

Birdsong, sunshine and Hollywood stars—who could want anything more? MARY DOWEY glows in SANTA BARBARA

SANTA BARBARA. After the 1925 earthquake, it was decided to build in a uniform style that would blend in with the town's oldest structures—like the Presidio of 1782, the last Spanish military outpost built in North America. There would be no billboards, nothing loud. The result is Spanish Colonial Revival architecture, maintained with such strict regulations that even McDonald's looks Moorish, with nothing more to proclaim their presence than a small brass plaque bearing the famous M.

While it may sound a bit phoney—Spanish building style—it looks great. The Inn of the Spanish Garden, a magnificent downtown hotel, is new but constructed so cleverly, following the layout of an 18th-century Spanish family home, it could have been there forever—or so it feels, stepping from the inner courtyard into a bedroom with a log fire.

Even Santa Barbara's main shopping centres, El Paseo and Paseo Nuevo, look the part with their whitewashed walls and flower-filled patios. There are signs of affluence everywhere—antique shops, jewellers, furniture stores and spas—but this town is low-key about its wealth. Although you could celebrity-spot on every corner, it's not the done thing to gawk or make a fuss.



WHERE TO STAY ■

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