831) 920-0744, porschemonterey.com

If you’d like to own one of the automobile industry’s most prestigious marques, Porsche Monterey’s got it. The business sells the German manufacturer’s most popular models as well as one-of-a-kind and custom cars. “Porsche Monterey offers an excep-

■ Best Gas Station

■ Best Auto Repair Shop

Lemos 76 — 544 Carmel Rancho Blvd. – (831) 624-2925, lemos76.com

Whether you want to fill up your car before heading to Big Sur or are in need of a repair, Lemos 76 — a repeat Golden Pine Cone winner in both categories — has it all. The family-owned and operated station is a local fixture. “Since 1961, we’ve been doing our business the exact same way: with integrity and a handshake that counts,” owner Ron Lemos says in response to online reviews and praise. “Our gas station and Better Business Bureau-accredited garage specializes in full-service auto maintenance and repair. From a simple oil change to changing belts, we do work on every make, year, and model with the same integrity we’ve held since opening our doors on Day 1.” 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.

■ Best Carwash

El Estero Car Wash — 590 Fremont St., Monterey – (831) 373-1801, elesterocarwash.com

Continues next page



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From previous page

El Estero Car Wash has been repeatedly voted Best Car Wash over the years by Carmel Pine Cone readers, who take their rides pretty darned seriously. And it’s not just you — the business displays numerous awards of excellence and official accolades from local leaders. Its employees provide thorough, professional, cheerful service every time. When it comes to the wash itself, El Estero uses something called Envirosoft Foam,” which the business says is made from a “high quality microcellular closed-cell foam,” a “significant development” for cleaning vehicles because it’s gentle on their finishes.

“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.” Browse the shop with greeting cards and more than 170 different air fresheners while you wait.

■ Best Place for Brides to Shop

Epiphany Bridal Boutique — *Mission between Fifth and Sixth – (831) 626-7200, epiphany-boutique.com*

Setting out to buy a bridal gown is either the most thrilling or the most stressful shopping trip of someone’s life — or maybe it’s a little of both. But you need someone calm, knowledgeable and professional to hedge your bets in favor of blissful browsing, and our readers recommend Epiphany Bridal Boutique.

Calling itself the area’s “premier bridal” shop, it offers the latest styles in wedding gowns, bridesmaids’ dresses, outfits for mothers-of-the-bride and flower girls, as well as Carmel’s largest selection of prom dresses and gowns for any formal occasion. Epiphany’s staff provides personalized service to everyone who comes in, asking for details such as event location, time of year and formality, to recommend the right look and fabric. Or, book a personal shopping appointment to find the right dress to feel your best on that special occasion. They also offer customized alterations and can fit almost any dress style to any body — taking in shoulders, waists, adding fabric or taking it away as needed — no adjustment is too challenging. The Carmel business — which also has a shop in San Luis Obispo — carries a wide variety of accessories, too. Its online blog offers tips and advice for your special occasion,

Continues next page

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From previous page

and you can glimpse some local brides on its Instagram feed.

Best Gift Shop

Ami Carmel — *Dolores between Fifth and Sixth* – (831) 620-1600, amicarmel.com

Ami Carmel has been voted Best Gift Shop over and over since it opened in 2021. Owned by Annee Martin, the store offers jewelry, artwork, gift cards, accessories, tabletop and home décor and even clothing. “To present things to people in a beautiful way, create experiences for people, and give back to the community, is our collective mission,” Martin says on the website. A longtime hospitality professional, Martin believes in providing positive experiences for customers. Ami Carmel holds community events, including taking part in book signings or celebrations of local artists. The store is relaxed, friendly, and offers treats for your pet as part of the shopping experience.

Best Candy Shop

Lula’s Chocolates — *Carmel Plaza and 224 Crossroads Blvd.* – (831) 624-5852, (831) 626-3327, lulaschocolates.com

Locally made, owned and operated since 2006, Lula’s Chocolates have become the Monterey Peninsula’s celebratory candy for special occasions and year-round. As owner Scott Lund says, he decided to start his business in the scenic Carmel area, because it’s always “chocolate weather” here. Lula’s Chocolates is named for Lund’s grandmother, who taught him candy-making. Lula’s truffles, chocolates, toffee and special holiday-themed confections are sold at many local stores, but you should also pop into its retail stores for occasional sales. Lula’s is also popular throughout the region, sold by many local vendors on the Monterey Penin-

sula, as well as in grocery stores along the West Coast. You can also shop at the factory in Ryan Ranch near Monterey Regional Airport.

Best Carpet and Flooring Store

Carpets & Floors — *471 Lighthouse Ave., Monterey* – (831) 372-2300, carpetsandfloorsmonterey.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. “We are pleased to present an extensive collection of the finest floor coverings made,” Carpets & Floors’ website 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.” The business is proud of its staff, saying they’re top-notch 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

Wally’s — *San Carlos 3 SW of Fifth* – (831) 224-7075, wallys-cbts.com

New on the Carmel scene with a niche market is Wally’s, specializing in men’s vintage clothing. The shop carries specialty duds, particularly outerwear, and some unisex and women’s items. Classic early 49ers

Continues next page



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GOLDEN PINE CONES

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bomber jacket? Check. Black leather moto jacket? Check. Label golf shirts? Check. They prefer to purchase gently used mens-wear collections and do not accept consignments. In true Carmel fashion, the shop is named for “a family dog that is well-loved, long-lasting and made in the USA, much like many of the items we carry.”

SERVICES AND HEALTHCARE

- Best Real Estate Company
- Best Place to Work

Carmel Realty Company — *Dolores south of Seventh and eight other offices – (831) 622-1000, carmelrealtycompany.com*

It’s no wonder that Pine Cone readers recommend Carmel Realty if you want to buy or sell a home. After all, its reputation in the community spans four generations, so readers know that these folks understand the ins and outs of the market. The longevity of Carmel’s oldest real estate company is no accident. Operating for more than a century on the principles of integrity, strong work ethic, teamwork, collaboration, communication, and customer service has created an exceptional work environment for a crack team of agents, brokers and employees. Carmel Realty takes mentoring seriously, making sure each of the firm’s agents is equipped to provide great service.

Up-to-date approaches and robust advertising campaigns enhance the company’s relationship with the community and help employees excel at their jobs, while also helping clients to sell their homes or find exactly the right new place, whether it’s for a young family, retirees who are downsizing, or anyone who just wants a special spot in paradise. And, as the firm’s website says, “We look

forward to demonstrating our exceptional abilities and our commitment to quality for decades to come.”

■ Best Place to Volunteer

SPCA Monterey County — *1002 Monterey Salinas Highway, Salinas – (831) 373-2631, spcamc.org*

Any animal lover can find a volunteer role at the Monterey County SPCA, an independent non-profit animal welfare organization serving more than 12,000 animals a year. Volunteers outnumber employees 4-to-1, with more than 350 who are critical to the nonprofit’s day-to-day operations. A dozen different volunteer opportunities include being a foster friend, working in the Carmel benefit shop, assisting in the veterinary or wildlife rescue clinics, or helping with community outreach and special events. The “doggy-day-out,” “pawjama parties” and “hug-a-pet” programs call for lots of love and one-on-one time with shelter pets. Applications for all roles are always welcome via the SPCA Monterey County website.

■ Best Place to Get Married

Carmel Mission Basilica — *3080 Rio Road – (831) 624-1271, 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 Saint Junipero Serra to Carmel, and the famous priest is buried there.

“Here at the Mission, we know that this is both a wonderful time in your lives as well as a stressful time,” the website says about tying the knot. “The church seeks to help you

Continues next page



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GOLDEN PINE CONES

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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 priests to get married outside of their own parishes. And because it’s an active parish, the Basilica’s schedule only allows weddings to occur on most Fridays and Saturdays.

Best Retirement Community

Carmel Valley Manor — 8545 Carmel Valley Road, Carmel Valley – (831) 624-1281, cvmanor.com

Founded in 1963, Carmel Valley Manor celebrates more than six decades of introducing its 65-and-older community to “the good life” at one of the Peninsula’s most scenic locations. The facility offers a range of services to help residents as they age, including independent living, assisted living and skilled

nursing, all on one campus. Carmel Valley Manor’s tranquil 65-acre property features breathtaking views of the valley and amenities that include ground-floor residences, outdoor patios, lush gardens, and easy access to shopping, restaurants, entertainment and recreation. There’s a range of wellness activities, too — the website lists “a fully equipped fitness center with professional staff; swimming pool for lap swimming or water aerobics; scenic trails for enjoying nature and fresh air; a community garden where you can grow vegetables or flowers, and fresh, locally sourced meals in our elegant dining room.”

No wonder more than one visitor has come away wondering, “When will I be old enough to live here?”

Best Electrician

Cate Electrical — Dolores and Seventh – (831) 624-5361, cateelectrical.com

When it comes to wiring, you don’t want to mess around — you want to feel safe and secure. Customer satisfaction has been the primary focus of this iconic, family-owned and operated local business, which has been trusted with the Peninsula’s electrical needs

since 1961. Cate Electrical specializes in prompt, efficient service calls, offering home remodels, landscape lighting, and much more to the residential and commercial community.

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 — (831) 204-4450, afterhourplumbingmontereyca.com

This much-trusted, locally-operated family business prides itself on honesty, character, integrity and the value of a job well-done, providing cheerful, round-the-clock services for all of your plumbing needs, from routine checks to emergencies. After Hour Plumbing & Drain typically offers prompt, same-day service when needed and guarantees satisfaction with its workmanship.

Best Architect

Samuel Pitnick Architects — 1357 Ord Grove Ave., Seaside – (831) 241-1985, samuelpitnick.com

Monterey Peninsula native Samuel Pitnick, an architect since 2010, has a body of work that includes single- and multi-family residences, retail, commercial, educational, recreational, and healthcare designs. Since graduating with honors from the University of Southern California, he has produced award-winning projects, from Hawaii, to New York, Europe and Asia, and his competition designs have been exhibited and celebrated in New York City, Chicago, Philadelphia, Chicago, Miami, Los Angeles, and Istanbul.

A LEED-accredited professional, Pitnick is a fierce advocate for sustainable and environmentally responsible designs that strive for harmonious balance between nature and architecture.

Best Interior Designer

Sea Blush Studios — Junipero 2SW of Fourth – (831) 238-7598, seablushstudios.com

Since opening Sea Blush Studios in 2022, proprietor Heather Palmer has become a multiple Golden Pine Cone winner for home-staging and design services, a passion she equates to the natural beauty of her surroundings.

“Like the familiar, easygoing pink wildflower native to the Monterey Peninsula coastline, Sea Blush Studios found its roots on the Central California Coast,” she wrote on her website. “Though beautiful, the flower is extremely hardy and well-equipped to handle the elements, just as our team is able to take the ever-changing climate in real estate and give our clients the edge.”

Palmer’s specialty at Sea Blush Studios is helping clients prepare their homes for market in innovative, aesthetically pleasing ways, and she prides herself on designs that fit any budget.

Best Home Technology

House Wires — “Serving the greater Monterey Peninsula” – (831) 659-8324, housewires.com

This award-winning local business has been satisfying Monterey County’s technological needs for more than 20 years by adhering to a philosophy that any computer user can appreciate: “Simpler. It’s what we all want from technology.”

House Wires, a multi-year Golden Pine Cone honoree, specializes in cable installation, home audio systems, home automation, home theater design, smart homes, smart lighting, installation of surround sound, TVs, and total system designs.

The company’s motto — “Integrity is core

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GOLDEN PINE CONES

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to everything we do” — and its execution have been lauded by clients in Carmel, Carmel Valley, Pebble Beach, Big Sur, Monterey, Pacific Grove, Seaside, Sand City, Marina, Castroville and Salinas.

■ Best Roofing Company

Scudder Roofing — 3342 Paul Davis Drive, Marina – (831) 373-7212, scudder-roofing.com

Now in its 43rd year, this local company has guaranteed satisfaction to customers all over Monterey County, offering all types of roofing applications, including slate, custom and specialty metal, shingles, and shake roofs, as well as waterproofing, custom gutters, and more. Scudder craftspeople take pride in “going the extra mile” for clients, which is why the company boasts that more than 89 percent of its business comes from word-of-mouth referrals.

Last year, the company’s founder, Pete Scudder, along with several other local building powerhouses, helped the students at Rancho Cielo, the vocational high school in Salinas, secure first place in the Orange County Sustainability Decathlon, in which the kids’ off-grid tiny house triumphed over more than a dozen entries from colleges and universities. That’s just scratching the surface of the company’s philanthropic spirit.

■ Best General Contractor

McNickle Construction — 26425 Laureles Grade, Carmel Valley – (831) 915-3393, mcnickleconstruction.com

For owner Ryan McNickle, “high-end projects are a personal passion” as he helps design and build your new home, or your dream-come-true remodel.

“A product is only as good as its design and assembly,” McNickle emphasizes on his website. “One of the most important aspects

of a project is the ability to choose the right group of individuals to involve. We take pride in the quality of our work, as well as the organization and efficiency of a project.” McNickle Construction is dedicated to maintaining clear communication and providing daily updates throughout each project.

■ Best Painting Company

Cypress Painting and Decorating — 224 Reindollar Ave. #128, Marina – (831) 624-9018, cpdpros.com

To understand why our readers selected Cypress Painting and Decorating as their go-to service for lightening and brightening homes and businesses, just have a look at its website. You’ll see dramatic before-and-after photos of a beautifully restored Victorian home in P.G., testimonials, examples of faux finishes, interior work and even a new, epoxy showroom floor.

And, the business prompts you to wonder, do you really need new kitchen cabinets, or do you just need to have them freshened up with a new finish? Reviews highlight the professionalism, meticulous approach, friendliness and efficiency of this business that’s been around for more than four decades.

■ Best Landscaper-Gardening Service

INCA Landscape Management — 2210 Del Monte Ave., Monterey – (831) 625-0900; incalandscape.com

How’s your yard looking these days? A little raggedy and sad? Our readers think you ought to call INCA. This family-owned business, founded in the Peninsula in 1981, can handle virtually any landscaping needs with services that include landscape design and installation, garden maintenance, installation and upgrades of irrigation systems, installa-


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GOLDEN PINE CONES

From previous page

tion of walkways and driveways, cleanups, tree trimming, pruning, deck and fence installations and repairs, and more. They'll look at special projects upon request, too.

INCA strives to treat each client as an individual to custom-fit the work to the customer's needs, desires, and financial budget.

■ Best Tree Service

Tope's Tree Service – 26700 Rancho San Carlos Road, (831) 204-1703, topestree-service.com

Pacific Grove native Andrew Tope, born fourth among 10 siblings, exhibited an early penchant for making things happen, moving from a \$4-an-hour job as a 17-year-old grounds man to other moneymaking opportunities that included selling firewood and trimming trees.

He launched Tope's Tree Service with "a chainsaw, pickup truck, and lots of dreams," and still operates that family-owned business more than four decades later.

In 2013, he added Tope's Sustainable Garden Center, specializing in sustainable plants and landscaping mulch produced from the tree trunks and branches he removes through his tree service, which focuses on fire clearance, emergency tree services and storm-damage cleanups, pruning, tree and stump removal, and multiple other services.

In a town where trees are treasured, Pine Cone readers think Tope's is the company to call — and that's saying something.

■ Best Real Estate Rental Company

San Carlos Agency — 26358 Carmel Rancho Lane, No. 5 – (831) 624-3846, sancarlosagency.com

Serving the Carmel area since 1954, this local company diligently focuses on fulfilling

the needs of each individual client, helping them make the best possible decision for their specific situation.

That unwavering integrity is, no doubt, why San Carlos Agency is in its fourth generation of family ownership and operation.

San Carlos manages one of the largest housing inventories on the Peninsula, with more than 400 furnished vacation rentals, long-term unfurnished homes and condos, as well as commercial spaces for lease. Other services include property management, maintenance and accounting, and, of course, luxury home listings throughout the Peninsula.

■ Best Real Estate Lender

Chad Hawker at Synergy One — Dolores 2 SW of Seventh, Unit D – (831) 521-9378, S1L.com/branch/carmel

Native son Chad Hawker established his reputation for unrivaled dedication and work ethic a long time ago as an undefeated tennis player at Carmel High (Class of 1992) before becoming a world-ranked Ironman triathlete.

Today, he brings that same diligence and tenacity to the business world as a senior loan officer and area manager of the Carmel branch of Synergy One.

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.

■ Best Personal Bank

Chase Bank — San Carlos and Sixth, 26378 Carmel Rancho Lane and 27845 Berwick Drive, Carmel Valley – (831) 625-2400, (831) 624-8224, and (831) 625-1313, chase.com

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Besides being conveniently located downtown and right off Highway 1, Chase also has branches in Monterey and throughout the Peninsula. According to its website, when it provides financial service through personal banking, credit cards, mortgages, small business loans, investment advice, Chase Bank is able to create a personalized banking experience for each individual. Through excellent customer service, as an online review said, going “above and beyond to help solve my issue,” Chase Bank aims to support everyone’s differing financial needs.

■ Best Business Bank

Monterey County Bank — four locations, including 3785 Via Nona Marie – (831) 625-4300, montereycountybank.com

The oldest locally owned and managed bank in Monterey County, Monterey County Bank has been committed to assisting local businesses with their financial needs since 1977, from helping merchants who accept credit cards, to working with the latest payment technology and security. In addition, the bank helps new entrepreneurs and seasoned managers secure commercial and Small Business Administration loans.

Local business owners won’t soon forget how the bank — and especially then-CEO Charles Chreitzberg — lent a hand during the pandemic, assisting in securing aid through various government programs to help keep everyone’s business afloat. Chreitzberg has since become chair of the bank’s advisory board, while new president and CEO Bill Wilson, who brings more than 25 years of banking and financial experience to the job, will no doubt keep Monterey County Bank’s long tradition of local service alive.

■ Best Investment Advisor

Monterey Private Wealth

Management — 2340 Garden Road, Suite 202, Monterey – (831) 372-3426, montereyprivatewealth.com

Monterey Private Wealth Management uses its expertise and dedication to support the changes and growth in its clients’ financial lives. Through its extensive knowledge, this financial planning firm helps clients with cash-flow management, investment strategies and management, risk assessment, debt management, and business retirement plans. In addition to a wide variety of clients, including high-net-worth folks, independent women, retirees, business owners, and executives, Monterey Private Wealth Management helps local nonprofits and maintains a blog on its website that covers financial topics like Medicare, capital gains taxes and more.

■ Best Accountant

Finn & Cohen CPAs — 425 Pacific St., No. 302, Monterey – (831) 375-5166, fc-cpa.com

Finn & Cohen, a full-service accounting and tax firm, for the last three decades has provided clients locally and beyond with a team of highly educated, qualified and dedicated workers.

With services such as tax management, accounting, advisory services, trust planning, and tax preparation, the group’s mission is to “help clients maintain financial viability in the present while taking a proactive approach to achieve future goals.” The Finn & Cohen team have “years of valuable experience assisting professionals with their accounting needs.”

■ Best Veterinarian

Heart Dominguez, Romie Lane Pet Hospital — 755 E. Romie Lane, Salinas – (831) 424-0863, romielanepethospital.com

Continues next page

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

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The first graduate of Cal State Monterey Bay to be accepted to and graduate from the UC Davis School of Veterinary Medicine, veterinarian Heart Dominguez cares deeply for every animal that comes into his office. Selected by the previous owner to take over the long-established practice in 2020, Dominguez says, “Our clients and their pets are the reason we continue to thrive in the Salinas community that we have served for over 55 years!” He says of his extensive experience, “I have had the opportunity to practice medicine in high-volume, multi-doctor practices as well as in shelter medicine, and I am thrilled to now serve as the clinical director at Romie Lane.”



831.659.3417 | 16 West Carmel Valley Road, Carmel Valley

■ Best Pet Boarding

Home Away From Home Pet Spa
— 1231 10th St., Monterey – (831) 392-6296,
montereypetspa.com

Hey, if your dog’s watching you pack your bags for a trip and looks jealous, why not send her to a special spot for a spa vacation designed just for her? Home Away From Home Pet Spa is this year’s choice among our readers, and everyone knows that in this area, dogs, cats and other critters run a close second only to trees in terms of influence. Not only does this place board pets, it’ll give them a bath, trim their nails and make sure they’re having a good time.

Also, we’d like to give special mention to whoever’s responsible for bathing cats there

— you are some brave and/or crazy people. Seriously, though, with a highly trained and passionate staff there to help and care for pets, Home Away From Home is able to pamper a large variety of animal friends. The business also works with the UnChained, a nonprofit that brings struggling young people together with homeless dogs so that both can have better lives. Spa owner Joel Jensen brings positivity into the unique work environment and said on the website, “When I was a boy, I wanted one (pet) of every breed...I got my wish.”

■ Best Pet Care

Suds ’N Scissors Inc. —
223 Crossroads Blvd. – (831) 624-4697,
sudsandscissorsinc.com

It’s the fall social season — Halloween parades, dressing up for holiday photos or just gussying up for sniff-and-greets with those oh-so-sophisticated dogs one sees at the Cypress Inn or along Ocean Avenue — and your four-legged buddy wants to look at least as good as you do. They come with their own coats. The least we can do is help them keep them clean and well groomed! Suds ’N Scissors provides a variety of services for pets in the area. From bathing to specific dog breed haircuts, this spa creates a magical experience for every pet whose paws come through the door. Suds ’N Scissors proclaims itself the “area’s most elegant grooming retreat,” and obviously, our readers agree. Suds ’N Scissors has a staff of specialists ready to care for all furry friends. A professional all-breed dog show handler since he was 16, owner Todd Harris ran several other pet businesses before taking over this Carmel institution with a history that dates to 65 years ago.

■ Best Auto Body Shop

Marina Collision — 1625 Santa Barbara Street, Seaside – (831) 883-1014

Pine Cone readers and online reviewers from communities up and down the Monterey Peninsula rave about the service provided by Marina Collision, which receives numerous 5-star reviews. Customers say this small, family-run body shop takes the stress out of collision repair with work that is perfectly executed, completed on time and at reasonable prices. And where body shops are concerned, what else is there?

■ Best Dry Cleaners

DiMaggio’s Classic Cleaners —
124 Central Ave., Pacific Grove – (831)
375-6113, dimaggiosclassiccleaners.godaddysites.com

DiMaggio’s has been locally owned and operated for more than 20 years and is a fixture on Central Avenue near the border of Monterey and Pacific Grove. Not only do the folks there provide all laundry and dry-cleaning services, they do alterations as well. Wedding dresses or uniforms or Halloween costumes pose no problems. Seamstress Sue receives rave online reviews for altering all types of garments. DiMaggio’s will also happily clean those more unusual items, such as comforters. Praised for professionalism, affordability and easy parking, DiMaggio’s is “the best around,” its customers say.

■ Best Travel Agent

Carmel Monterey Travel — 2511
Garden Road, Suite B200, Monterey – (831)
649-4292, carmelmontereytravel.com

Carmel Monterey Travel is an independent, family-owned company that’s been specializing in full-service leisure and business travel for more than 40 years. Its team of travel experts brings clients decades of national and global travel experience, helping travelers not only with cruise and land

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GOLDEN PINE CONES

From previous page

vacations, but in identifying the best hotels and group tours. “We deliver unforgettable moments and provide our clients with personalized, cost-efficient services,” says the website. No service is too unusual or specialized for this team, which has access to luxury hotels, private villas, off-book private islands, high-end city apartments and exotic experiences.

Best Hair Salon

Oya Salon — 201 Lighthouse Ave., Monterey – (831) 656-0570, oyasalon.com

This sleek salon offers a full array of hairstyling services, with a deep expertise in color. Highlights, baby streaks, color balance, cellophane, and color correction are all part of the repertoire. Blowouts start at \$75 and keratin treatments at \$110. Its website and social media depict the latest styles and brands. “Oya is a hub for cultivating creativity in hair artists, makeup artists, models and photographers. We support the local community and provide the best in customer service,” owner and artistic director Brian Bode says in his online business profile. Customers praise Oya’s cleanliness and quality service.

Best Skin Care

Skin Care by Loty — 81 Soledad Drive, Monterey – (831) 917-0388, skincarebyloty.com

Owner and esthetician Loty McClain’s motto is “love yourself,” and she believes that her clients should feel beautiful, glamorous and confident. After her own struggles with acne in her youth, McClain sought training to become a California State Board Licensed practitioner. She says on her website that her “extensive experience in dermatology and aesthetics prepared her to focus on educating and empowering clients to be proactive with

the health of their skin.” McClain’s detailed skincare consultations and customized treatments include facials, chemical peels, microdermabrasion and at-home skincare regimens. She also offers facial waxing services. Her shop carries a wide array of her own Loty-branded skin care products, including cleansers, masks, serums and toners.

Best Nail Salon

Tina Nails Pacific Grove — 709A Lighthouse Ave., Pacific Grove – (831) 732-1334, tinanailspg.com

Tina Nails offers a wide array of nail and waxing services, and not just for women. This salon welcomes men and also offers services for kids, with special prices for children’s manicures and pedicures. Spa pedicures are \$40 and manicures \$25, with additional costs for special extras such as sea scrubs, foot masks, cooling gel and paraffin wax. Acrylic nails and intricate multicolored nail designs are also offered. Customer reviews praise the salon’s cleanliness and the friendly environment. Open seven days a week, it’s easy to make an online appointment, but walk-ins are also welcome.

Best Spa

Spa at Pebble Beach — 1518 Cypress Drive, Pebble Beach – (800) 877-0597, pebblebeach.com/the-spa-at-pebble-beach

This world-class, 5-star sanctuary not only welcomes guests of the Pebble Beach Resorts, it’s also open to the public daily, including holidays. This is truly a place to spend a full morning, afternoon or most of the day. That’s because a Pebble Beach spa treatment also includes use of the sauna, cold plunge and steam room, the relaxation room, an outdoor pool, indoor conservatory with cozy blankets and fire pit, and access to the juice bar and café, which serves light fare and salads. Sip a glass of bubbly by the pool. Browse a well-stocked boutique fea-

turing active and casual wear. A full-service salon is also available for nails and hair. Spa services go well beyond basic massage and include wellness rituals such as sound healing and chakra balancing. The menu of men’s services includes pre-golf warm up, post-golf

therapy and sports body work. And this is a spa where it’s a true treat to take a relaxing shower at the end of it all, with luxurious bathing products and clean, private, spacious shower rooms.

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Best Dentist

Bradford Carl — 26485 Carmel Rancho Blvd # 3 – (831) 624-2111, bradfordcarl.com

For more than three decades, Dr. Bradford Carl has served patients in his Carmel office. A repeat Golden Pine Cone winner, the well-known local dentist and his staff believe that preventative care and education are the keys to optimal dental health. “That’s why we focus on thorough exams — checking the overall health of your teeth and gums, performing oral cancer exams, and taking X-rays when necessary,” The website states. “We also know that routine cleanings, flossing, sealants, and fluoride are all helpful in preventing dental disease.” He is current on all the latest dental research and has an office outfitted with cutting-edge technology. In addition, Dr. Carl’s friendly, long-term employees are knowledgeable, helpful and always glad to check patients’ insurance benefits for coverage.

Best Dermatologist

Mary Dahl — 977 Pacific St., Suite A, Monterey – (831) 644-9740, marydahlm.com

Board-certified dermatologist Mary Dahl and her team pride themselves on providing patients with personalized and excellent care. The popular clinic offers treatment for skin cancer, infections and rashes, mole mapping and facial rejuvenation. The clinic’s aesthetician services include custom facials tailored to a patient’s individual needs that feature thorough cleansing, exfoliating, skin analysis, and serum, to “leave your skin refreshed and glowing,” facials for teens and adults with acne, and dermal infusion, which is described as a “highly effective three-in-one treatment that simultaneously exfoliates, extracts and infuses the skin with a targeted serum for your specific skin condition.”

Best Ophthalmologist

Philip Penrose — 880 Cass St., Suite 105, Monterey, and 21 Upper Ragsdale Drive, Suite 201, Ryan Ranch, Monterey – (831) 373-2275 and (831) 740-8934, eyemd-monterey.com

Previous Golden Pine Cone winner Philip Penrose is a board-certified ophthalmologist and a member of a litany of professional medical organizations, including the American Academy of Ophthalmology and the Monterey County Medical Society. Penrose does more than determine a prescription for a patient’s eyeglass and contact lenses, he provides a full range of eye-care services. “In addition to helping Monterey LASIK eye surgery and cataracts patients achieve clear vision, his clinical interests include the medical and surgical management of diabetic eye disease and glaucoma,” says the website for Eye M.D. Monterey, his clinic with offices in Monterey and Ryan Ranch.

Best Optometrist

Blink Optometry — 217 Crossroads Blvd. – (831) 250-6999, blinkcarmel.com

A full-service vision care center and a boutique optical shop, the optometrists at the Blink Optometry in The Crossroads offer full-scope optometry, from the youngest of patients, to seniors. Trevor Fogg, O.D., a Carmel native, practices full-scope optometry including the treatment of eye infections, ocular allergies, dry eye syndrome, removal of foreign bodies, and diabetic eye disease and is certified in corneal refractive therapy. Telma Barseghian, O.D., specializes in fitting glasses and contact lenses, treating eye diseases, infections and injuries, and co-manages cataract and laser surgeries with local docs and surgeons, as well as in the San Francisco Bay Area. The online reviews for Blink are glowing. “Dr. Fogg is a super optometrist,”

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GOLDEN PINE CONES

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one patient said. “I recently relocated to Carmel and needed to find a local provider. I was nervous about finding a new doctor, but I needn’t have worried: he’s friendly, approachable, and put me at ease immediately.” The patient went on to say that Fogg fitted him for glasses and contacts, and praised him for recommending a new type of soft contact lens. “His staff is also great. Thank you, Blink Optometry!”

Best Orthopedist

Christopher Meckel — 12 Upper Ragsdale Drive, Ryan Ranch – (831) 648-7200, msjhealth.com

Cofounder of the successful Monterey Spine and Joint in Ryan Ranch, orthopedic surgeon Christopher Meckel performs an astounding nearly 300 hip and knee replacements annually. With about two decades of experience in joint replacement surgery, Meckel is supremely popular, based on the hundreds of positive patient reviews, including several this month alone. “I was fortunate to have Dr. Meckel step in when I needed an emergency full right hip replacement,” one patient wrote on Google, calling the doc the “best-kept secret” on the Monterey Peninsula. “In two weeks, I had moved from bed, to walker, to cane with virtually no sign of having had a pretty major surgery. A kind, caring, knowledgeable doctor and staff.” Another patient this year said Meckel and his staff were warm, welcoming and helpful. “He took his time to look me in the eye and explain to me what he reviewed on my X-rays. He did an exam, and we were able to discuss ways to heal my injury.”

Best Pediatrician

Jill Airola — 2 Upper Ragsdale Drive, Suite B210, Ryan Ranch – (831) 333-0999, mppmg.com

Pediatrician and repeat Golden Pine Cone winner Jill Airola is warm, friendly, professional, funny (sometimes wacky), and has an extraordinary rapport with her young patients. For example, Airola may crawl on the floor of the exam office with a toddler and hand them a necklace to play with, or paint a girl’s nails — even teenage girls —to soothe and comfort them. Never one to rush an appointment, Dr. Jill, as she’s known, makes her young patients and their parents feel like they’re her only care in the world. It’s obvious that Airola and the other doctors at Monterey Peninsula Pediatric Medical Group love what they do. “Whether you are caring for a healthy newborn, a sick toddler or a busy teen, we are here to help your family thrive!” the clinic says.

Best Primary Care Physician

Gregory Tapson — 26607 Carmel Center Place, #104 – (831) 624-3077, montage-health.org/doctors/profile/gregory-tapson/

A quick internet search will tell you that Gregory Tapson is a well-liked and respected Carmel physician. Patients say the primary care doc is trustworthy, accessible and determined. One woman, who has been going to Tapson for two decades, noted a particularly lengthy period in which she suffered from an extremely debilitating condition that took nearly 10 years to diagnose. She credited Tapson for being determined to find the cause. “He never gave up in trying to find the source,” the patient said. “Unlike many other physicians, he never attributed my illness to anxiety or suggested that it might be in my head. He was always tenacious, loyal, sincere, and very smart. He’s a good man, and I am deeply indebted to him.”

Best Plastic Surgeon

Douglas Sunde — 856 Munras Ave., Monterey – (831) 372-0200, drsunde.com

Most of us want to feel better about ourselves, and many turn to professional help to make that happen. Enter Douglas Sunde, a Monterey plastic surgeon who has been awarded a Golden Pine Cone every year, including this year, from 2008 to 2023. Sunde, who is personable and takes his time to understand what patients want and to explain to them in detail what to expect, offers a long list of cosmetic and reconstructive procedures, including facelifts, neck, chin and brow lift surgeries, neck contouring, scar revision, breast lifts and reductions and Botox and fillers.

As Sunde says, “Plastic surgery is about more than looking good. For a lot of men and women, it helps correct years of discomfort, improving their comfort and quality of life.” While his surgical goal is to achieve beautiful, natural-looking results, Sunde’s ultimate

aim is to help his patients feel better about the way they look. His staff is friendly and professional, while his patients are extremely grateful. “Excellent care throughout the process,” one woman said in an online review this year, adding that Sunde communicated clearly and gave her special attention post-surgery. “My physician husband and I met with him several times before surgery,” she said. “Dr. Sunde is a highly skilled surgeon who is accessible, direct and empathetic. Ten stars!!!”

Best Physical Therapist

Claire Kristl — 26537 Carmel Rancho Blvd. – (831) 601-6007, carmelpthbythesea.com

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From previous page

A lifelong athlete, Claire Kristl, who operates Physical Therapy-by-the-Sea, has been practicing physical therapy in Monterey County since 1986. Physical therapists help patients regain functional capacity after an injury, and Kristl takes a thoughtful, research-based approach to providing care for each patient. She offers treatment for joint replacement, orthopedic issues, sports-specific retraining, golf rehabilitation, fall prevention, chronic pain, injury recovery, geriatric conditions, and other conditions.

She employs manual therapy and massage, biomechanics assessment and training, therapeutic exercise and stretching, and other techniques to help her patients reach their goals. “She is a master clinician who treats the whole body by carefully obtaining one’s personal history, assessing biomechanics that are impeding function and crafting a personal rehabilitation program for each client,” Kristl’s bio states. “Her objective is to return clients to their maximal functional level while meeting their personal goals whether it is competing in a triathlon, recovering from surgery or remaining independent at home.”

■ Best Chiropractor

Derek Barkalow — 550 Camino El Estero #103, Monterey — (831) 655-3255 ext. #3, drbarkalow.com


Monterey Peninsula native and chiropractor Derek Barkalow followed the career path of his father, Stephen Barkalow, who has been a licensed chiropractor since 1977. The younger Barkalow always wanted to contribute to the health and wellbeing of others, which ultimately led him to pursuing and obtaining a Doctorate of Chiropractic degree. On a patient’s

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GOLDEN PINE CONES

From previous page

first visit to his office, Barkalow will gather a complete medical history and perform a detailed physical evaluation. If the exam examination confirms the need for care, Barkalow will initiate appropriate chiropractic care and order any diagnostic procedures required. “Most often treatment will begin on the first visit,” according to his online bio.

“This may include manual medicine, physiotherapy, Class IV Laser therapy and many more modalities to help you return to optimal health as quickly as possible. Whatever your physical health issues may be, Dr. Derek looks forward to helping you on your path to optimal physical health and peak performance.”

Best Divorce Lawyer

Sarah Cavassa — 50 Ragsdale Drive, Suite 201, Monterey – (831) 655-6868, cavassaoconnell.com

Divorce is never easy, but having a competent, tenacious and understanding attorney can soften the blow. Experienced trial attorney Sarah Cavassa, cofounder of Cavassa O’Connell law firm in Monterey, has nearly 17 years of experience practicing law. A certified specialist in family law, certified by the State Bar of California Board of Legal Specialization, Cavassa practices family law and civil litigation and represents those experiencing divorce, custody and other issues. She also prepares and reviews premarital and postmarital agreements.

While her law firm notes that the primary goal in each case is to resolve a matter as quickly and efficiently as possible, while also achieving the best possible outcome for their clients, Cavassa and the other attorneys in her office are experienced litigators prepared to take a case to trial.

“Every case is unique, and every client has her or his personal interest in the outcome,” they say. “Whether it is an issue over tens of millions of dollars, or an issue over childcare, we know it is an issue that is important to the client, and so it is important to us.”

Best Estate Planning Attorney

Best Lawyer if You Need to Sue Somebody

Jeannette Witten — 26515 Carmel Rancho Blvd., Suite 200 – (831) 480-6608, HUDSONMARTIN.COM

The winner of two Golden Pine Cones this year, attorney Jeannette Witten, who lives in Carmel with her family, has practiced law since 1998 and is well-versed in business law and estate planning. Witten represents companies in business and corporate law matters and transactions, including securities transactions and issuances; intellectual property licensing, management, and use; mergers and acquisitions; entity counseling and formations; and trademark and copyright matters.

She has been the managing partner of Hudson Martin PC since 2013, when her firm

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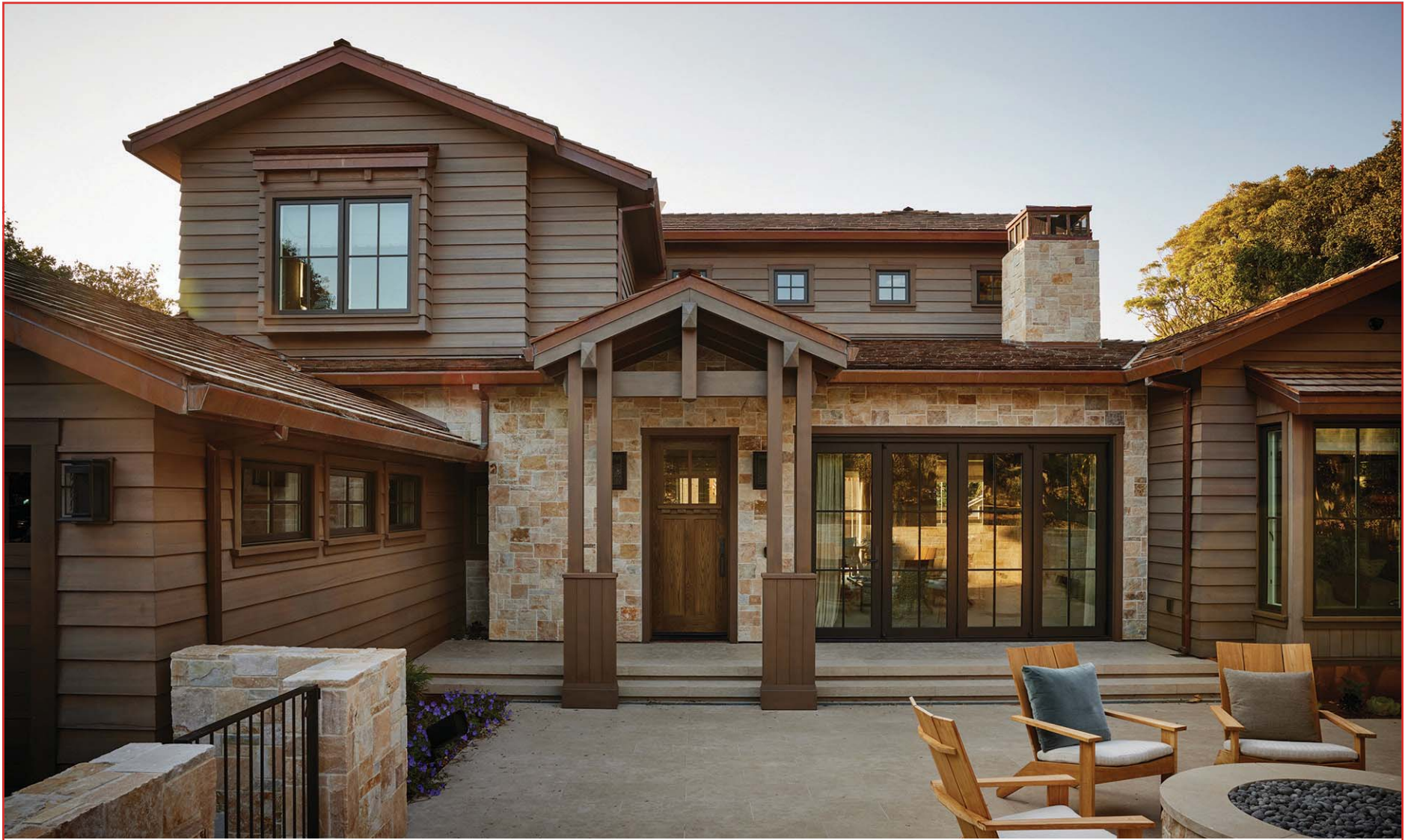
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- Ryan McNickle



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GOLDEN PINE CONES

From previous page

merged in with one of the most historic practices in California. “Under Ms. Witten’s leadership, this historic firm has connected with the next generation of entrepreneurs and lead-

ers and is now one of Monterey County’s most economically vibrant firms,” the Hudson Martin PC website says. A local restaurant owner offered an online testimonial on Witten. “I’ll never forget leaving Jeannette’s office the very first time we met with her,” the owner said. “I’ve unfortunately had a bad

taste in my mouth of dealing with attorneys over my lifetime, but I’ve never walked out of an attorney’s office being so thankful that I had the privilege of doing business with an attorney such as Jeannette Witten. I truly mean that to this day. She and her staff are always giving us not only confidence, but the most important thing for me is extreme clarity of what we are working through with extreme patience.”

■ Best Defense Attorney

Jennifer Rosenthal — 26364 Carmel Rancho Lane, Suite 201 – (831) 625-5193, jsrattorneyatlaw.com

Sometimes people find themselves on the wrong side of the law. It happens. But having a dedicated lawyer to come to your defense is not only an emotional relief, it makes navigating the complicated court and legal system much easier. Pine Cone readers this year deemed Carmel defense attorney Jennifer Rosenthal worthy of a Golden Pine Cone.

In addition to having a passion for justice, Rosenthal is driven to make a difference in the world. She truly believes in giving a voice to those who don’t have an opportunity to use theirs. One need only look to the boards of the nonprofit organizations Rosenthal has served on — Legal Services for Seniors and Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA) of Monterey County — to realize she cares about the less fortunate. Rosenthal “champions justice for all and ensures quality representation with compassionate and continued personal contact through all stages of the legal system,” her online bio says. “She has extensive experience as both a civil litigator and criminal defense lawyer.” Her boutique law firm specializes in land use, real property, business formation, cannabis regulatory work, family law, landlord/tenant law, and all aspects of criminal defense. She successfully handles complex cases and achieves favorable results for her clients.

■ Best Public Relations Company

Armanasco Public Relations — 585 Abrego St., Monterey – (831) 372- 2259, armanasco.com

Founded by David Armanasco in 1985, Armanasco Public Relations was the only formidable PR game in Monterey County for a very long time. After nearly four decades, the firm — a repeat Golden Pine Cone winner — has grown to become the one of the most recognized public relations companies on the Central Coast. Armanasco Public Relations has

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GOLDEN PINE CONES

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served hundreds of businesses and organizations in various fields through the years and continues to grow and excel. In an industry built on relationships, Armanasco understands every segment of the rich and diverse Monterey Peninsula and beyond and has helped clients “enhance public perception, establish credibility, develop brand awareness, and create stronger relationships with their targeted audiences,” its website says. Among the businesses the firm has worked with are the Pebble Beach Company, Granite, Montage Health, the Cannery Row Company, Taylor Farms, Tehama Carmel and many others. In 2013, David Armanasco became a partner of California Strategies, a full-service public affairs consulting firm with extensive experience and statewide reach and depth.

■ Best Insurance Agent

Connally Farmers Agency — 404 W. Franklin St.,

Monterey – (831) 424-0829, agents.farmers.com/ca/monterey/jessica-connally

As a local Farmers agent, Jessica Connally said her insurance agency helps customers select the best coverage that fits their needs. “This process is straightforward and personalized to help make you smarter about insurance,” Connally said. “We have six fully licensed staff ready to meet, or answer a call and help you with auto, home, renters, motorcycle, business insurance and more! We love to help our customers, and our agency is always ready!” One of Connally’s customers praised her in an online review. Connally Farmers Agency “truly went above and beyond to secure a policy for me,” the female client wrote. “Despite having only a two-week window, they managed to get it done with an impressive three days to spare. The communication throughout the en-

tire process was exceptional, providing me with updates and clarity. In a nutshell, Connally proved to be absolute lifesavers, demonstrating unparalleled dedication and efficiency in meeting my insurance needs.”

■ Best Shoe Repair

Federico’s Drive In Shoe Services — 542 Abrego St., Monterey – (831) 649-3322

Few businesses on the Monterey Peninsula have been operating as long as Federico’s Drive In Shoe Service. For an astonishing 84 years, Federico’s has been resurrecting old shoes and boots. The business’ skilled workers offer a variety

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2019-2024

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of services, including heel repair, resoling, and restitching. It also repairs leather goods and luggage and offers dyeing and shining services. One Federico’s client even had great things to say about a wallet she took to the shop for repair. “Federico’s has been around forever; they never disappoint,” the woman said. “I took a vintage wallet in today for some stitching and within a couple of hours I had it back looking brand new. Prices are ridiculously reasonable, and the folks are friendly.”

Best School

All Saints Day School — 8060 Carmel Valley Road, Carmel Valley – (831) 624-9171, asds.org

Founded in 1961 in Pacific Grove by three Episcopal parishes, All Saints Day School moved to its location in Carmel Valley four years later. The pre-through-eighth-grade school, headed by Sara Brown, prides itself on a warm and welcoming community whose members are valued as the heart and soul of the school.

“Our community is built not only upon the shared commitment to education and the All Saints mission, but upon our working together in partnership and good spirit to achieve excellence,” the private school states on its website. “We take joy in our combined responsibilities to help children achieve their potential consistent with their unique gifts and to prepare them for life as citizens of the world.” All Saints explains that its academic program is shaped by an appreciation of how much young minds can understand and achieve. Teachers strive to build upon students’ curiosity while instilling a spirit of cooperation, respect for others and their ideas, and satisfaction in personal intellectual growth.

Best Teacher

Cat Meyers — All Saints Day School, 8060 Carmel Valley Road, Carmel Valley

Middle school teacher Cat Meyers is a dedicated educator and must be well loved, because our readers are pretty meticulous about the quality of their kids’ education. “I currently teach science at All Saints Day School, where I have the opportunity to share my love of learning with students in grades

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

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six to eight,” Meyers wrote on her LinkedIn page. “I enjoy creating a dynamic and inquiry-based learning environment that encourages students to explore, question, and discover the natural world and their place in it.” Teaching science, Meyers said, has also made her a better scientist, as she must constantly challenge herself to improve her skills and knowledge. “For over 20 years, I have been working in education, and I am grateful for the insights, perspectives, and questions that students have enriched my life with,” Meyers went on to say.

■ **Best Principal**

Sara Brown — *All Saints Day School, 8060 Carmel Valley Road, Carmel Valley*

All Saints Day School and its staff were awarded several Golden Pine Cones this year, and that can be partly attributed to principal Sara Brown, who joined the faculty of the private school in 2004. The school says alumni, students and their parents say Brown quickly became their favorite “for her skill, kindness, humor and sharp intelligence, in a way

that her students consistently appreciated, year after year. Brown offers a message to students and parents on the All Saints website: “Confidence, character, and community are the cornerstones of what we strive to instill in our children,” she said.

“Together, as families and teachers, we walk alongside our children on this journey of growth and discovery, creating a place where both children and adults feel seen, valued, and loved.”

■ **My Favorite Nonprofit**

CASA of Monterey County — *945 S. Main St., Unit 107, Salinas – (831) 222-3965, casaofmonterey.org*

CASA of Monterey County’s mission is unquestionably an honorable one: “To recruit, train, and support community volunteers who advocate for children and youth in foster care and the juvenile justice system. To uphold children and youths’ rights and pursue a safe and permanent home while providing the support, empowerment, and resources needed to heal and flourish into adulthood.” Volunteers with CASA of Monterey County are dubbed “court-appointed special advocates,” and they advocate for children in foster care and the juvenile justice system to help break the cycle of abuse and neglect. Those interested in becoming a CASA can start by applying on the nonprofit’s website. An interview and a background check are scheduled, and those selected undergo five weeks of training, with classes held twice weekly.



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