



# THE REBIRTH OF HOTEL CALIFORNIAN

*Designer Martyn Lawrence Bullard's exotic twist on a Santa Barbara landmark*

BY DAWN MOORE | PHOTOGRAPHY BY DOUGLAS FRIEDMAN

UPON CHECKING INTO A HOTEL, tradition dictates a stop at the front desk. However, traditions are merely suggestions at the Hotel Californian. Hence, no front desk. Which is of little interest anyway when gazing at the startling black and white chevron coffered ceiling or intricately tiled floor. If in fact you are staying, a hotel representative can swipe your credit card, create a key and check you in from an iPad while you stay nestled in an oversized modernist wingchair.

Owner Michael Rosenfeld knew exactly what he wanted when he embarked on the reinvention of this 1925 Santa Barbara landmark. And he knew AD100 designer Martyn Lawrence Bullard could deliver his vision - a heady mix of provenance, luxury and glam while still embracing the city's storied Mediterranean architecture. His wildly successful collaboration with Martyn on another fabled hotel, The Colony Palms in Palm Springs proved their chemistry was both an experiential and financial success. "The

**ABOVE** In the original hotel building lobby, a Portuguese library table "suggests" a reception desk with MLB custom designed Bugatti-style mirrors and Morocco-meets-midcentury custom floor tiles.

## By the Numbers

- 1,000,000 tiles used
- 27 tile patterns
- 121 rooms
- 3000 guests a month
- 425 average square feet in guest rooms
- 10 dishes at Blackbird featuring seafood
- 800 Mashrabiya panels
- 1 unique shade of Moroccan blue in the spa Marjorelle
- 250 steps to the beach

**ABOVE** The hotel's entrance captures Santa Barbara's Mediterranean architecture accented with Moorish black and white marble tiles. **LEFT** In the ballroom, seven different MLB-designed wallpapers for Schumacher were decoupage together to create a Marrakech palatial-style wall treatment. Custom designed limestone fireplace.



**ABOVE** In one of four different themed bedrooms, the signature encaustic tile work Bullard used throughout the hotel creates another layer of pattern against his leather upholstered beds and bronze cobra wall sconces.

**RIGHT** The custom-tiled pool deck boasts the most sweeping ocean views of any hotel in Santa Barbara, with deep lounging beds and pillows inspired by Bullard's travels to Africa.



**LEFT** The spa's domed ceiling was painted to resemble Yves Saint Laurent's Marrakesh villa, Marjorelle - for which the spa is named. Floors and fountain pedestal are covered in a traditional mosaic of Zelig tile imported from Fez.

direction Michael and Martyn took together was to create something special that is part of Santa Barbara yet unique," notes general manager Warren Nocon. "They agreed that everywhere you turn should have an air of quality. And surprise."

Rich in textures and patterns, the color palette is strikingly monochromatic with accents of warm terra cotta, brass and the gleaming wood of custom Mashrabiya panels. "The hotel's look was derived from the architectural spirit of Santa Barbara, but to feel sexier and more modern," Martyn says. "So, I looked to a Moroccan flavor with furniture influenced by the 1950s Italian masters like Gio Ponti."

This Italian-riviera-meets-American-riviera by way of Tangiers aesthetic is at once fantastical and familiar. However, fully realizing Rosenfeld's vision for this waterfront destination meant adding two buildings to the complex creating a bustling paseo. The master plan was executed by the Santa Barbara-based architectural firm of Design ARC with Lawrence Bullard's influence apparent in details like oil-rubbed bronze fixtures and tile risers.

Even the two hotel restaurants - Blackbird (yes, after the Beatles' song) and Goat Tree (named for the famed Moroccan goats that graze in trees) - are wrapped in a theatrical black and gold geometry.

But the crown jewel of this property is undoubtedly the spa. A signature Lawrence Bullard dream-like experience; both sexy and exotic yet soothing. "Spas should be a space that transports you somewhere you can be relaxed; serene and magical. A sanctuary with an element of fantasy," say Lawrence-Bullard. And as planned, the Hotel Californian delivers an experience that will dazzle the most seasoned world traveler. **CH**

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