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DayTripping

By Fran Endicott Miller



Photos Fran Endicott Miller

When enjoying a weekend getaway, I typically explore an entire locale with the intention of providing tips and activity ideas. I usually recommend a home base hotel and a few restaurants. And so it was that I embarked on a "Silicon Valley" weekend stay; I studied the surrounding area in preparation for recommending hiking and biking, museums, and gardens. But after checking in to my quaint, independently owned boutique hotel in Los Altos, it was clear that Enchanté was itself the destination.

The French chateau-inspired, 19 room Enchanté inn is a relatively new gem, and is alone worthy of the approximately 75-minute drive from Lamorinda. Primarily welcoming Silicon Valley high rollers during the week, Enchanté relaxes a bit on the weekends, as do the rates. It's a fantastic retreat at which to unwind and be pampered. Owner and Francophile Abigail Ahrens has created a place so elegant, so unique, and

so under-the-radar, you won't believe it exists in tiny, and tony, downtown Los Altos. And you might not believe that you're not actually in France.

Ahrens, well-known and highly regarded in the area as a top Realtor and designer of exquisite homes, spared no expense in planning, designing and decorating this French jewel in which she resides on the top floor. Many of the furnishings and décor are from her personal collection: the antique French hutch in the lobby, the dining table in the Napoléon Bonaparte-themed Campagne One Main bistro, and the chandeliers. And don't miss the Napoléon memorabilia housed behind glass in the dining room, including an authentic Napoleonic-era bicorn military hat which Ahrens picked-up at the Paris flea market. "I was told it was actually his," says Ahrens with a dubious smile. One will never know, but it's fun to imagine.

Each of Enchanté's gorgeously appointed rooms is unique, and each is lavishly and authentically decorated in a different French theme: Marie Antoinette, Musique de l'Opera, Tour de France, Cheval du Course, Chateau Du Chien and Chambre Romantique, to name a few. Many of Enchanté's regulars (of which there are several during the business week) request varied rooms during their stays, so as to experience Ahren's entertaining, and sometimes tongue-in-cheek, themed décor. Most have gas fireplaces; all have Carrera marble bathrooms (some with free standing tubs), monogrammed robes, top quality Amish-made mattresses, beautiful and sumptuously detailed curtains and linens, and windows that actually open. And if you simply can't leave home without your pooch, Enchanté provides your pet an equally luxurious getaway with pet beds, organic homemade biscuits, filtered water, food and water bowls.

Guests are also treated to a glass of wine and an appetizer plate each evening, and a full, made-to-order breakfast each morning - to be enjoyed on the outdoor patio or in the sunny dining room that features 200 year-old French timbers, a period fireplace, and limestone floors. The bistro is also open to the public, and many locals were seen there enjoying dinner and weekend brunch.

Even the most welcoming of hotels requires that you get out for a bit and walk, and the small, charming town of Los Altos begs to be explored. Both sophisticated and homespun, the few blocks of non-metered, ample parking harken to a simpler time. High-end boutiques, kitchen goods, and an old fashioned stationery store are interspersed with a 40-year-old classic deli and gourmet restaurant choices, such as the wonderful Cetrella at the corner of First and Main. Like sister restaurant Cetrella Half Moon Bay, this outpost serves flavorful Mediterranean-rim and California coastal dishes sourced from regional farms and artisanal purveyors. Dishes are dictated by the seasons and what is found at the local farmer's market, such as roasted baby beets, corn bisque, and Happy Boy Farms fritto misto. House made pastas include Bellwether Farms jersey cow's milk ricotta agnolotti, whole grain mustard fettuccine, or vegetable risotto. Entrée selections include Ora King salmon, roasted Pitman Farms duck breast, bacon wrapped pork tenderloin, or braised short rib pot roast. And don't miss the craft cocktails, specifically their Manhattan.

Be sure to stop at Manresa Bread to grab some loaves or baguettes to take home. Located at 271 State Street, this bakery - from the acclaimed Manresa team out of Los Gatos - offers amazing breads and pastries. Get there early as they often sell out.

It's likely that Los Altos has never crossed your mind as a weekend getaway local. Let Enchanté make you a convert, as it did me. C'est tres magnifique.



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