

In the ZONE

While still sparkling with the same starry glamour it's always had, California's **Santa Barbara** has a fresh buzz, thanks to the emergence of the Funk Zone – an artsy neighbourhood hub drawing in creatives of all stripes



Words by AMIRA HASHISH

Santa Barbara's reputation precedes it. Mention that you're going and you'll get glowing reviews from anyone who's been. After all, with its endless sunshine, sandy beaches and world-class wineries, what's not to love? But California's old charmer has a new edge, fuelled, in recent years, by the creative set that has grouped in the Funk Zone, a once run-down district that spans the space between the ocean and Highway 101.

Just across the way from the Amtrak station stop that forms part of a picturesque rail route hugging the Southern California coastline, this gateway to the "American Riviera" has become a hub of culture, food and drink. Its previous guise as an industrial, marine and manufacturing district was interrupted in the 1990s by artists looking to move their studios to more affordable plots in the city, breathing new life into the abandoned warehouses that now serve as must-visit galleries and shops.

Artist Lindsey Ross, aka The Alchemstress, was an early adopter. The photographer, who works with the process of wet-plate collodion and set up her studio in a corrugated-metal barn, says the area is at the core of her practice and her favourite place in the world. ▶▶

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“When I first moved here, my studio was kind of a home base to my group of friends, who were also my art community,” she says. “As the neighbourhood has grown, we have grown as artists and entrepreneurs. For example, Catherine Gee, a designer of elegant clothing, has a worldwide presence in over 100 boutiques. It started here.”

Ross cites acclaimed winemakers Dave Potter of Municipal Winemakers and Potek Winery, Matt Brady of SAMsARA Wine Co, and Drake Whitcraft of Whitcraft Winery: “We’ve known each other since the beginning of our careers. There are so many examples of people who have become well-respected leaders in their field. R Nelson Parrish is a sculptor whose work is on display in many museums and private collections. I knew Scott Linde when he was developing his superfood company, Sun Potion. Now, it’s sold worldwide.”

Then there’s Loveworn – a shop and gallery run by stylist and seamstress Jill Johnson and pop artist Wallace Platt

– which offers one of the largest selections of vintage denim in the US, as well as couture creations. You can’t miss it: a graffiti-fronted rock ‘n’ roll warehouse that also houses Platt’s Rodeo Gallery.

“Wallace and I opened our first store in Santa Barbara in 1991. It was a creative hub for almost two decades, so we have a positive history here. After a hiatus, I recognised the start of a revolt against fast fashion – people were craving something ‘real’ again,” Johnson says.

The duo make most of the inventory on the premises, using techniques such as cut-and-sew, heat-press, patching and studding. They also have a nearby art studio, where they do all the messy stuff, silkscreening and stencilling outside, and letting things dry in the sun.

Platt describes his Rodeo Gallery as a dream project. “I wanted to have a place where every walk of life could see art without being judged on if they could afford it,” he says. “So many galleries have this boring, snobbish ‘you can’t afford

this art, so what are you doing here?’ thing. I want to inspire others and offer a cultural experience, too.”

With the art scene booming, it made sense for the region’s wine and produce to find its groove here, too. Sherry Villanueva is behind the Funk Zone’s most coveted food and drink offerings, including The Lark restaurant, Pearl Social cocktail bar and artisanal Helena Avenue Bakery.

Villanueva’s mission is to connect visitors with outstanding regional producers and makers. “We spend time at the farmers’ market, on fishing boats or in the fields, so that we can see and experience the passion of their craft and hand-select what will work best in our restaurants.”

The walkable 13-block area that makes up the Funk Zone has become the epicentre of Santa Barbara’s culture and hospitality. Use it as a base for exploring seaside Summerland, glitzy Montecito or the Spanish-style Presidio. It’s a magical microcosm that’s making waves, and having a lot of fun along the way. >>



FUNK ZONE, SANTA BARBARA // Photos by NATASHA LEE



MURAL IN THE FUNK ZONE // Photo by MAX WHITTAKER, courtesy of Visit California/Visit Santa Barbara

A Guide to Santa Barbara

STAY

BELMOND EL ENCANTO
800 ALVARADO PL, 93103
belmond.com/elencanto

Santa Barbara's grande dame for more than a century, El Encanto oozes timeless glamour. Couples, wine lovers, wellness-seekers, families, foodies and Hollywood's elite flock here to soak up the best Pacific views on the American Riviera. The luxurious bungalows and suites are set in three hectares of lush gardens. Styles of early Santa Barbara architecture and nostalgic settings remain throughout, such as the trellis-lined Arbor & Lily Pond. Sip a cocktail here, before taking the plunge in the zero-edge pool. There's a spa with ocean-inspired treatments, while the coastal cuisine is exquisitely paired with an extensive wine selection.

MAR MONTE HOTEL
1111 E CABRILLO BLVD, 93103
marmontehotel.com

Set on the site of the 1930s Vista Mar Monte, this lifestyle hotel is just steps from the beach. The final phase was completed in 2021, with LA-based design firm Beleco overseeing the interiors. Exposed beam ceilings and arches are coupled with chandeliers, terracotta and a vast ceramic tile art installation behind the reception desk, bringing Spanish-style elements into the space. Vibrant new restaurant Costa serves delicious dishes, while Café Lido is the place for breakfast or a poolside lunch. Take one of the hotel bikes along the oceanfront promenade and you'll be in the Funk Zone in minutes.



BELMOND EL ENCANTO

EAT

LA PALOMA CAFÉ
702 ANACAPA ST, 93101
lapalomacafesb.com

This pretty patio restaurant celebrates the fusion cuisine of the Californios – early Californian settlers – using high-quality, indigenous ingredients in thoughtfully crafted barbecue dishes.

GOAT TREE
36 STATE ST, 93101
hotelcalifornian.com

Pop in for a coffee or a Moroccan-inspired dish in this café by Martyn Lawrence Bullard, who also worked his magic on the Hotel Californian, in which it's housed.

LOQUITA
202 STATE ST, 93101
loquitasb.com

A love letter to the city's Spanish origins, the menu here was created with input from celebrated chef Perfecto Roche. Expect tapas, wood-fired grilled seafood and meats and superb seasonal paella.

BETTINA
1014 COAST VILLAGE RD, 93108
bettinapizzeria.com

Husband-and-wife team Brendan Smith and Rachel Greenspan serve the best Neapolitan-style pizzas and naturally leavened breads in Montecito.

HELENA AVENUE BAKERY
131 ANACAPA ST, 93101
helenaavenuebakery.com

Come here for custom-baked sweet and savoury goods en route to Santa Barbara's Urban Wine Trail. Expansive windows provide a glimpse of the kitchen brigade as they whip up breads and pastries.

THE LARK
131 ANACAPA ST, 93101
thelarksb.com

The bounty of Santa Barbara County wineries, farms and the ocean meet here, in an old fish market building, with talented chef Jason Paluska at the helm.



LOQUITA // Photo by BLAKE BRONSTAD, courtesy of Visit Santa Barbara



PEARL SOCIAL // Photo by ROB STARK, courtesy of Visit Santa Barbara

DRINK

SANTA BARBARA WINE COLLECTIVE

131 ANACAPA ST, 93101
santabarbarawinecollective.com

This is the first communal wine-tasting location where visitors can sample bottles from some of the county's best family-run producers all on one site.

PEARL SOCIAL

131 ANACAPA ST, 93101
pearlsocialsb.com

Beautifully presented cocktails, fresh oysters and live music make this a great spot to start or finish your night.

THE VALLEY PROJECT

116 E YANONALI ST, 93101
thevalleyprojectwines.com

This urban winery owned by Magan Kunin is home to a striking chalkboard map of Santa Barbara County AVAs (American Viticultural Areas). Kunin also has a new tasting room in Presidio, and is set to open another at her Goleta winery.

SHOP

THE BLUE DOOR

4 E YANONALI ST, 93101
thebluedoorsb.com

Come to browse three jam-packed floors of great-quality vintage from 14 private collectors, arranged alongside handmade goods that are all sourced locally.

FIELD + FORT

2580 LILLIE AVE, 93067
fieldandfort.com

Find essentials for elevated living in this homeware store and café, then explore Summerland's many interiors shops.

GARDE

2280 LILLIE AVE, 93067
gardeshop.com

Talented artists and designers from all around the world come together in this revamped 1920s farmhouse that has its very own chicken coop. Founded in 2012 by Scotti Sitz and partner John Davidson, the concept store is a local institution.



GARDE



SANTA BARBARA COUNTY COURTHOUSE
 Photo by BLAKE BRONSTAD, courtesy of Visit Santa Barbara

DO

STEARNS WHARF

stearnswharf.org
celebrationsantabarbara.com

The West Coast's oldest working wooden wharf offers a dazzling view of the coastline and the Santa Ynez Mountains. Find it next to the Santa Barbara Harbour, which is a great launch pad for a sea excursion. On that front, Celebration Cruises has you covered.

BEACHSIDE RIDE

santabarbara.bicycle.com
wheelfunrentals.com

If your hotel doesn't offer bicycles, use one of the many BCycle stations located throughout town, pick up a bike or Segway at one of the rental shops off lower State Street, near the waterfront, or have bikes delivered to your hotel via Wheel Fun Rentals. Cruise along the 5km Cabrillo Boulevard Bike Path in either direction, passing beaches, Skater's Point, Stearns Wharf and the harbour.

SANTA BARBARA COUNTY COURTHOUSE

sbcourthouse.org

While many consider the Old Mission Santa Barbara (aka the "Queen of the Missions") one of the region's major landmarks, the Santa Barbara County Courthouse is a close tie. Designed in a Spanish-Moorish style and completed in 1929, the still-functioning courthouse was built to resemble a castle. Its distinctive clock tower, sweeping red roof, elegant arches and sunken garden make it a popular photo spot – as well as a glorious wedding venue, beloved by locals. Inside, you can get a visual history lesson in the Mural Room, marvel at wrought-iron chandeliers and hand-painted tiles and soak up a panoramic view of the city.

THE LOWDOWN

Discover more of Santa Barbara at SUITCASEmag.com or visit santabarbaraca.com