

Wanderings: Carmel-By-The-Sea, California

By Marla Crimini

Originally published in Western Art and Architecture

In Northern California, courtyards, cottages and creative arts combine to form Carmel-by-the-Sea's subtle and elegant charm. Drawing visitors from across the world, this town of one square mile overflows with art and natural beauty. These elements intertwine with distinctive architecture, including homes that appear to be plucked from a fairytale and placed into this delightful beach town.



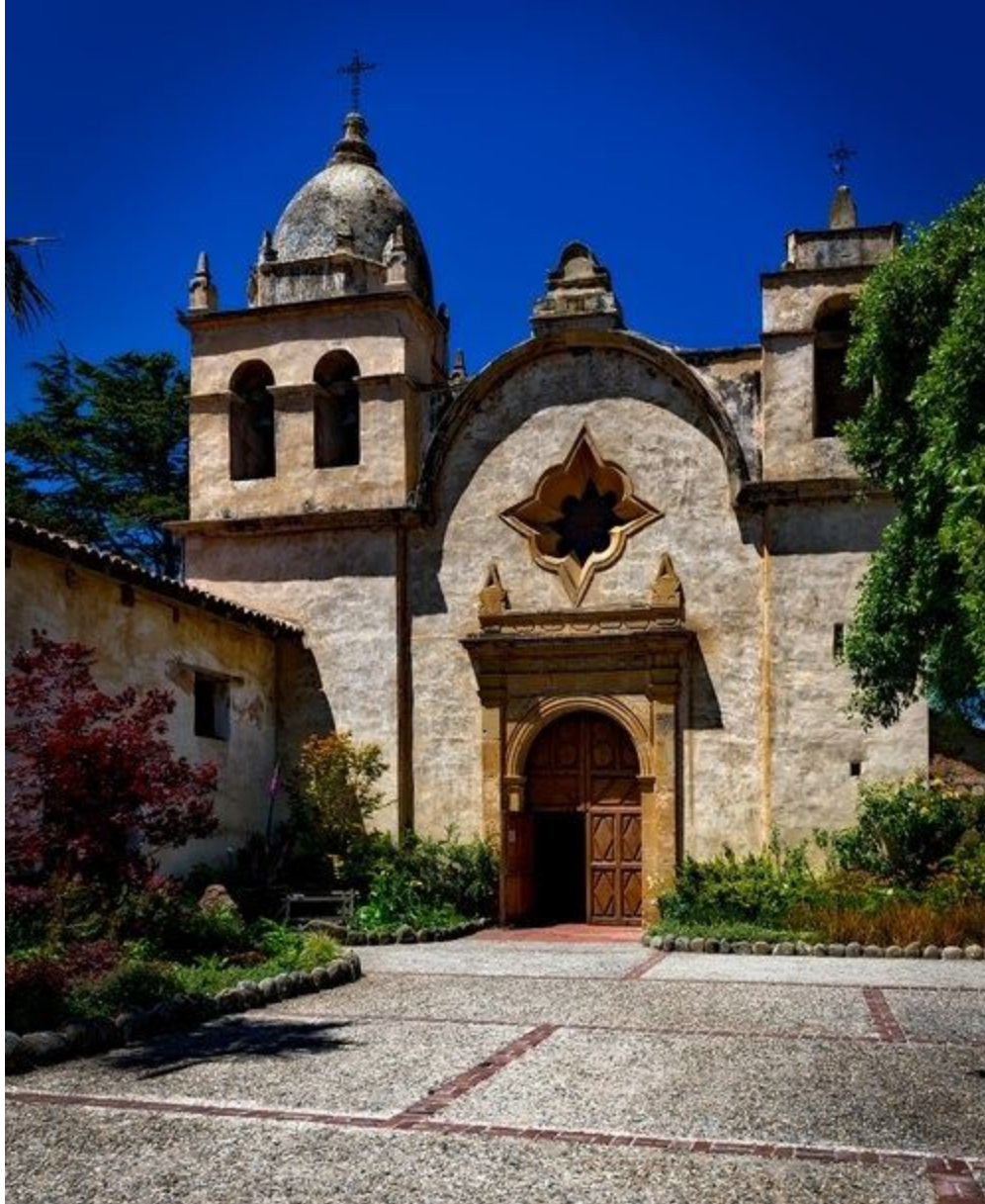
Located on the Monterey Peninsula, about 120 miles south of San Francisco, Carmel-by-the-Sea is easy to explore on foot. Its downtown area is lined with galleries, boutiques and restaurants. Behind buildings, more than 40 narrow, hidden passageways twist and turn, opening onto courtyards often adorned with outdoor sculpture or artwork.

The courtyards were constructed in the 1920s, around the time when Hugh Comstock's Dollhouse Tudor houses and shops were built. The small- town ambience is palpable; there are no addresses or parking meters. Aside from Carmel's tiny downtown, sidewalks are nonexistent.

And seemingly always, the Pacific Ocean is steps away. For a breezy sea stroll, simply walk toward the beach, which is dog friendly (along with many hotels, restaurants and other establishments). The town's streets slope downward to the Scenic Bluff Path that stretches from tony Pebble Beach to Point Lobos, offering glorious views overlooking the waves, gardens and cypress trees along the way.

Famous in recent years for its former mayor, Clint Eastwood, who still resides in town, Carmel-by-the-Sea transports visitors to an earlier era with its history of attracting spirited, ambitious talents. After the massive 1906 earthquake destroyed much of San Francisco, many artists, writers and musicians fled to Carmel and established a thriving colony. At the time, the city's Arts and Crafts Club was in its infancy and welcomed the creative community with open arms and budget-friendly rents. Among the renowned writers who called Carmel home were Sinclair Lewis, Mary Austin and Upton Sinclair, and artists such as Percy Gray, Anne Bremer and William Ritschel found inspiration along Carmel's shores.

This Bohemian haven was incorporated on October 31, 1916, and celebrates its centennial anniversary this year with special events. Take, for instance, the citywide parade (planned by the organizers of the Rose Bowl parade) and celebratory lunch on October 29. There's also music, theater, dance, art and culinary events planned through December.



With approximately 100 galleries situated within the town's borders, both avid collectors and casual visitors find Carmel a dreamy art destination. For enthusiasts, Carmel-by-the-Sea offers a rare treat: to observe and interact with artists while they work in their studios. Notable artists include award-winning sculptor [Steven Whyte](#) of his namesake gallery; as well as Mary Titus of [Titus Contemporary Gallery](#) and [Galerie Plein Aire](#)'s husband-and-wife team, Jeff Smith and Cyndra Bradford. These artists open their studios to the public and are often found behind the easel or in the midst of sculpting a new masterpiece. Other standout galleries include [Trotter](#) for early California art; [Cassandra Blackmore](#) for contemporary glass works; and [Gallery Sur](#), which showcases sculpture and

photography. A trusted way to make the most of gallery visits is through [Carmel Art Tours](#), led by local expert Rohana LoSchiavo, who offers custom walks based on her 25 years in the fine art world.

While admiring the artwork in Carmel, it's impossible not to be inspired by the diverse architecture as well, which ranges from shingled bungalows to modern designs. Over the years, renowned architects have left their mark here, including Frank Lloyd Wright, Charles Sumner Greene, Hugh Gutterson and others. At the corner of Lincoln Street and 6th Avenue sits the first house built by architect M.J. Murphy in 1902. Known as the "First Murphy House," today it's home to the [Carmel Heritage Society Welcome Center](#).

For more extensive art experiences, the [Carmel Art Association](#), the second-oldest cooperative in the U.S., features multiple rooms with exhibits from numerous local and regional artists. For those short on time, the stunning entry garden is certainly worth a peek. Nearby, the [Center for Photographic Art](#) is a nonprofit that advances the Central Coast's photographic arts through education and exhibition. It evolved from the renowned Friends of Photography established in 1967 by Ansel Adams and other photographic luminaries. Today, the organization holds installations and events throughout the year. Another major attraction is the historic [Carmel Mission Basilica](#), with its museums and galleries. For visitors with an extra day to explore, the [Monterey Museum of Art](#), located outside of town, features works by contemporary regional artists along with legendary talents.



After combing through galleries, it's delightful to relax and enjoy the culinary scene. [Anton & Michel](#) is a popular modern European restaurant, while [Vesuvio](#) offers Southern Italian specialties with views from a lively rooftop patio. Located in the landmark Cypress Inn, [Terry's Lounge](#) features an outdoor courtyard, craft cocktails and an extensive menu, including specialties such as truffle ravioli and chicken piccata.

Spending the night in Carmel offers more opportunities to admire the area's history and architecture. The elegant [L'Auberge Carmel](#) is a 20-room Mediterranean-style inn with a top-rated restaurant, [Aubergine](#). Nearby, the [Cypress Inn](#) is a landmark hotel built in 1929 and co-owned by legendary actress Doris Day. The luxurious [Carmel Country Inn](#) is a bed-and-breakfast-style retreat in the center of town.

Much like its hidden courtyards, Carmel-by-the-Sea reveals itself to visitors in subtle ways, rewarding travelers with lingering aesthetic treasures. From the hypnotic waves lapping the shoreline, to an artist quietly working in a studio, to the understated design of a beachfront cottage, the town appeals to artists of all kinds and remains an artistic oasis today.