

An Artful Reawakening



Biltmore Santa Barbara owner Ty Warner. Image courtesy Ty Warner Hotels and Resorts.

Following a recent renovation, Four Seasons The Biltmore Santa Barbara has rediscovered its rich history

By Victoria Charters

Stepping back to gain a view of his hotel against a stunning, clear-sky backdrop, developer and hotelier Ty Warner smiles. “This was a tremendous personal commitment for me,” he explains. “I feel I achieved the uniqueness and special feeling this property deserves.”

Mr. Warner’s sense of unfettered satisfaction comes as no surprise. His treasure of the American Riviera, a.k.a. Four Seasons Resort The Biltmore Santa Barbara, has just emerged from the cocoon of an extensive, four-year-long renovation personally supervised in every detail by Warner himself. This 20-acre wonder of architectural and escapist artistry rests confidently nestled along the

shores of the Pacific, a newly-metamorphosed butterfly ready to face the world.

The Biltmore was originally built in 1927 as a private hacienda in the Spanish Colonial style by renowned architect Reginald Johnson. Greg Rice, director of development of Ty Warner Hotels and Resorts, explains that Reginald Johnson “attended to the smallest of details. He worked art into elements of function and he made sure the hotel served as a complement to the land, the existing flora and vistas—not the other way around. Corridors and archways don’t just serve as a means of passage; they frame striking views of the ocean and mountains.”

While the renovation updated the hotel with modern conveniences and facilities, Warner strove to maintain the original aura of the property. “With the Biltmore, Ty was dedicated to ensuring the line between new and historic is imperceptible,” says Rice.

Now, upon arriving through the terracotta brick entranceway and porte-cochere, guests are immediately greeted by a Spanish mica chandelier from the early 20th century, the first of the hotel’s numerous elements that embrace historic forms, quality and tradition.

One challenging aspect of the renovation and restoration of the Biltmore was the tile, which is key to the classic Spanish Colonial architectural style. Rice explains, “The original roof tiles were created during a time when a man’s shin was used as the mold for the curve.



The resort’s new spa and fitness center were seamlessly woven into the 1920s main building. Warner selected the two 80-year-old Canary Palms that frame the entrance because they are the same age as the historic hotel. Image courtesy Four Seasons The Biltmore.



(Above): Colorful textiles and priceless art pieces from Ty Warner's personal travels adorn the lobby. (Below): During the renovation, Warner hired teams of artisans to hand-paint the ceiling beams and create tile murals. Images courtesy Four Seasons The Biltmore.

Ty custom-made his own tiles in a similar fashion so that you cannot detect where history ends and the renovations begin. His primary vision was that the Biltmore renovations should only incorporate materials consistent with the hotel's original 1927 design." With some detective work, the Biltmore design team rediscovered the building's original tile manufacturer, Gladding, McBean; they also learned that Gladding, McBean made the original tile murals that reside in the halls of the hotel.

These historic tile murals are intrinsic to the hotel and to the history of Santa Barbara. The Biltmore's tiled tradition began in the original 1920s construction with the implementation of hand-crafted wall tiles, which weave historic stories of the Santa Barbara area and have interesting linkages to the tile displays in the Casa de Herrera (a nearby historic estate) and Santa Barbara's historic courthouse. In the renovation, these motifs and original tile patterns were reproduced with great care to honor the tradition of the hotel's





(Above): The renovated terrace at Bella Vista restaurant features a floor made of antiqued yellow Ramon marble with tumbled stone inlay. Newly installed antique gas lamps illuminate outdoor dining areas as well as walkways, courtyards, and gardens. (Below): Original tile murals can be discovered along corridors and passageways throughout the hotel. Images courtesy Four Seasons The Biltmore.



first artists and craftsmen; they appear throughout the hotel on surfaces and in signage.

The new renovations are a testament to the work of artisans and craftsmen of today and of days gone by. The stunning lobby ceiling is hand-painted and distressed, giving what are actually concrete supports the appearance of aged, hand-painted beams. There are two new murals in the lobby—one inspired by an old map of the area, the other depicting a historical landscape of Santa Barbara as viewed from the air. Public areas have been enhanced with antiques, Persian carpets and hand-woven fabrics from Italy, France, Spain and elsewhere—all personally chosen by Warner as

part of his goal to make a stay at The Biltmore feel like an overnight visit in a residential guesthouse.

Throughout the hotel the skills of artists are evident. Prints by Santa Barbara's master photographer of the early 1900s, J. Walter Collinge, adorn corridors; watercolors by local artists (including Patty Look Lewis) hang in the rooms. Several discontinued fabrics from the Fortuny family, sought out by Warner himself while in Venice, now adorn many of the sconce shields and lampshades in the lobby and public areas.

And if that isn't enough, art lovers can relax in the hotel's Ty Lounge while sipping on a truly artful signature cocktail—"The Biltmore Bellini". ■