

# ARCHITECTURAL DIGEST

THE INTERNATIONAL MAGAZINE OF INTERIOR DESIGN

DECEMBER 2002

HOTELS

## On Half Moon Bay

A NEW RITZ-CARLTON FOR THE CALIFORNIA COAST



HOTELS

# On Half Moon Bay

A NEW RITZ-CARLTON FOR THE CALIFORNIA COAST

Architecture by Hill Glazier/Interior Design by Brayton + Hughes

Text by Penelope Rowlands/Photography by Mary E. Nichols



ABOVE: The Ritz-Carlton Half Moon Bay, in Northern California, “was conceived as a ‘cottage’ in the spirit of Newport, Rhode Island’s grand seaside residences,” says Richard Brayton, of Brayton + Hughes Design Studio, who laid out the interiors of the Shingle Style hotel, created by Hill Glazier Architects.

“The design strives to be more casual than the typical Ritz-Carlton while maintaining the signature Ritz quality,” explains Brayton. LEFT: Afternoon tea is offered in the intimate salon. Table skirt and loveseat fabrics from Cowtan & Tout. Jim Thompson armchair slipcover fabric.





**I**t rises up from the coast, as majestic as anything to be found in Newport or along Southampton's Meadow Lane. The landscape around it, by contrast, looks Scottish, with a roiling, melodramatic sea, jagged cliffs and perfect, pristine golf courses. For all that, the new Ritz-Carlton Half Moon Bay is very much a Northern California phenomenon: a full-service spa and golf resort on the edge of the Pacific in an area that feels blessedly remote.

In some ways the town of Half Moon Bay is an unlikely location for this new addition to the Ritz-Carlton family. An unassuming seaside community of just over 11,000, it was first settled by Portuguese fishermen and shipbuilders in the 19th century. Still largely a farming town

(its annual pumpkin festival is renowned), it's become increasingly upscale, catering to a crowd that includes commuters to Silicon Valley, just a hilly, 45-minute drive away. But the soul of the place, it seems, remains in its rolling farmland, weathered barns and roadside produce stands.

Only minutes from town, the hotel began in a thicket of controversy. Historically, Californians have furiously protected their coast from development; the fight over this particular stretch of shoreline raged on, intermittently, for 30 years. The Ritz-Carlton Half Moon Bay is the first resort to have been built on the Northern California coast in more than a decade. Many predict that it will be the last—at least on this scale.

It's no wonder, then, that the hotel's de-

**The welcoming lobby. Henredon club chairs, sofa console and low table. Federal-style chests-on-stands from Baker Furniture. Decorative Crafts andirons. Donghia fabric on Chippendale-style chairs. Club chair pillow fabric from Bergamo. Robert Allen pillow trims.**

sign works hard to minimize its presence, seeking to become part of its rugged surroundings. "The idea was always to make it a part of the bluff," architect Robert Glazier says of the 261-room hotel, built in the style of a grand seaside lodge, that he and partner John Hill, of Hill Glazier Architects in nearby Palo Alto, designed for the resort's 14 wind-swept acres. "We were trying to make it look as picturesque as possible."



Although it encompasses an astounding 298,264 square feet, the building keeps a relatively low profile. Its shape approximates, to a degree, the curvilinear contour of the cliffside, and, while it's six stories tall in parts, it gives the impression of lying close on the land. The colors of its façade—steely gray on foggy days, golden-hued on sunny ones—reflect the moods of sea and sky. The Pacific itself is omnipresent. There's salt in the air, and by the time guests arrive at the porte cochere—one of the hotel's many Hamptonesque features—they're within distant earshot of its crashing waves.

This oceanside setting made Shingle Style architecture a logical choice. Such

## The hotel's nautical theme reaches a crescendo in the boatlike Navio restaurant, with its spectacular barrel-vaulted ceiling.

**BELOW:** The mahogany-clad Navio restaurant, which specializes in coastal cuisine, features "nautical motifs, including a carpet patterned with abstract rope coils, that evoke the history of the local seaside settlements," Brayton points out. Sconces at rear from Boyd Lighting.

English antiques and Portuguese tapestries and ceramics intermingle throughout the 261-room hotel, a reference to the Portuguese shipbuilders who came to the area in the 1800s. **RIGHT:** Floor-to-ceiling windows in the conservatory allow guests to enjoy the spectacular views.



structures rose up in America in the mid- to late 19th century, particularly in the Northeast, where numerous examples remain. The style, with its asymmetrical massing and attractive detailing, was "very organic to the project," according to Glazier. "Because the site is quite irregular, broken up with different cliff faces, Shingle Style was the most appropriate choice." It lent itself particularly well to the task of making an enormous

building seem smaller. "Its elements helped us to break up the façade." To reduce the structure's apparent height, the architects, who specialize in hotel and resort design, faced its first two levels in sandstone. As for its roofline, they punctuated it "with a variety of gables, dormers and chimneys," adds Glazier.

When it came to the interiors, "the goal was to give the project a sense of reality being a seaside resort," says Richard

Brayton, of Brayton + Hughes Design Studio in San Francisco. An early, critical debate centered on when and where the ocean should reveal itself, he recalls. "We talked a lot about whether you should walk in and see the water, but then we decided that you shouldn't, that the hotel should unfold." Upon arrival, guests walk across a floor inlaid with a compass pattern, one that helps them navigate the space. (It also sounds out the





first note in a nautical theme, one that reaches a crescendo in the boatlike Navio restaurant, with its spectacular barrel-vaulted mahogany ceiling.)

In the public areas, Brayton, like the architects, worked to scale down the hotel's size. "We created rooms inside a big building that felt residential in scale." Among these is a stately lobby that, with its low lights, closely grouped seating and richly hued needlepoint carpet, is as in-

timate as a front parlor. On one side of the room is a small library that might have been airlifted from an English country house, with paneled walls, coffered ceilings and deep-toned lounge chairs and banquettes; eating dinner there, as some guests choose to do, at a leather-inlaid games table in front of a roaring fire, must rank as one of the great hotel experiences. On the lobby's opposite side, there's a frillier alternative, a salon in a

softer palette that has an almost Victorian atmosphere. In homage to Half Moon Bay's history, artifacts from Portugal, including ceramics and tapestries, can be found throughout these rooms—and, indeed, all over the hotel—as well as paintings of the California coast, many by local artists.

It's only after guests step into the much larger, relatively casual conservatory that they are brought, dramatically,





"Gracious hospitality but on a residential scale is what we had in mind," says Brayton. ABOVE: The Brian Blood oils in the library "underscore the sense of place." Donghia chair leather. Banquette pillow fabric, Beacon Hill. S. Harris games chair fabric. Andirons, Decorative Crafts.

face-to-face with the ocean. And then in the most stylized way: through a beautifully detailed wall of floor-to-ceiling windows that "has an almost turn-of-the-last-century classicism," says Brayton. "It comes out of the traditional Palladian window style. It really opens up the first floor to the view."

In the sumptuous guest rooms, too, special attention has been paid to windows. The variations seem endless—there are gables, dormers, window seats, bay windows. "Nothing impedes your view as

far as the eye can see," says John Berndt, the hotel's general manager. The irony, of course, is that the very coastal preservation rules that nearly prevented the hotel's existence seem to have guaranteed its continued appeal. If all goes well, the land around it will remain unchanged forever.

For newcomers to Northern California, the experience of rocky, fogbound beaches, rather than the golden ones more typical of the southern part of the state, may come as a shock. Even on warm, sunny days, a dip in the ocean here can be perilous, not to mention icy cold. Happily, other seaside pleasures await, most having to do with the quiet appreciation of nature—whale watching, say, or walks on the bluff. The two Half Moon Bay golf links, well-established courses on the grounds, beckon in all weather, as does the indoor pool, sheltered in a kind of greenhouse.

This is a resort that effortlessly culti-

vates the art of staying cozily indoors as well. The spa area, for example, is deliciously sybaritic, with mineral baths inspired by the ancient Romans, who, after all, knew all there was to know about aquatic decadence. Even modern California's contribution to the form—the lowly hot tub—has not been ignored. Predictably enough, the hotel's, which is situated near a crisp white gazebo and a garden earmarked for weddings and concerts, is of a more exalted kind. Guests turn up there, inevitably, at sunset each evening, absorbing the beauty around them and the sound of pounding surf. The wonder is that they ever choose to come out. □

*Ritz-Carlton Half Moon Bay  
1 Miramontes Point Road  
Half Moon Bay, California 94019  
650-712-7000*



This is a resort that effortlessly cultivates the art of staying cozily indoors.



**ABOVE:** Brayton used “light and airy” colors for a suite’s octagonal bedroom. “Each room lets you feel a connection to the outdoors.” Robert Allen desk chair, bed frame and headboard fabrics. Lounge chair and ottoman fabric from Brunschwig & Fils. Bergamo floral fabric.



**RIGHT:** “The hotel was built into a sloping site on the bluff to fully utilize the natural terrain and take complete advantage of the ocean and shoreline panoramas,” says architect John Hill. The southern guest room wing sits between the resort’s two championship golf courses.