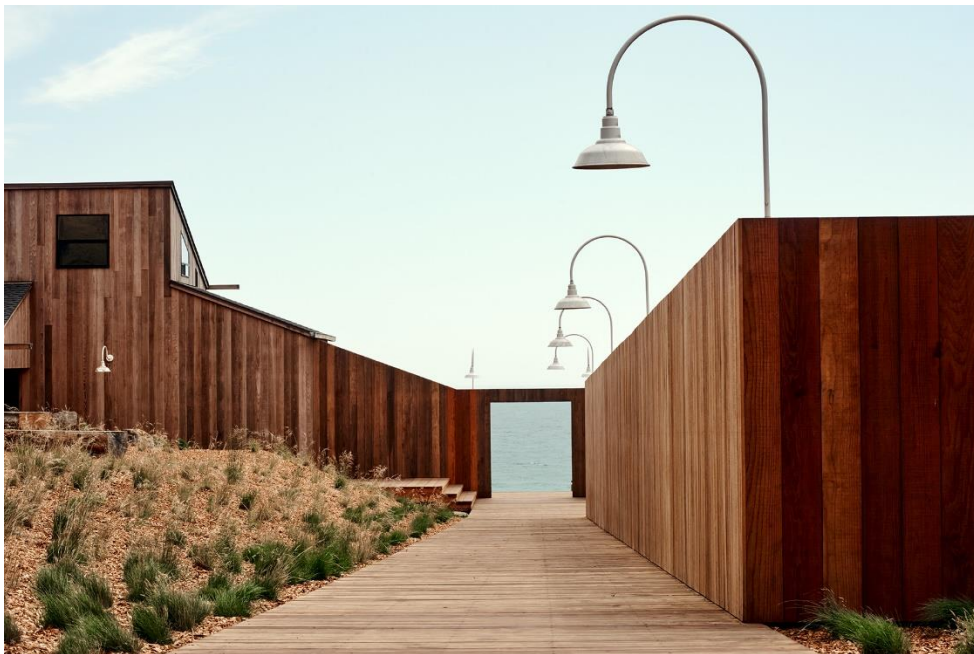


TRAVEL+ LEISURE

This Hidden Town on the Sonoma Coast Now Has a Waterfront Ranch With Some of the Most Beautiful Views in the Country

Welcome to the newly transformed Sea Ranch Lodge.

By **Leilani Marie Labong** February 16, 2022



Along Northern California's wandering Highway 1, a nostalgic wayfinder signals, in can't-miss-it oversize Helvetica font, the turn-off for the newly transformed [Sea Ranch Lodge](#). Crested atop a 53-acre rolling meadow that softly descends to the jagged coastal shelf these parts are famous for, the 1964 building was recently restored by Seattle-based architecture studio [Mithun](#). The resort in Sea Ranch, California reopened to the public last fall after a lengthy closure.

"The Lodge is a historic building, and one that a lot of people care about, so we tried to have the lightest touch possible, in a way that people would almost *not* notice a change," says architect Sade Borghei, whose intent recalls the original Sea Ranch founders' north star for the midcentury bluff-top enclave: "Living lightly on the land."



This ideology, often attributed to the area's Indigenous Pomo nation, shaped the iconic design of [The Sea Ranch](#) (TSR). Buildings are clad in weathered, local redwood that ultimately blends into the primeval landscape, while sloped shed-style roofs nod to both the naturally aerodynamic cypress hedgerows and the area's broad-shouldered agricultural buildings. There's even a historic livery stable from the 1870s, located just downhill from the Lodge, a relic from the 10-mile-long, 7,000-acre precipice's former life as a livestock ranch and timber operation.



"The Sea Ranch is made of buildings that become part of the landscape rather than dominate it," says architect and [UC Berkeley professor emeritus Donlyn Lyndon](#), one of the founding fathers of the iconic, nature-integrated development, established in 1964. "And that have something to do with each other rather than being individual, show-off structures." Still, the 10,000-square-foot Lodge is the undisputed "big building on campus," admits Lyndon. What's more, Borghei's aspirational "light touch" was no easy feat considering the original Lodge endured decades of ill-conceived renovations

that detracted from the property's most important asset: the breathtaking panorama of the Sonoma Coast's untamed wilds, from wave-chiseled bluffs to gale-whooshed, grassy meadows.



Stripping away the gratuitous architecture created an open flow within the Lodge 2.0. And if loyal patrons haven't noticed any major changes, perhaps it's because Mithun's renovation is simply more intuitive and attuned to nature, as the original architects intended.

What's more, each space is now either drenched in natural sunlight (as in the Dining Room, sometimes co-opted for alignment-focused yoga with Bay Area transplant and [lyengar instructor Lisa Ruby](#)), or softly anointed by it (like in the [cocktail lounge](#), where the Hot Spot, a jalapeño-spiced margarita, is the drink of choice).



Just inside the front doors, a vintage red-arrow "Supergraphic" seems to point the way to [The General Store](#), newly raised to the lobby level for easier access to the highly curated trimmings of the TSR lifestyle. Inside, guests will find branded spoils like colorful Poketo pens, insulated water bottles, and fleece-lined sweatshirts all emblazoned with TSR's official logo – Ram's horns, in honor of the land's resident grazers.

These iconic [Supergraphics](#) – joyful postmodern designs of simple geometry and primary colors – were originated at TSR by the now-93-year-old San Francisco artist [Barbara Stauffacher Solomon](#) in the mid-1960s to take the edge off the often-squally coastal climate. Moonraker, TSR's residents-only athletic club, contains some of the most photographed Supergraphics, from the [blue "wave"](#) bedecking a stairwell to what's commonly viewed as [a bullseye in the men's locker room](#). Solomon admits that her inspiration was actually a "lady's bosom."

"Supergraphics are a great contrast to The Sea Ranch's desire to be so 'goody goody' with nature," she says. In celebration of the Lodge reopening, the artist painted a fresh design above the bar. Called "Land(e)scape," the piece depicts an array of black, dark-green, and red diagonal lines traveling across two planes, an abstraction of a winter sunset reflected upon the mysterious, briny water.

If you're lucky enough to witness such a dazzling dusk, the Adirondack chairs on the redwood deck are among the best seats in the house. Only when the sun has set in sensational fashion should you return indoors to peruse the art exhibit by rotating designers and artists – Solomon's work kicked off the series in December; Lyndon's travel sketches took over the gallery space in January; and married Big Sur painters Erin Lee Gafill and Tom Birmingham's plein-air canvases were installed for February. Or you could reclaim your cozy spot in front of the fire – the lounge's monumental hearth is a rugged counterpoint to San Francisco interior designer [Charles de Lisle](#)'s striking and sculptural tableau of low-slung, emerald-green tufted sofas by Arflex and faceted Martino Gamper side tables.

By now, you must be hungry. [The Dining Room](#)'s executive chef Eric Piacentine honed his "rugged yet refined" dining at Big Sur Bakery, another beloved spot with immense culinary cred. From the unctuous and earthy foraged-mushroom pappardelle to the line-to-table catch of the day with locally harvested seaweeds to juicy roasted Sonoma duck with nutty wild rice, burst huckleberries, and fresh-dug beets, Piacentine's bountiful fare brims with sense of place.

"It's not easy to make things feel effortless, like they just 'should be,'" Borghei says. "And The Sea Ranch feels like it just should be."