

DESTINATIONS OF THE WORLD  
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May 2015



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A NATURAL BEAUTY

**MUSCAT**  
A LUXURY WEEKEND BREAK

**SCANDI-CHIC IN  
STOCKHOLM**

*ULTIMATE*  
**BALI**

WHERE TO EAT,  
SPA AND STAY

**Greek  
Island  
Odyssey**

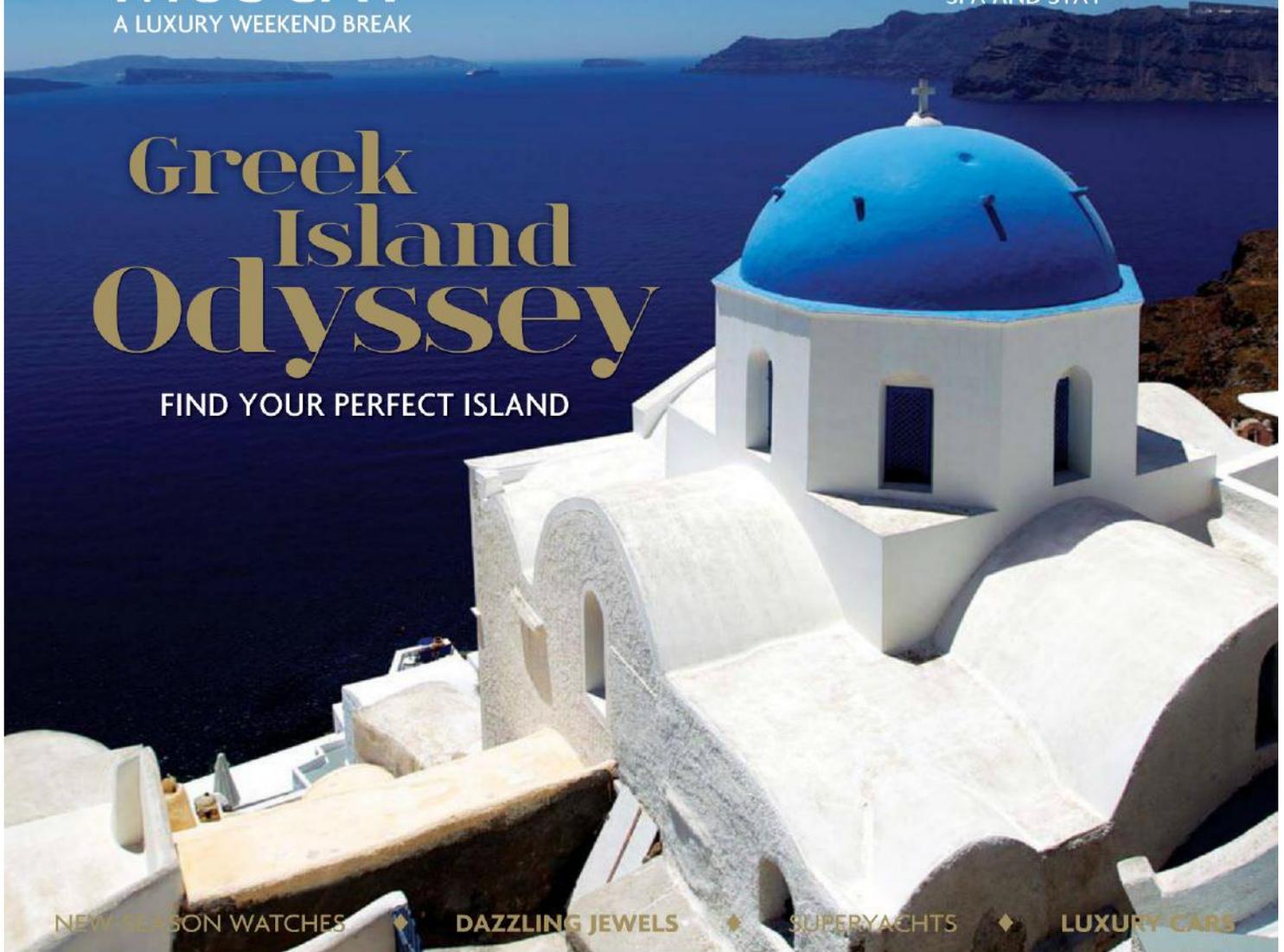
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# DESTINATIONS

THE WORLD'S MOST DESIRABLE LOCATIONS

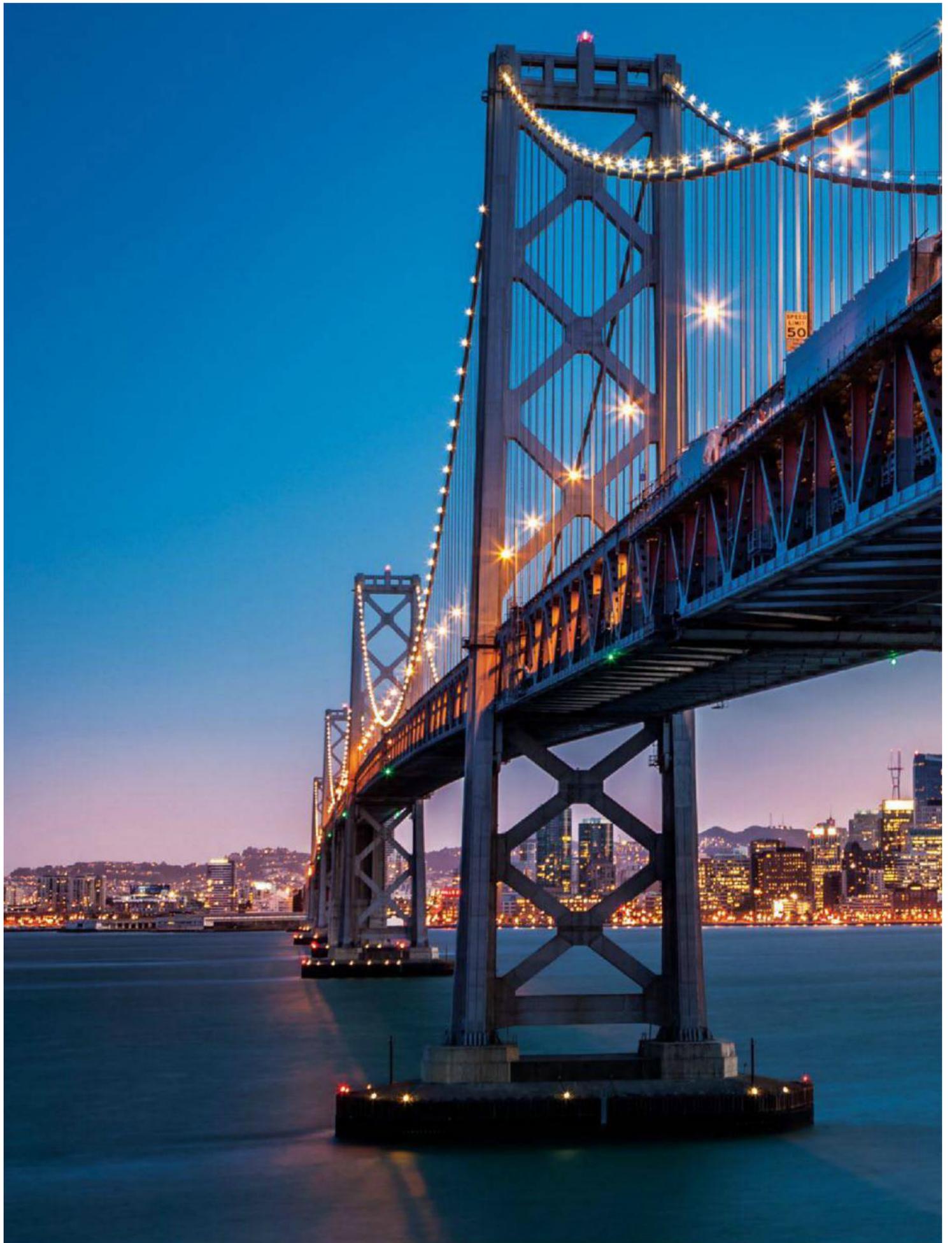


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**BRIDGE OF THE BAY**

The glittering Golden Gate Bridge is the city's icon, but there's so much more to discover in San Francisco

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# BAY OF PLENTY

With fashionable neighbourhoods, fabulous food and a hippie undercurrent, there's no shortage of atmosphere in San Francisco, but the city's urban nature gives it an edge, writes Becca Hensley

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**T**hey call it Land's End. And, there's a reason. Standing on a rugged cliff among wind-molded cypress trees, I gaze down at the ocean, a jade-coloured cauldron of unbridled waves, immersed in a halo of fog.

On San Francisco's northwest rim, Land's End, twenty minutes by car from downtown, is part of the Golden Gate National Recreation Area. It feels otherworldly, standing at the very rim of the North American continent, listening to the call of the seagulls and the pounding waves. Raw and wild, the city's nature is the undercurrent of the legendary city and the boomtown, can-do spirit that has lingered on from gold rush days.

To my right, the Coastal Trail hugs the cliff tops, offering riveting views of the city's famed icon, the glittering Golden Gate Bridge. Keep going, and you could walk all the way to the bridge, though the trail itself eventually dead-ends into Sea Cliff, a well-heeled seaside neighbourhood.

I venture left and trudge onto Ocean Beach, which from the Land's End lookout point seems to extend indefinitely. Amid the brume, it looks like a timeworn black and white film, the waves

pounding in slow, hypnotic motion. Off shore, Seal Rock, a collection of craggy rock formations, punctuates the swirling waters. In the sky, I identify the specks of moving colour, human confetti, as kite surfers. Behind me, a coyote slinks through the bushes and multi-hued wildflowers that mottle the stone-strewn, red earth.

When the throngs arrive to peruse the park's Visitor's Centre, the air is filled with the happy murmuring of hikers, view seekers and history buffs. The ruins of the Victorian-era Sutro Baths, a long abandoned private swimming complex built in the park's heyday as a resort destination, move with so many visitors it resembles an anthill in motion. The coyote has vanished, replaced by dogs on leashes and denizens discussing where they'll gather to eat tonight in this most food-centric city.

Fog-laden, grey, and misty, San Francisco lies on a peninsula in Northern California, its surrounding area encompassing almost 80 square kilometres of a dense cityscape known as the Bay, which has nooks and crannies of raw nature like Land's End, along with crowded, lively streets and the city's famous steep hills.

Known for cool summers, cable cars, sourdough bread, wharves galore, bookstores and an

The city is flush with stately Victorian houses (right)

Head out on foot along the Coastal Trail (below) for amazing views of the Golden Gate Bridge (previous page)

**“THE COASTAL TRAIL HUGS THE CLIFF TOPS, OFFERING RIVETING VIEWS OF THE CITY’S FAMED ICON, THE GLITTERING GOLDEN GATE BRIDGE”**

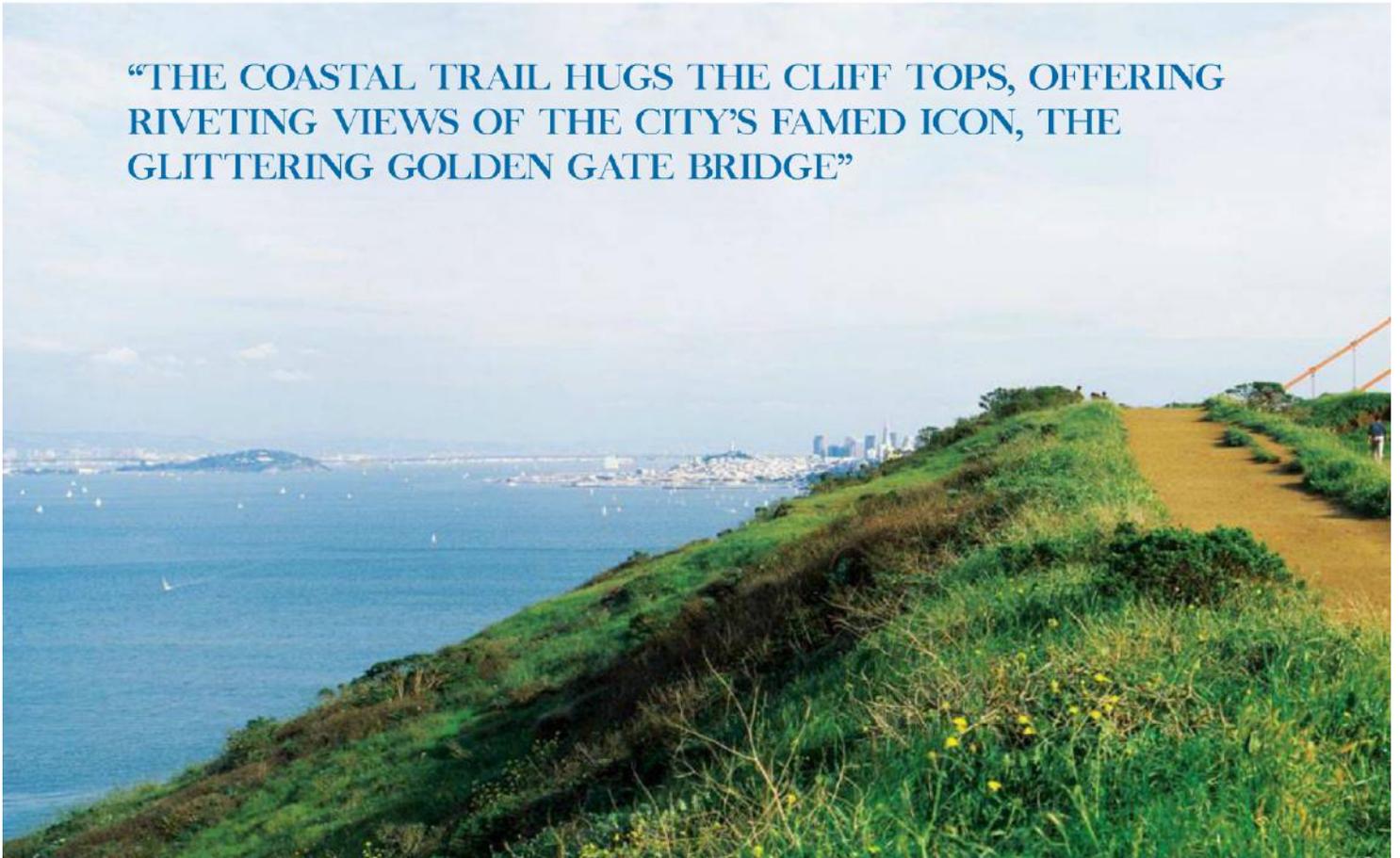




Photo: Getty Images



extant hippie undercurrent, San Francisco is a cosmopolitan city, said to sell more theatre tickets than anywhere else in the United States.

The city is flush with stately Victorian houses, which meld together, colourful and catawampus. Some neighbourhoods appear crumbling, others majestic. Seaside bungalows beguile and the mansions that sit atop Pacific Heights are the stuff of Hollywood cinema. From the edgy Mission District and the museum-laden SoMa to the global brand swank of Union Square, there's a neighbourhood to suit any mood.

You can nibble dim sum in Chinatown, peruse the second-hand shops along Haight Street, sample the nightlife in hip Castro and hop on the green cable cars to Fisherman's Wharf for a seafood feast. Expansive parks and beaches lead to always-chilly

A colourful mural in the Mission District neighbourhood (top left) of San Francisco

An entrance sign in the city's Castro District, a neighbourhood in Eureka Valley (top right)

Alcatraz Island, or 'The Rock' (above) housed a high-security prison from 1934 to 1963

seas, while galleries, award-winning restaurants and bakeries comprise the mix. The main tourist attractions: Coit Tower, Alcatraz Island (a former prison), Telegraph Hill and the Golden Gate Bridge are just part of the fun. And, nearby, only an hour by car, the famous wine country awaits.

As for the Bay City's residents, they eschew designer heels, label-laden purses and ostentatious jewels for an understated sense of style. Bump into someone in a dishevelled hoodie and worn tennis shoes, and he might be an executive from one of newest dot.com startups. Somebody in yoga pants? She's the one solving a health crisis affecting the burgeoning biotech industry. Vintage clothes a la Boho chic? Probably a world famous artist, winemaker, or the heir of Levi Strauss, who opened up a dry goods business here in the 19th century



## “SOME NEIGHBOURHOODS APPEAR CRUMBLING, OTHERS MAJESTIC”

Coit Tower (above) illuminated at night, is one of San Francisco's top tourist attractions

A Caviar and Carat facial at La Belle Day Spa & Salon (below left)

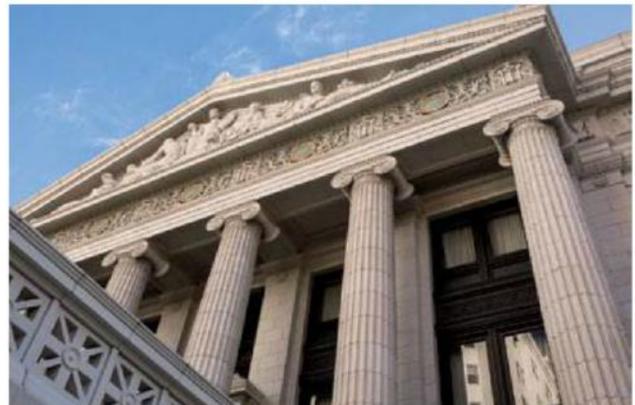
The Neo-Classical facade at The Ritz-Carlton San Francisco (below right)

and is credited with inventing jeans.

Wearing my own version of casual chic, I enter The Ritz-Carlton San Francisco. I've just enjoyed a Caviar and Carat Facial at La Belle Day Spa & Salons (+1 415 433 7644; [www.labeledayspas.com](http://www.labeledayspas.com)), one of San Francisco's top beauty spots. This instant reviver uses gold leaf, liquid gold and caviar to renew cells and stimulate collagen, and it works. I look like a runway model – except for the fact that I'm balancing a plethora of bags from a shopping spree at Wilkes Bashford, a townhouse-style emporium in Union Square, chockfull of gorgeous

accoutrements. Somewhat serendipitously, the Ritz-Carlton has just been refurbished and it was Wilkes Bashford that inspired the hotel's new, even classier lines. The interiors of the Neo-Classical building now read like a finely fitted, bespoke suit. Beyond the design, the Ritz-Carlton offers intuitive service, commodious suites, and a club floor and lounge where you're certain to spot a celebrity.

Lucky for me, I run into somebody better than a film star: the hotel's star concierge Ric Lee. Lee has promised to help me plan a sightseeing tour I won't soon forget: a helicopter outing at sunset, which hovers over the cityscape – including the Golden Gate Bridge – before landing near the wharf area for dinner aboard a yacht with San Francisco Helicopter Tours (+1 650 635 4500; [www.sfhelicoptertours.com](http://www.sfhelicoptertours.com)). For tomorrow, Lee



## DESTINATIONS SAN FRANCISCO

suggests sailing the USA 76, the America's Cup Racing Yacht, which takes eager sailors out to sea at breakneck speed. Feeling some trepidation, I tremble at the idea of hoisting the sail or steering this renowned vessel myself, but he assures me I can just relax and ride. Startlingly, there's another heart-racing alternative. "How about flying a Marchetti SF260 Fighter Jet?" he asks. Terrified, I pass, though I know my husband yearns to impale the clouds at the speed of light. More my velocity, I opt for the "Kitchen Table" experience at Parallel 37, the hotel's award-winning restaurant. There, under the tutelage of Chef Michael Rotondo, we'll help the chef plate dishes for dinner service, then sit at the kitchen table, custom made from locally-sourced barrel staves, while he makes us an off-menu, eight-course dinner.

There's plenty to eat in San Francisco, but for foodies and oenophiles, a trip to the Wine Country is de riguer. Rather than driving, we hop aboard a flight with Seaplane Adventures Seaplane Adventures (+1 415 332 4843; [www.seaplane.com](http://www.seaplane.com)), ascending from the waters of Richardson Bay in Sausalito and buzzing for 50 minutes to Sonoma Valley, where we tour the Ceago Viegardens Winery, before flying back to town.

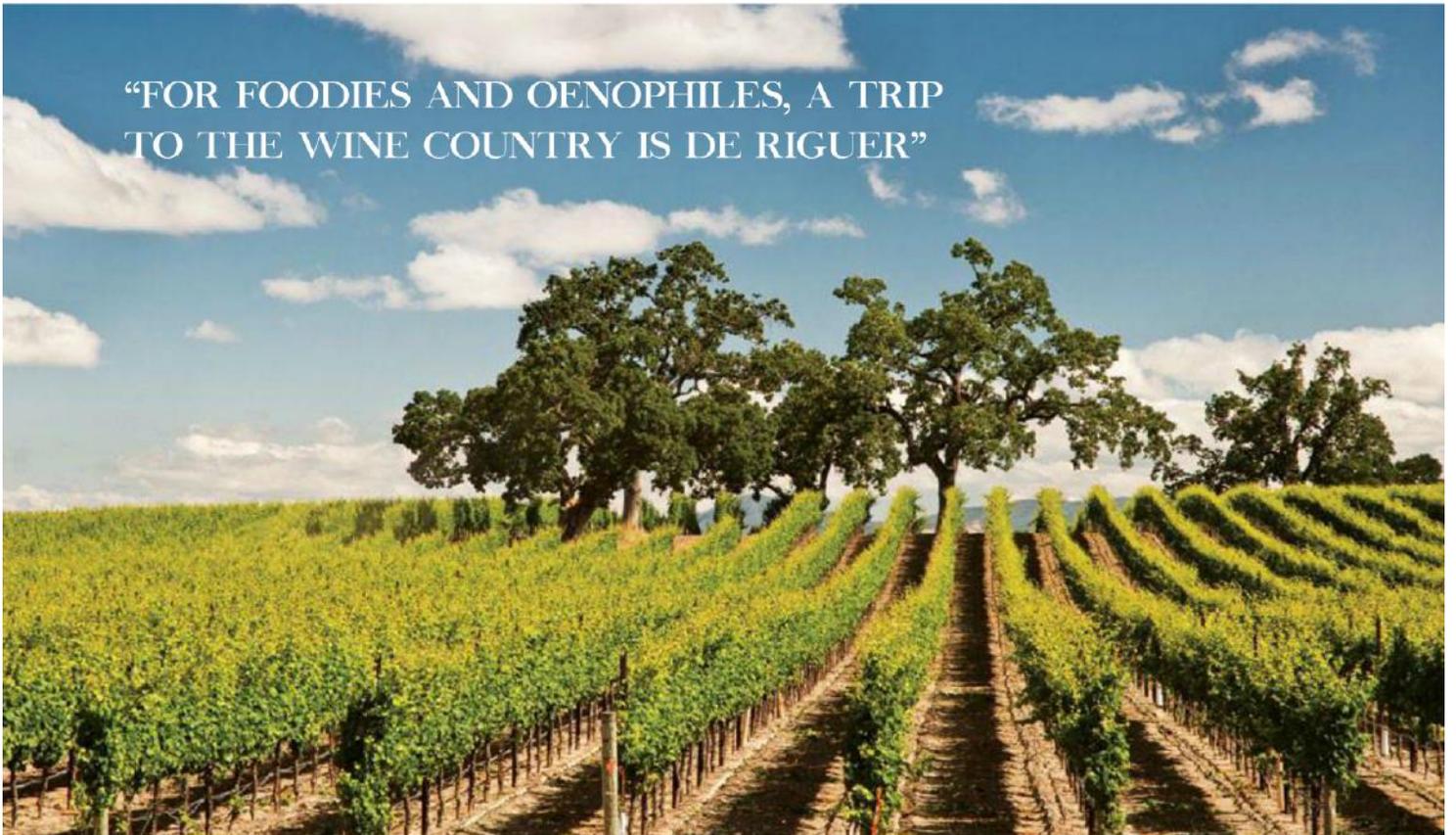
The next day, we head to Oakland, where the concierge at the InterContinental, Bill Sutton, has



Hop on board San Francisco's Hyde Street Cable Car Tram (above), a signature way to explore the city

One of the many vineyards in Sonoma Valley (below), only a 50-minute seaplane flight from the city

“FOR FOODIES AND OENOPHILES, A TRIP TO THE WINE COUNTRY IS DE RIGUER”





The main bedroom in the Penthouse Suite at The Fairmont San Francisco (top)

An aerial view of downtown San Francisco (above)

managed to convince chef, Alice Waters to spend the day with us. An advocate for sustainable eating, she leads us through the farmer's market, and helps us to carry baskets of fresh produce to Chez Panisse Cafe, Water's seminal eatery, said to have spearheaded America's foraged food movement. There, we have an unforgettable lunch made from our market found provisions.

Finally, we check into *The Fairmont San Francisco*, a symbol of the city since 1907. A bastion of elegance, every inch of the hotel evokes the historical grandeur of San Francisco. In the Penthouse Suite, refurbished by Champalimaud in 2009, we experience grace incarnate. Created in the Roaring Twenties by famed American

archeologist and art historian Arthur Upham Pope, the suite spans the entire eighth floor of the building, and is valued today at US\$20 million. Its east-meets-west features include paintings by David Hockney, a gold leaf covered rotunda, Persian tile flooring, a sleeping suite hidden by a bookcase and eye-popping views.

San Francisco is many things. As a child visiting relatives, it was my storybook city. As an adult, it's an overflowing treasure chest. If you visit, I urge you to go to Land's End and feel the wonder of nature and possibility while standing on the cliffs above the sea. It's akin to what those first gold miners sought – and found. Pure, natural riches – and it won't cost you a penny. ☞

## Stay

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