PORTOLA HOTEL & SPA

Monterey, California

BY RENEE BRINCKS

The Portola Hotel & Spa sits steps from several of Monterey's Mexican-era adobes and gardens, along a well-traveled sweep of downtown waterfront. Alvarado Street stretches south from the front of the hotel; the Monterey Bay Coastal Recreation Trail traces the coast behind the property.

"What makes this hotel so special is its accessibility to Monterey. You can walk everywhere," says Janine Chicourrat, Portola Hotel & Spa managing director. "As a visitor, you don't need to get in your car to explore. You're able to rent a bike, rent a kayak, walk down to Fisherman's Wharf for dinner, visit the Cooper Molera complex, walk over to the Monterey Bay Aquarium—there are convenient options all around us."

The shoreline location and surrounding sites provided design context for a recent project that refreshed the Portola Hotel's 379 rooms and suites. Completed this summer with creative guidance from RoseBernard Studio's San Francisco office, the updates capped off a four-year, property-wide renovation.

"The design firm did research on our destination and fell in love with the Californios and the history of Monterey. In each room, they've incorporated colors and patterns common here at the turn of the century. They also added subtle coastal touches throughout the rooms," says Chicourrat.

Those inspirations play out in the form of light wood, crisp, white bed linens, and pillows that pop with playful colors. Pale blue accents wash across select walls, echoing Monterey Bay waters. Sun splashes in through patio doors and windows. Individual accommodations offer views of scenic shoreline, sailboat docks and historic sites.

Photos: Courtesy of the Portola Hotel & Spa

(Above) Natural elements abound throughout the hotel. The lobby library features warm natural woods that create a relaxing, tranquil vibe. (Below) Guestrooms are light and bright with playful pops of color and breathtaking views.

As they outlined renovation plans, project managers incorporated suggestions from past guests and updated the property's infrastructure to better suit a modern audience. In addition to bringing more light fixtures into each room, for example, the team chose headboards with convenient built-in lighting. Crews installed ceiling fans and added air conditioning across the guest accommodations. New double-pane windows and sliding glass doors enhance energy efficiency in rooms and suites, which range from 400 to 1,000 square feet in size.

Connection points also took priority, meeting the needs of families, business travelers and convention-goers in town for gatherings at the adjacent Monterey Conference Center.

"We've all got multiple devices that we need to plug into multiple locations. And, when you're traveling with children, all of a sudden a family of four might have eight different devices to charge. We addressed electrical outlets, USB plugs and the like to make the rooms more flexible and comfortable," Chicourrat says.

The wider construction project also included lighting changes, lobby elevator upgrades, pool deck updates and swimming pool resurfacing work. Earlier rounds of the extended renovation brought fire-pit seating to outdoor venues behind the hotel. Lush living walls and well-established trees set a striking backdrop for the open-air patio spaces.

Nature also stars inside the Portola Hotel & Spa lobby, where ficus trees reach up toward a ceiling made of skylights. An atrium makeover completed early in the renovation timeline took cues from the property's coastal setting. The lobby features sea- and earth-toned fabrics, light-hued leather, copper accents and intricate lanterns suspended from above. Natural wood warms the space, and artwork reflects the patterns of the ocean.

Guests can flip through books about nature, art, architecture and travel in the lobby library, or wander into Jacks Monterey to enjoy cocktails beside a sleek fireplace. Introduced in 2017, Jacks

Living walls add color and vibrancy to outdoor dining and seating areas and also serve to visually connect the spaces with the recently renovated lobby.

The ambiance at Jacks is warm and inviting with a sleek fireplace and a chic, colorful bar that draws you in from the lobby atrium.

serves breakfast, dinner and drinks in a modern space that opens to the hotel atrium. From classic morning favorites to small bites, sandwiches and seafood served in the evenings, Jacks spotlights ingredients from local producers. The bar menu includes mixed drinks, Monterey County wines and pints from neighboring Peter B's, the hotel brewpub.

Special releases and happy-hour deals are always on tap at Peter B's. The family-friendly spot dishes up burgers, pizzas and American entrees, along with an assortment of starters and salads. Guests can order K-9 casserole and other "Bark Bowls" from the brewpub's dog menu, as well.

The Portola Hotel & Spa's dining venues, meeting spaces, accommodations and spa services, available at the on-site Spa on the Plaza, helped earn the property a spot on Condé Nast Traveler's 2020 Readers' Choice list of the top 20 Northern California hotels. This year, the hotel also recorded awards from U.S. News & World Report and from Smart Meetings magazine, which recognized the U.S. Green Building Council LEED-certified property's sustainability efforts.

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Chicourrat says the accolades speak to an ongoing commitment to comfort and guest service.

"I'm proud of how we've taken a hotel that's 40 years old and reinvented it. What crews did in the lobby and Jacks is amazing, and what the owners have put into the property is huge," she says. "They've really reinvested to remain relevant to the customer."

The Portola Hotel & Spa is located at 2 Portola Plaza, Monterey. For more information, please call 831/649-4511 or visit portolahotel.com. ■

With its direct access to the Monterey Conference Center and proximity to so many historic sites and leisure activities, the Portola Hotel's location makes it an ideal destination for travelers of all types.