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## THE GREEN ISSUE

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# Green Getaway: California Coast

A Glam Girl's Guide to Going Green

+ Writing | Catherine De Orio + Photography | Gregory Goode

I recycle, turn off the lights and eat organic foods. That said, the only shade of green I can be accused of being is that of a jaded urban dweller. I like my creature comforts — hemp sheets not included. With an eye toward eco-luxury, I set out to see if it was possible to successfully combine my pleasures with my principles. So in this quest to become green, I headed to the Golden State, starting off in San Francisco before heading north into Sonoma and then south, right into Los Angeles.

Flying from Chicago to San Francisco was a remarkably un-green beginning to my journey: I much prefer a Christian Louboutin footprint to a carbon one and was dressed accordingly. Upon arrival, I picked up my spacious Hybrid GMC Yukon (for a long ride, size does matter) and headed to **The Orchard Garden Hotel** (415.399.9807 | Theorchardgardenhotel.com). It was the first hotel in California to earn the coveted LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) certification; these days, "green luxury is not an oxymoron," says Stefan Muhle, the hotel's GM. "It's becoming a standard." In this case, The Orchard Garden is the gold standard, with its key card energy control system, compact fluorescent lights, in-room recycling systems, 100 percent washable

linens (no dry cleaning chemicals here) and **Roots**, the in-house restaurant that focuses on locally sourced, organic ingredients. To further enhance the experience, book a suite with a private terrace and city views — at the very least, other guests will be green with envy.

In San Francisco, one can throw a stone and hit an organic restaurant (although I'd prefer my guide be used instead). Like many of the films it plays on its wall, **Foreign Cinema** (415.648.7600 | Foreigncinema.com) is an oldie but goodie. Gaze at the stars (in the canopied outside dining area), a film or a date, all while feasting on seasonally inspired fare like artichoke and green bean salad with oil cured olives, lemon vinaigrette and parmesan or Northern halibut with white corn and chanterelles in a fig vinaigrette. My experience, much like the Fellini film playing while I dined, was imaginative and richly textured with flashes of fantasy. Nearby, **Farina**, a relative newcomer to the scene, (415.565.0360 | Farinafoods.com) serves delicious handmade pasta dishes. And in a city that does, in fact, sleep, head to **Nopa** (415.864.8643 | Nopasf.com) for rare San Fran late-night dining. The hotspot serves filtered water (in lieu of bottled) and dishes made with locally farmed ingredients.

Interested in polluting (your body) and helping the environment? At **Yield** (415.401.8984 | Yieldsf.com), it's possible; touted as the city's first green wine bar, the watering hole pours eco-friendly wines made from organically and biodynamically farmed grapes. (The interior design is eco-smart as well.) Or choose **Elixir** (415.552.1633 | Elixirsf.com), which serves organic beers, wines and cocktails. My recommendation: their margarita that's made with organic tequila, lime juice and agave nectar. It's so good, one might forget they are being bad.

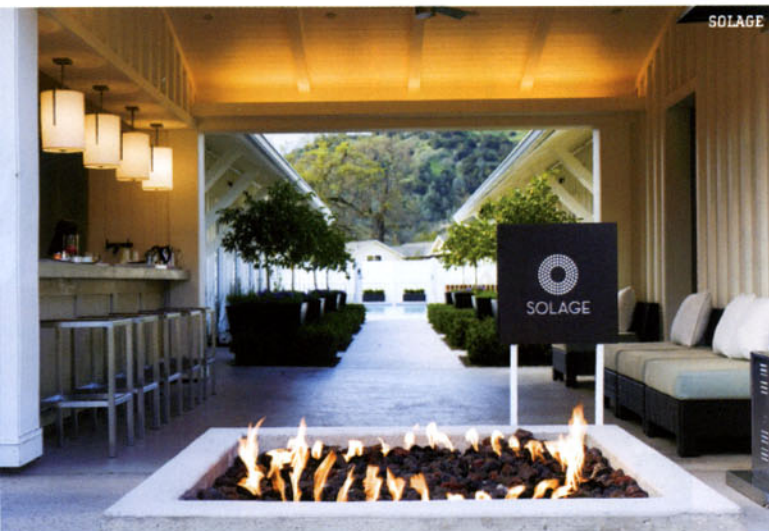
After my city time in San Francisco, I headed north to Sonoma's greener pastures. My first stop was in **Sausalito at Fish** (415.331.FISH | 331fish.com), known for its dedication to sustainable seafood and organic produce. Sit outside overlooking the harbor and enjoy daily specials that range from wood-fire grilled Arctic Char to Sand dabs with béarnaise drizzled asparagus.

Arriving at **Solage Calistoga** (866.942.7442 | Solagecalistoga.com), I was immediately calmed by the serene location ... until I was put on a bike tour of the resort. My rules are usually quite simple: stationary bikes, yes. Moving ones, no. That said, the property was

spectacular, thanks to manicured, sustainable landscaping, fire pits encircled by cozy seating clusters and a magnificent pool surrounded with palm trees and cabanas. The modern studios are made from natural, sustainably farmed and recycled materials. Think "Napa Barn meets San Francisco loft." This city girl felt right at home.

At the onsite **Spa Solage**, the Mudslide treatment offers a playful twist on the region's long-standing tradition of mud baths and geothermal water therapies. Although I could have used a cocktail after my bike tour, I opted instead to have the "mudtender" whip me up a lavender mudtini (infused with essential oils to soothe my overly-taxed body). Next, I got down and dirty and baked in nutrient-rich mud in a private sauna. After rinsing, I soaked in geothermal water laced with aromatic oils before coming to rest in a warm blanket cocoon on a sound chair they told me balances the nervous system and brings a zero-stress state through vibrational healing. All this hard work made me hungry.

The surrounding environs are rich with dining options, but I was enticed to stay put. The resort's **Solbar** features delicious upscale cuisine and a menu that changes frequently to ensure that everything being used is seasonal.



Executive Chef Brandon Sharp says simply, "We serve the best of what the valley has to offer." It is difficult to pick favorites off the tasting menu, but if I had to choose, the flavors of the grilled quail served over a bed of creamy grits, Tuscan kale and smoky bacon jus melded harmoniously — and matched perfectly with my glass of Joel Gott alakai. The morning meals rival those at dinner (duck confit hash anyone?), so as I packed to leave, I shook my head in disbelief upon hearing a frog singing a tale of woe. Sorry,

Kermit, but I'm not buying it: When visiting Solage, it's very easy being green.

Organic vineyards abound in this area, and my first stop was at the **Staglin Family Vineyard** (707.944.0477 | Staglinfamily.com), which is certified organic and uses 100 percent solar power for the winery. This property has even attracted stars like Christina Aguilera, who was married here. So there you have it — organic- and diva-certified. Nearby, there's also the certified biodynamic and sustainable **Benziger Family Winery** (888.490.2739 | Benziger.com), which offers daily tours.

Heading down the winding two-lane highway through Big Sur, it would be easy to feel as if life were a Cary Grant film — oversized sunglasses and headscarf are a must. The serene, chaparral-covered, undulating curves of the Santa Lucia Mountains majestically rise from wooded canyons and stand in stark contrast to the wind whipped waters of the ocean.

Set back from the highway amidst a grove of historic oaks is the charming hotel **Glen Oaks** (831.667.2105 | Glenoaksbigsur.com). Built in 1957, it has been redone to stay true to its mid-century modern roots, incorporating a green sensibility with modern aesthetic. Indoor-outdoor living permeates every aspect of the décor: bamboo floors, Peroba wood furniture

and stone showers. Luxurious details also abound: radiant heat bathroom floor, organic cotton sheets and free wireless Internet. King rooms are desirable for their private sitting area with indoor-outdoor fireplace.

Just down the road is the enchanting **Ventana Inn & Spa** (831.667.2331 | Ventanainn.com). Even though it is currently

undergoing renovation, parts of the property are still open, including its restaurant, **Cielo**. The outstanding wine list is primarily from the Central Coast, and the food is locally sourced. The smoky provolone, salty Serrano ham, roasted red peppers, slightly bitter artichokes and tannic cabernet vinaigrette in the antipasti play a symphony on the tongue, while the glazed Sonoma duck breast with cognac jus melted into my taste buds, sating my hunger while seducing me to indulge further. For dessert,



opt for a truly decadent treat, **Esalen Institute's** (831.667.3000 | Esalen.org) hot springs, which are open to the public only between the hours of 1-3 a.m. Reservations are necessary, clothing optional (the water is hot indeed!).

After a meandering trip through the verdant Santa Ynez Valley, I arrived, with trepidation, at **El Capitan Canyon** (866.352.2729 | Elcapitancañon.com), a campground. My fears were allayed, however, when I arrived at my cabin that was complete with a Jacuzzi hot tub, fireplace and kitchenette — and the ability to order a masseuse to my room! This is truly my kind of roughing it. The grounds are mainly constructed of reclaimed wood and contain an organic farm that supplies their café. Tempting as the café was, my true nature won out, and I headed to **Bella Vista** in the **Four Seasons Biltmore Resort** (805.969.2261 | Fourseasons.com). Their philosophy is to use the freshest ingredients from their own or local farmers' gardens and pair them in a way so the flavors speak for themselves. What a chatty bunch; each dish called to be tasted. The pancetta and truffle wrapped free-range chicken with white bean and ham hock cassoulet was especially delish. This camper felt quite pampered.

During the day, do this region organically by stopping by one of these certified organic vineyards: **Alma Rosa Winery & Vineyards** (805.688.9090 | Almarosawinery.com) and **Sunstone Vineyards and Winery** (805.688.9463 | Sunstonewinery.com).

When I arrived at my final stop, I chose to stay in genuine LA style at **The Ambrose** (310.315.1555 | Ambrosehotel.com), which promotes healthful living with all the features expected from green hotels. It takes it one step further, however, offering eco-chic touches like Starbucks' fair trade organic coffee, Aveda natural bath products, onsite hybrid car rentals and Italian bed linens. President Deirdre Wallace believes that nothing needs to be sacrificed to have a green hotel. Which is perfect for me, since I want it all. In a city of smog, this hotel is a breath of fresh air.