

HOME TRENDS



Photos by Trinette Reed Photography

In Auberge du Soleil's Maison Saint-Tropez, glass doors open to a private terrace where a simple, oversize bathtub and rain shower beckon guests outside.

Improving on perfection

Designer tapped to freshen resort keeps the 'ah' in Auberge du Soleil

By Paige Porter Fischer

Some proper nouns need no introduction. Take, for example, Auberge du Soleil. The flagship Auberge property in Napa Valley has become synonymous with luxury, the hotel by which all others are measured.

Tucked into a Rutherford hillside woven with pewter-green olive trees, Auberge enjoys one of the most famous panoramic views in all of Napa; from the emerald-striped vineyards on the valley floor to the Mayacamas Mountains beyond them, it's a mesmerizing tableau that changes colors every moment with the light. But one thing here never changes: Auberge du Soleil has a reputation for excellence that has remained untarnished since the hotel opened in 1985.

The same can be said of Suzanne Tucker, the interior designer whose reputation for impeccable style and grace precedes her. A San Francisco icon and a partner at Tucker & Marks, she was the former protégée of preeminent designer Michael Taylor, who was responsible for the original design of Auberge du Soleil. She worked for him during the hotel's creation and has delivered various updates to the rooms since Taylor passed



The update retains the French country aesthetic of the luxury resort.

away. So it made sense for the resort to tap Tucker to re-imagine its renowned maisons — named after regions in the South of France — that house its 50 rooms and suites.

"The intention was to retain the authentic French country aesthetic everyone's come to associate with Auberge, while making it feel a little bit more current, young and fresh," says Tucker. "But it's a big challenge to deliver a new look to an iconic property, one known — and loved — for its original design." Her task was great and the timeline long. The resort didn't want to close entirely for renovations, so Tucker needed to create the new look and deliver it, one maison at a time, until all 13 were complete.

To date, 24 of the rooms are complete. These rooms are classified as 'deluxe' on the hotel's website, www.aubergedusoleil.com.

"There have been many times in my career when I'm asked to refresh or update something Michael originally did, and I can't help but ask myself, 'What would Michael do if he were here now?'" For Auberge, he would be doing chic colors, muted and peaceful. He wouldn't be bringing in wild colors, and he wouldn't be doing everything in gray like it is done everywhere today."

Tucker decided on the colors of Provence, including pale sand, limestone, tobacco — "colors that are very livable, very soothing and not in-your-face. There's nothing that someone can walk in and find objectionable here," says Tucker.

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A California king bed is the focal point of the guest rooms, where a hand-carved wooden headboard extends to the ceiling. Designer Suzanne Tucker designed the three panels of fretwork backed by a mirror.



Tucker's spa-like bathrooms are drenched in natural light, boasting soaking tubs, spacious showers and heated limestone floors.

The new palette marries effortlessly with the warm hues outside — a design relationship Tucker intended. "Here, the view is the main event, and I wanted a fluid connection between the interiors and the famously beautiful exteriors," she says. The warm, sophisticated neutrals, which replaced the original pale olive, persimmon and saffron hues, mimic the golden light that floods the rooms from sunrise to dusk.

"The single biggest change we made was replacing the solid walls, which had shuttered French doors, with entire walls of iron and glass," says Tucker, who wanted a more contemporary sense of transparency. "Though many Californians may be used to the idea of indoor-outdoor living, other guests may come here for a taste of it, and this wall of glass delivers."

She replaced Saltillo tiles with

hardwood floors and ultra-soft carpets. Grasscloth wraps the walls for added texture, and luxurious textiles from Tucker's own fabric line — some designed exclusively for Auberge — invoke the Côte d'Azur. Bleached and cerused woods add a rustic French elegance, while sculptural accessories and stacks of coffee-table books play to the "collected" look Tucker hoped to achieve in each residence.

"I do like to think of these spaces as residences," she says. "Ideally, you should walk into a luxurious hotel room and feel like it's your second home for a little while. A big part of making the rooms feel good and welcoming is getting the lighting right. Any good designer knows how imperative it is to make good lighting choices."

In addition to maximizing natural light, Tucker followed her own golden rule of design: incorporating three

sources of light in every room. "You want light to come from a variety of sources — midrange, overhead and from sconces. When the light is layered, it envelops you. And dimmers — well, dimmers are a must," she adds.

Between the fresh color palette, the golden sunlight bathing the interiors, and the layers of warm light inside, guests may be fooled into believing they will emerge from their accommodations sun-kissed — that is, if they have the desire to leave the room.

Tucker designed each guest room to be anchored by a romantic centerpiece: a custom-designed California king bed with an intricate three-panel headboard made of mirrored fretwork. "I modeled the bed after this gorgeous grillwork I'd seen on a screen when I was traveling," she says. "I loved the pattern, so I sketched it and came up with the idea of adding a little glamour, with the mirror behind it."

"The bed is so critical in a hotel room — first that it's comfortable and dressed with fine linens," says Tucker. "But I also think the bed should have a presence. It should transport you somewhere far away from your everyday life. It should signal the beginning of decompressing, whether you're away for 24 hours or lucky enough to be away for 24 days."

"From the sound of the wind and the birds to the sight of the silver light bouncing off the olive leaves, from the smell of the air to the taste of the wine and the warmth of the sun — it's a tactile experience at Auberge. I wanted the rooms to provide the same sensory experience that the property so effortlessly delivers."

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Tucker & Marks

Q&A

Suzanne Tucker's Marin County inspirations

Suzanne Tucker's design firm, Tucker & Marks, is located on Maiden Lane in San Francisco. But the designer, who resided for 12 years in Pacific Heights, moved north to Marin 20 years ago. Happily straddling both city and country, she shares a few of her favorite things about Marin County.

What lured you over the bridge to move to Marin?

The spectacular view back to San Francisco, and the fact that you feel as though you are living in your weekend house all during the week!

Favorite place to eat breakfast in Marin?

The Lighthouse in Sausalito — the best thin Swedish pancakes.

Best spot for coffee?

Philz in Sausalito.

Your favorite lunch spot?

Fish (on the water in Sausalito).

Favorite Marin indulgence (ice cream shop? wine bar?)

Three Twins Ice Cream.

Where do you like to shop for home design things?

Hudson Grace in Larkspur (2403 Larkspur Landing Circle).

Where would you go for a special dinner?

Sushi Ran — best sushi in the country! Le Garage and the Farmshop run a delicious second.

Favorite walk/hike in Marin?

Mount Tam's Nora trail up to West Point Inn at the top of the mountain, for 360-degree views of the whole Bay Area.

Best view in Marin?

The top of the Marin Headlands, looking back over the Golden Gate Bridge toward the city. It's always breathtaking, and you can't help but be awestruck!

— Paige Porter Fischer