

A Romantic Seaside Charmer in California: The Mansion at Casa Madrona



By Ann Abel
Contributor

On the Marin County side of the San Francisco Bay, the posh but sleepy town of Sausalito is often overlooked by travelers making their way from the city up to wine country. That's a shame because the seaside community has excellent restaurants, peaceful air, quick ferry service to San Francisco, fairly easy access to the gustatory pleasures and hiking trails of Sonoma and Point Reyes—and one of coastal California's most charming, romantic small hotels.

Redone earlier this year, the [Mansion at Casa Madrona](#) inhabits a Victorian mansion that was built as a private home in 1885 and listed on the National Register of Historic Places. It was sold in 1906 and became a bed-and-breakfast until World War II forced its sale and turned it into temporary lodging for military families in transit. After years of disrepair, it had its first renaissance in 1959, when new owners renovated and added a restaurant that counted Dick Van Dyke, Carol Burnett, Warren Beatty and Pink Floyd (more on them later) as fans.

But the 2014 renaissance takes it even further. The current owners brought in top architects and interior designers to create a luxurious update that marries the modern and the historic, the original Victorian moldings with top-of-line (but unobtrusive) technology. The romance and charm quotient here are higher than in the main Casa Madrona hotel, which hosts many corporate clients and is currently being renovated. (I stayed as a guest of the mansion.)

In the 11 mansion rooms (from \$609) and seven freestanding cottages (from \$509), there's a strong nod to the harbor location—not to mention terrific views of the marina and the bay, and the lights of San Francisco in the distance on a clear night, in many of them—in the cool blue-and-gray color palette. Several have outdoor space with breakfast tables. (The only downside, for some, of the mansion and cottages is that they're on a hill behind the main hotel, and once the hotel elevator stops on the fourth floor, reaching your room can require climbing six flights of stairs—"your exercise is built into your relaxation," said the front desk agent who showed me around.)

The showplace is the Alexandrite Suite, named for a gemstone said to dispel bad energy and absorb positive vibes. It's a 5,000-square-foot, two-bedroom accommodation that's designed for entertaining at least as much as for sleeping (from \$10,000). It has a huge patio with ample seating, a chef-caliber kitchen (and comes with a private chef to use it), a private gym, an office, a media center with a 50-inch TV, a wine bar with Napa and Sonoma reserve wines and a secret passageway that connects it with the rest of the mansion, for guests who want to buy out the place and invite 23 friends (from \$25,000).

(Speaking of wine, take advantage of the hotel's partnership with [Ram's Gate Winery](#), the southernmost in Sonoma and just 30 minutes away. Open only for wine club members and by-appointment tours, tastings and picnics, the winery has beautiful rustic-luxe tasting rooms, and excellent food and wine—I'm still dreaming about the shrimp with curried cauliflower and coconut foam, and the Silver Eagle Pinot Noir. And back in Sausalito, the Italian trattoria [Poggio](#), downstairs in the hotel, is superb.)

It's an unlikely pairing, this refined, classic hotel and this unruly, countercultural band, but it worked in the '60s and it works in the decor now—one more unlikely factor that adds to Casa Madrona's considerable charms.



The Mansion at Casa Madrona

Room 609, known as the Piper Room, has some of the mansion's most beautiful Victorian details, such as an elaborate fireplace.



The Mansion at Casa Madrona

The view from the master bedroom of the Alexandrite Suite



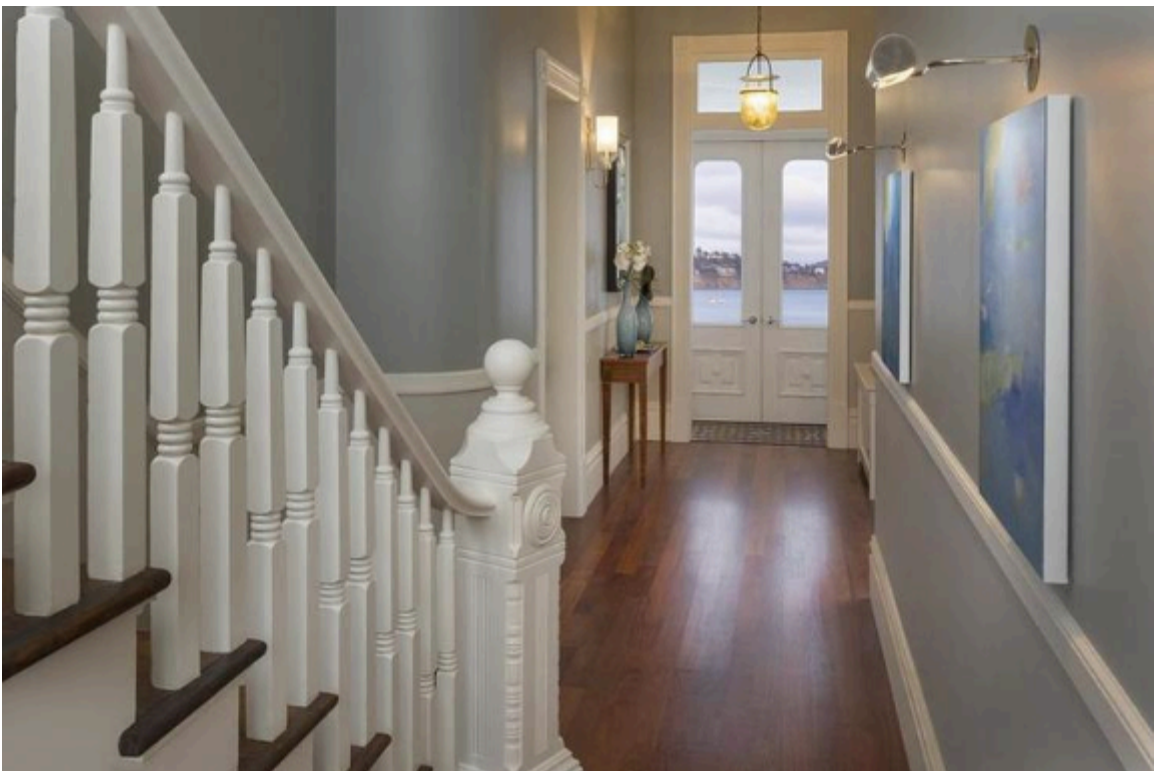
The Mansion at Casa Madrona

The balcony of the Alexandrite Suite



The Mansion at Casa Madrona

The living (or meeting or entertaining) area of the Alexandrite Suite



The Mansion at Casa Madrona

The entryway of the mansion



The Mansion at Casa Madrona

The bedroom of a standard room in the mansion