

AUBERGE

l'art de vivre

VOLUME 17

WINE COUNTRY SECRETS

TOP PLACES TO
EAT AND DRINK

EN ROUTE

CYCLING THE
TOUR DE FRANCE

CARRY ON

MUST-HAVE
DESIGNER LUGGAGE

RESPONSIBLE LUXURY

SUSTAINABLE SERENITY AWAITS
YOU AT SOLAGE CALISTOGA





GREEN, NATURALLY

SOLAGE HELPS THE ENVIRONMENT BY BECOMING PART OF IT

By Phil Barber

PHOTOGRAPHS BY TRINETTE REED

IMAGINE LYING IN A HOT MINERAL BATH, THE STEAM SLOWLY PUTTING YOU AND YOUR PORES INTO A PEACEFUL STATE, AND YOUR MIND AMBLING. NOW HERE'S A TRAIN OF THOUGHT FOR THE NEXT TIME YOU TAKE A SOAK AT SPA SOLAGE AT SOLAGE CALISTOGA IN NAPA VALLEY: WHERE DID THIS WATER COME FROM?

The hot water for these thermal baths, and for Solage's heated pools, comes out of two wells on the property, part of the geothermal abundance that has made Calistoga a spa destination for 150 years. (Don't miss the Spa's exclusive Mudslide treatment before or after a soak.) In fact, the five Spa buildings here, where over 27 types of massages and body renewal treatments are offered, are warmed by radiant heat from the pipes carrying the super-heated liquid, which exits the ground at 212 degrees. The hot water is more than a local quirk. It's symbolic of Solage Calistoga's commitment to green innovation, and to blending seamlessly into its surrounding environment and community.

Similar examples abound throughout the property. Solar panels atop each of the resort's main buildings fulfill about five percent of Solage's total electricity needs, reducing grid consumption and carbon dioxide emissions. Guests are invited to reuse their linens, and their bathrooms are replenished with locally



TRANQUIL SETTING

Taking a dip, opposite page, in the heated pool at Solage Calistoga can be a daily pleasure.

handmade soaps and lotions packaged under the Solage brand. The resort uses low VOC-emitting paints, non-toxic cleaning products, and natural building materials like hemp, jute, stone, and reclaimed timbers. The salt-based pools require almost no chlorine disinfectant. Older Spa linens are repurposed—sheets go to a local homeless shelter and towels go to an animal shelter.

The Solage grounds are landscaped with indigenous, drought-tolerant plants, and nourished with recycled water—a relationship that allows the city of Calistoga to put to good use the excess treated water it builds up during the summer months. The exterior lighting is low-wattage and close to the ground to cut down on the light pollution that might confuse migrating birds and dim the view of the California night sky.

Simply put, Solage aims to be as clean and responsible a neighbor as you could hope to have in a full-service, 89-unit resort. "This property was built from the ground up, and we were able to really think about the things



EASY DOES IT

From top: Rippling streams of running water, a relaxing couples massage, and the resort's landscape and surrounding mountains create a serene ambience.

that were important to us—to focus on a new brand, if you will,” Auberge Resorts Chief Executive Officer Mark Harmon says. “It was great to have this opportunity.”

“From the very beginning we have strived to blend into the environment and become an integral part of our community,” adds Richard Hill, Solage General Manager. This vision of Solage, of its commitment to its environment, began even before it took shape. It is one of the primary reasons that Auberge Resorts selected Howard Backen (of Backen, Gillam & Kroeger) as lead architect of the project. Auberge wanted the Solage look to be part San Francisco loft, part Napa Valley barn. Backen, who is based in nearby St. Helena and whose portfolio includes Napa wineries such as Larkmead, Harlan Estate, and Cliff Lede, is helping to

“THE PROPERTY WAS BUILT FROM THE GROUND UP, AND WE WERE ABLE TO REALLY THINK ABOUT THE THINGS THAT WERE IMPORTANT TO US,” AUBERGE RESORTS CEO MARK HARMON SAYS.

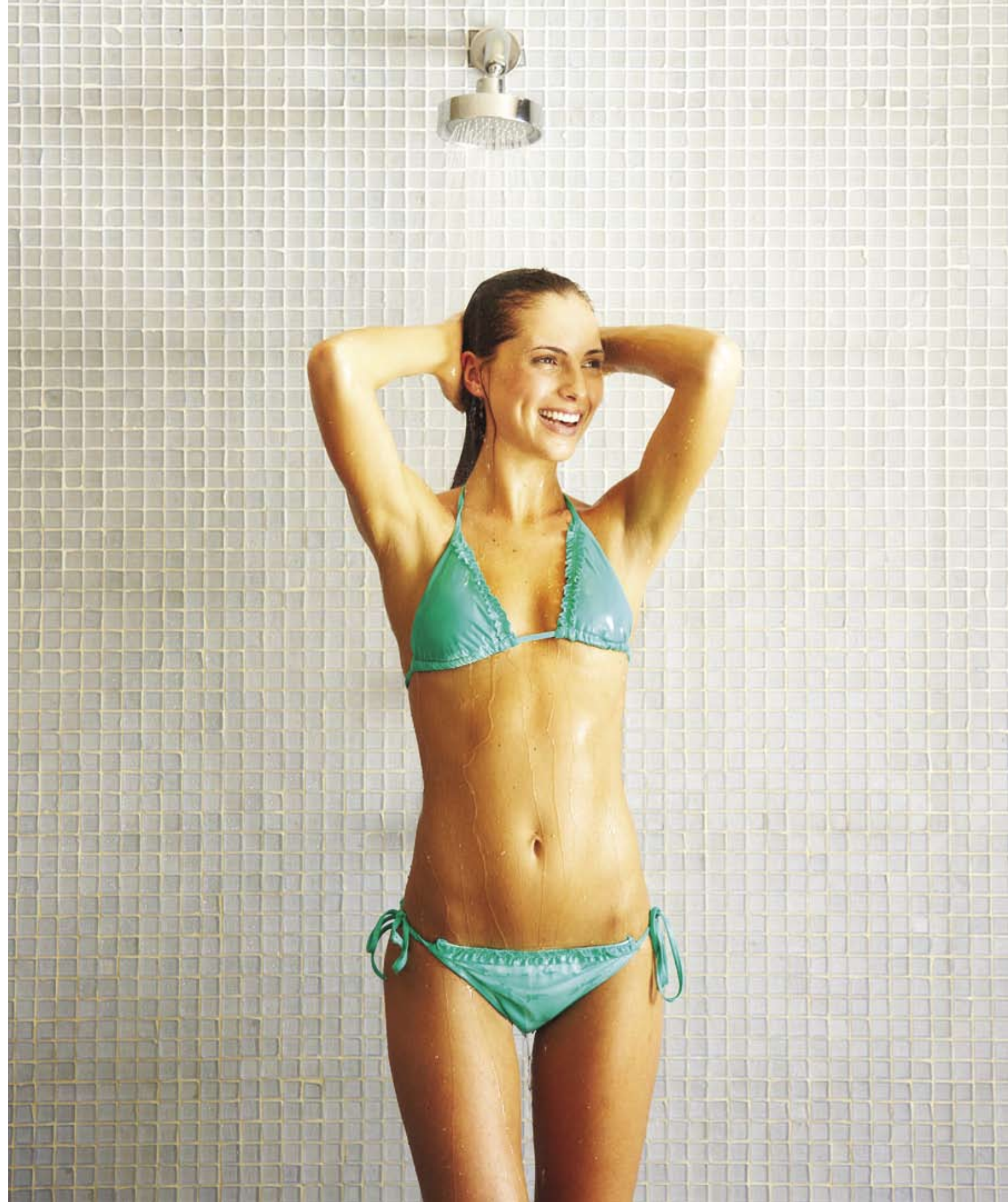
define the wine country’s architectural style, with his eye for rustic elegance and his willingness to marry projects with the surrounding countryside.

In other words, it was dosed with common sense. “Look at the guidelines of green design, and much of it comes down to things we normally consider good architecture and design,” Harmon says. “We oriented buildings in the right direction, provided shade where we needed shade, and built thick walls where we needed them to balance our weather, which can be hot in the summer and a little chilly in the winter.”

The company looked at homes in Davis, California, the university town to the east, in the Sacramento Valley, for inspiration. The weather in Davis is roughly similar to Calistoga’s, if more humid, yet the more innovative houses there relied almost exclusively on passive heating and cooling. Backen incorporated high ceilings and soaring banks of windows to maximize light, and fans and ceiling ventilation to circulate air.

Granted, the architect had plenty to work with at the Solage site, with Calistoga’s lush, wet winters and hours of sun in the summer months. There are vineyards to the south and oak-studded hills just across the Silverado Trail to the east. Those features stand not in contrast to the resort’s luxuries, but as a background palette.

During construction, Auberge was already plotting ways to make Solage eco-responsible. One solution: pedal power. Every suite at the resort has two dedicated bicycles that guests can borrow for forays into Calistoga or down the road to wineries. Drive through town on Lincoln Avenue on any given day, and you might spot 20 Solage cruisers parked. “That was fun,”





THE SOLAGE GROUNDS ARE LANDSCAPED WITH INDIGENOUS, DROUGHT-TOLERANT PLANTS AND NOURISHED WITH RECYCLED WATER.



INDULGENCES
Clockwise from top left: from furry friends to plush guest rooms to leisurely bike rides—Solage is about pleasure. The luxe pool area, opposite.





REUNION
Below, left to right: Executive Chef Brandon Sharp; the tree-shaded grounds. Opposite page: Cycling is the Solage staff's preferred mode of transportation.



NOWHERE IS THE GREENING OF SOLAGE MORE EVIDENT THAN AT ITS MICHELIN-STARRED RESTAURANT, SOLBAR, A FAVORITE OF LOCAL FOODIES, VINTNERS, AND AREA VISITORS.

Harmon says of the bike concept. “We do that at one other Auberge property [The Inn at Palmetto Bluff], and I wish we could do it everywhere—we will.”

Solage staff members are also in the habit of cycling around the 22-acre property while housekeeping, or depositing guests at their rooms. Such efforts are probably second nature to a team that receives “green bucks”—tradable for mugs, meals, and overnight stays—for presenting new ideas on sustainability.

Nowhere is the greening of Solage more evident than at its Michelin-starred restaurant, Solbar, a favorite haunt of local foodies, vintners, and area visitors. This isn’t just because of the solar panels atop the dining room or the fuzzy, multi-shaded carpeting made of recycled plastic. Executive Chef Brandon Sharp and his kitchen team grow many of their own vegetables and herbs in the Solage garden. Of the produce sourced off-site, upward of 95 percent is organic, and all of the meats are hormone- and antibiotic-free. Many of the ingredients are local, too, which means a smaller carbon footprint.

Of course, the program is consistently being fine-tuned. The Planet Solage committee meets monthly to brainstorm ways to get even greener and to set tangible goals for reducing consumption, and the Auberge

executive committee convenes quarterly to review the company’s environmental initiatives.

A while back, for example, someone noted that guest rooms were regularly stocked with two plastic water bottles at turndown. Hydration? Good. Nearly 40,000 plastic bottles generated each year? Not so great. Now Solage offers washable, reusable glass receptacles that are stamped with the Solage logo and replenished every evening with house-filtered minted water. Solage has also launched a composting effort. The resort now composts about 3.68 cubic yards of organic material a week to go along with its 7.45 cubic yards of recyclables. And last June, Solage went phosphate-free in all of its laundry detergents, fabric softeners, and whiteners. Next, Solage would like to get LEED certified, the U.S. Green Building Council’s system of recognizing environmentally friendly construction practices.

Moreover, as part of its Earth Day events on April 22, Solage hosted an organic wine tasting and a family-style dinner. But the resort’s efforts to give back continue all year—Solage contributes \$1 of each reservation to the Napa Valley Vine Trail Coalition, a non-profit that aims to build 44-miles of walking and biking trails from Calistoga to the Vallejo Ferry on San Pablo Bay.

The tourist industry has noticed Auberge’s efforts.



Solage received a Green Design Award from *Hospitality Design* in 2008, and other inns have begun to follow its lead. “It’s undoubtedly a star among green hotels,” says Patricia Green, president of the Green Hotels Association.

The big question: Do Solage’s guests care about all of this healthy-planet stuff? Anecdotal evidence suggests they do, though the reasons for choosing Solage are undoubtedly complex. With its range of outstanding amenities and its idyllic environment, the resort is highly attractive to families and couples alike.

You can’t pigeonhole the Solage guest, but certainly many of those more adventurous travelers savvy to

SOLAGE RECEIVED A GREEN DESIGN AWARD FROM *HOSPITALITY DESIGN* IN 2008, AND OTHER INNS HAVE BEGUN TO FOLLOW ITS LEAD.

environmental issues are in tune with the resort’s efforts. A pretty good rule of thumb: No one comes to Solage because of the composting. But you can bet that a lot of its guests notice that they aren’t tossing plastic bottles into the recycling bin each morning.

And really, that’s the beauty of the Solage ethos. The more you dig into its conservation, responsible practices, and commitment to community, the more there is to like. Those who really get hooked can get involved with the Vine Trail. But if you’re simply looking for a quiet weekend, and perhaps a full-body exfoliation treatment at Spa Solage, the resort doesn’t beat you over the head with a sustainably harvested, FSC-approved piece of post-consumer reclaimed lumber.

“You can put out a placard, ‘If you don’t want to change the sheets’ and all that, but really, that’s greenwashing. That’s just a token effort,” Harmon says. “We didn’t want to say, ‘look how great we are.’ We’d rather let our actions speak for us.” Those actions are speaking—in a neighborly whisper. ■ *Solage Calistoga, 755 Silverado Trail, Calistoga, California. Room rates from \$375 to \$895. For reservations, call 866/942-7442 or 707/226-0800; solagecalistoga.com.*



IT'S THE DETAILS
Spa Solage's Relaxation Porch, above; a sample of Solbar's award-winning cuisine, left. Opposite page: Sipping morning coffee before a busy—or lazy—day.