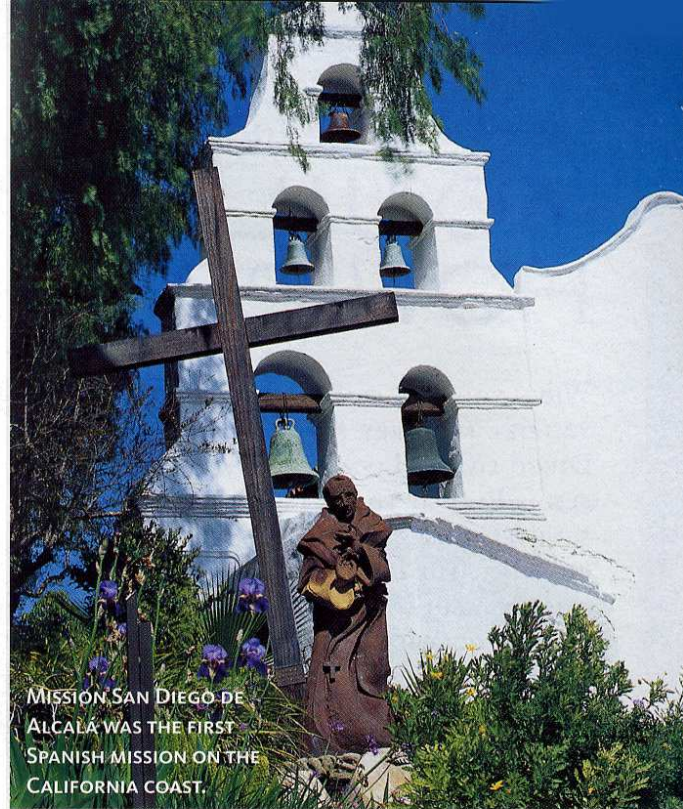


My hands are stained red, black and yellow; my body aches from sitting on asphalt for three hours; and I couldn't be happier.

I've joined a group of teenage art students to paint a collage at "Chalk La Strada," an event held each October in San Diego's Little Italy as part of the neighborhood's annual "Festa." The youths working around me use large pieces of chalk to create impressive three-dimensional renditions of works by Dali, Michelangelo and van Gogh on the rough pavement. Since my drawing skills peaked in third grade, my contribution is Mondrian's gridlike *Composition A*.

Italian flags zig-zag across India Street, past a sleek neon sign announcing "Little Italy." An accordion player pumps out tunes on a sidewalk, while down the block at the Precious Cheese stage, headliners such as Lena Prima (Louis Prima's daughter) and her band entertain the crowd. People pour in and out of local eateries: Mimmo's, the Princess Pub, Vantaggio Deli and, my favorite, Filippi's Pizza Grotto, a fixture since the '50s. Each year more than 100,000 visitors come for the popular Festa, one of the largest Italian celebrations west of the Mississippi.

Little Italy is one of the many neighborhoods that



MISSION SAN DIEGO DE  
ALCALÁ WAS THE FIRST  
SPANISH MISSION ON THE  
CALIFORNIA COAST.

painted by Fausto Tasca, a Venetian.

Italian immigrants began moving to the bayside area in the late 1800s, and an established neighborhood was in place by the 1920s. Many of the residents were hardworking fishermen who brought seafaring skills and an entrepreneurial spirit to the region. These early residents shaped the foundation of San Diego's fishing trade, an industry that would grow to make the region

# HISTORIC SAN DIEGO

By Rob Dunton

help give California's second-largest city its small-town feel. With 1.2 million residents within the city's borders, and 2.9 million in the county, San Diego can seem like a massive urban center, but its many distinct neighborhoods give its citizens something they can get their arms around. Nearby communities such as Hillcrest, Ocean Beach, Point Loma and Normal Heights each have unique personalities, festivals and events that are shaped by their location, architecture and resident personas.

A block up Columbia Street, Our Lady of the Rosary Church rests quietly on the outskirts of the Festa excitement. This spiritual center of Little Italy has ties to the mother country, as well. Father Rabagliati, born in Italy, raised the initial funds to build the church in 1925. The remaining construction debt was paid off by community fishermen, who contributed a percentage of their earnings. The church's interior artworks were

known for a time as the "Tuna Capital of the World." Other enterprising Italians started local businesses that have become modern landmarks: Anthony's Fish Grotto traces its lineage to a small fish market founded in 1916; and the Busalacchi family's Trattoria Fantastica and Café Zucchero have ties to the market opened by Joe Busalacchi at Fifth and E streets, circa 1925.

Though not connected with Italy, the Pioneer Hook & Ladder Firehouse Museum is a must-see neighborhood attraction. This gem is housed in a historic 1906 fire station, and has firefighting equipment, photographs and memorabilia showcasing 150 years of firefighting history from throughout the world.

The neighborhood has survived nearly a century of economic highs and lows. Back in the 1960s, 35 percent of the neighborhood was razed to build Interstate 5. Yet steadfast families, businesses and Our Lady of the Rosary Church held on. Today, the







BEAUTIFUL TEMPORARY ARTWORKS ARE CREATED IN SAN DIEGO'S LITTLE ITALY NEIGHBORHOOD DURING CHALK LA STRADA, PART OF THE ANNUAL FESTA.



remaining 55 blocks that make up Little Italy are thriving and brilliantly situated only a short distance from Broadway, the Santa Fe train depot and shimmering San Diego Bay. Swept up in San Diego's residential real estate boom, the area is now blossoming as never before, sprouting block after block of eye-catching urban residences, sumptuous restaurants, a *pensione* (Italian B&B), shops—even a public bocce ball court at Amici (Friend) Park ... *naturalmente!*

### THE GASLAMP QUARTER

It's Wednesday night, and I'm strolling down Fifth Avenue. Bars, clubs and restaurants are busy, and their frivolity spills onto the sidewalks. The street is a whirring blur of cars, pedicabs and horsedrawn carriages.

Wyatt Earp would be pleased.

After surviving the historic gunfight at the O.K. Corral, Earp made his way to booming San Diego in the

chased 800 acres in 1867 at the bargain price of 33 cents an acre—a grand total of \$267. This marked the true beginning of downtown San Diego.

Today the Gaslamp Quarter is a National Historic District covering 16½ city blocks packed with Victorian-style buildings constructed between the Civil War and World War I. Many of these buildings were brothels, gambling halls and opium dens during San Diego's colorful past. China's 1912 Revolution was plotted here. If walls could speak, the Gaslamp Quarter would have stories to tell.

References to the past flourish throughout the quarter: A new nightclub, the Stingaree, carries the nefarious moniker of the now-defunct red-light district. The Horton Grand Hotel and its adjacent theater (home to San Diego's longest-running play, the hilarious *Triple Espresso*) are named after founding father Alonzo Horton. The hotel's Ida Bailey restaurant is named after the city's most infamous madam. What remains of San Diego's Chinatown is memorialized by streetlights that resemble Chinese lanterns.

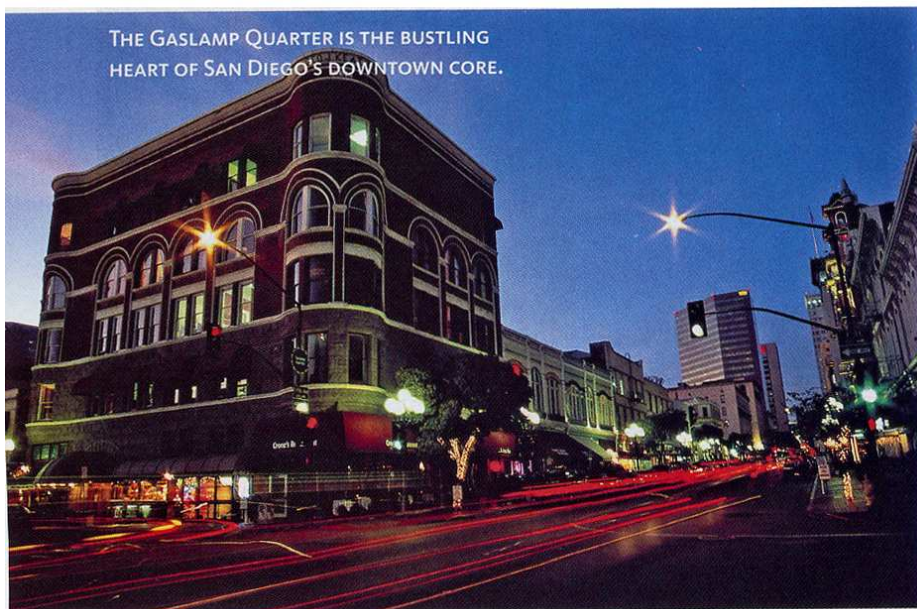
The Gaslamp Quarter has refined its historical roots with modern fittings to become a cosmopolitan hub that is equally appealing to families, couples and singles. Often compared to New Orleans' French Quarter, the area has streets lined with stylish boutiques, music and dance clubs, theaters and coffee houses. Restaurants offer fare from around the globe, and historic residences blend with chic lofts, high-rise condos and boutique hotels. An international eclecticism befitting a port town is apparent at every turn, and the deeper you look, the more you find. Arrive in the afternoon and stay into the wee hours—Wyatt Earp would be pleased.

### OLD TOWN

Old Town was the only town before New Town came along—in fact, it is considered the West Coast's first European settlement and the birthplace of California. When Mission San Diego de Alcalá was founded on Presidio Hill in 1769, it would be the first of 21 missions the Spanish would establish along the California coast. Not that the land was empty when the Spanish arrived: They built their presidio overlooking an existing Kumeyaay village, and a larger indigenous village existed farther up the San Diego River.

The transition from military outpost to mission to town was a slow process, punctuated by Spanish land grants, Mexican rule and eventually U.S. control. California became a U.S. territory in 1848, and San Diego was formally incorporated two years later with its first downtown situated where Old Town stands today. The population was roughly 250.

THE GASLAMP QUARTER IS THE BUSTLING HEART OF SAN DIEGO'S DOWNTOWN CORE.



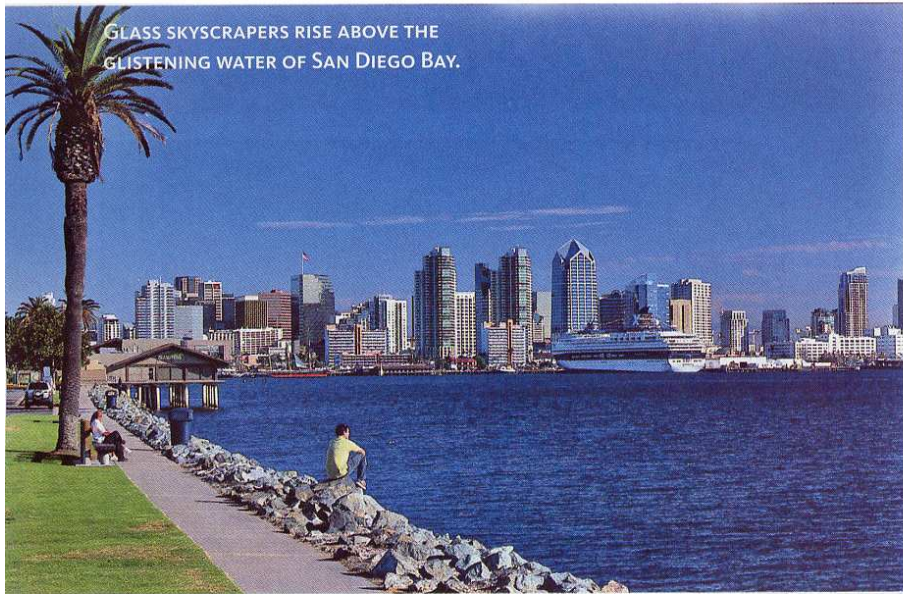
1880s. Using the skills he honed as a saloon proprietor during his Tombstone days, Earp operated four San Diego saloons and gambling halls in what would become today's Gaslamp Quarter. He saw then what many enterprising business owners see today: that San Diego's downtown core is an unrivaled location.

In its earliest incarnations, this bayfront area was called "Rabbitville" and "Flea Town." William Heath Davis had something grander in mind in 1850: "New Town." Poor timing squashed his dreams, and his collection of preframed spec houses sat unsold (one can still be toured at Fourth and Island). Seventeen years later, New Town blossomed under the entrepreneurial touch of Alonzo Horton, a used-furniture retailer. After hearing of the area's exceptional climate and locale, Horton moved south from San Francisco and pur-





GLASS SKYSCRAPERS RISE ABOVE THE  
GLISTENING WATER OF SAN DIEGO BAY.



BRETT SHOAF / ARTISTIC VISUALS

Nowadays Old Town San Diego is a pedestrian-oriented State Historic Park where visitors can explore a re-creation of early Mexican and California life from 1821 to 1872. Spread over only half a square mile, the town's intimate scale speaks volumes about the area's humble beginnings, when foot travel was the primary means of transportation and horses were a luxury for many. Blended into the park are 33 restaurants, 21

museums, more than 50 specialty shops and a live-performance theater. A number of the houses open to the public are said to harbor ghosts—the most noteworthy is the Whaley House, rated by the Travel Channel as “America’s Most Haunted.”

A unique confluence of cultural influences helped shape San Diego. Early settlers were a diverse bunch—indigenous Kumeyaay, Spanish missionaries and aristocrats, Mormons, and pioneers from Europe, New England, Northern California and Mexico.

The House of Machado and Stewart represents a classic example of this blending of cultures. Corporal José Manuel Machado, one of the pioneering Spanish soldiers stationed at the Presidio, built this adobe house in the 1830s. His youngest daughter, Rosa, married Jack Stewart, a transplant from Maine who was shipmate of noted author Richard Henry Dana Jr. The modest two-room home continued to be occupied by Stewart descendants until 1966.

It's easy to immerse yourself in a bit of living history in Old Town. Take a day and check in at the charming Heritage Park Inn, an 1889 Queen Anne bed and breakfast in Old Town. Leave your car behind and wander the streets: Watch as fresh tortillas are made by hand at the Old Town Mexican Café. Check out old





## DETAILS

**TRATTORIA FANTASTICA**, 1735 India Street; 619-234-1735; [www.trattoriafantastica.com](http://www.trattoriafantastica.com).

**TRIPLE ESPRESSO** at the Horton Grand Theater. This fun, light comedy is full of music and magic. Other great theater can be found at the San Diego Rep at Horton Plaza and at the Old Globe in Balboa Park.

**OLD TOWN TROLLEY TOURS**. Be car-free and use these fun, dependable trolleys with their kindly, humorous, well-informed guides. Hourly loops to all of central San Diego's premier destinations.

**OLD TOWN THEATRE**. Presents quality live theater in an intimate environment. Shows tend to be long-running winners.

**FREE HISTORICAL WALKING TOURS** in Old Town. Check at the Old Town Tourist office for daily tours. Very worthwhile.

Go beyond the Gaslamp. Head to the bayfront promenade, with parks, trails, marinas and Seaport Village.

For more information on San Diego's history and neighborhoods, visit [www.sandiegohistory.org](http://www.sandiegohistory.org), [www.littleitalysd.com](http://www.littleitalysd.com) or [www.gaslampquarter.org/history](http://www.gaslampquarter.org/history).

printing presses at San Diego's first newspaper office. Explore the Casa de Estudillo, a fully furnished adobe hacienda built without electricity or running water. Imagine life before cars at Seeley Stable's fascinating exhibit on stage coaches. There are picnic tables in the Old Plaza, and a lot of shade trees to relax under. Enjoy authentic Mexican cuisine that emerged from the same dry desert lands where San Diego was born, and enjoy how sweet life can be. ▲

*Rob Dunton lives in San Diego.*

## GETTING THERE



Alaska Airlines serves San Diego daily. To book an Alaska Airlines Vacations package to San Diego, visit the Web at [alaskaair.com](http://alaskaair.com) or call 800-468-2248.

## BLUES & GREENS

### BLUES

San Diego has 70 miles of beaches and two major bays, perfect for recreation.

**HARBOR SAILBOATS**, 619-291-9568.

**RESORT WATERSPORTS** at Bahia & Catamaran Resort Hotels; 858-488-2582.

**SURFARI**, 858-337-3287; [www.surfari-surf.com](http://www.surfari-surf.com).

**SEAFORTH BOAT RENTALS**, 619-223-1681; [www.seaforthboatrental.com](http://www.seaforthboatrental.com).

**SAN DIEGO BIKE & KAYAK TOURS**, 858-437-1224; [www.sandiegobikeandkayaktours.com](http://www.sandiegobikeandkayaktours.com).

**LOIS ANN DIVE CHARTERS**, 800-201-4381; [scuba@loisann.com](mailto:scuba@loisann.com).

### GREENS

The San Diego area is home to nearly 100 public and private golf courses aimed at a wide range of skills and budgets.

**CORONADO MUNICIPAL GOLF COURSE**, 2000 Visalia Row, Coronado; 619-435-3121; [www.golfcoronado.com](http://www.golfcoronado.com).

**TORREY PINES MUNICIPAL GOLF COURSE**, North and South Courses (South is more challenging); 11480 North Torrey Pines Road, La Jolla; 800-985-4653; [www.torreypinesgolfcourse.com](http://www.torreypinesgolfcourse.com).



COURTESY: SURFARI

**MADERAS GOLF CLUB**, 17750 Old Coach Road, Poway; 858-451-8100; [www.maderasgolf.com](http://www.maderasgolf.com).

**AVIARA GOLF COURSE**, 7447 Batiquitos Drive, Carlsbad; 760-603-6900; [www.fourseasons.com](http://www.fourseasons.com).

**THE GRAND GOLF CLUB** (formerly Meadows Del Mar), 5300 Meadows Del Mar, San Diego; 858-792-6200; [www.thegrandelmar.com](http://www.thegrandelmar.com).

**LA COSTA RESORT AND SPA**, Costa Del Mar Road, Carlsbad; 800-854-5000; [www.lacosta.com](http://www.lacosta.com).





TOWER23 IS A MODERN BOUTIQUE HOTEL PERCHED ON THE WATER'S EDGE.

COURTESY: TOWER23

# San Diego Style

*Tower23 and W San Diego are two of the city's most stylish new hotels*

By Rob Dunton

## TOWER23

**723 Selstar Street, San Diego  
866-TOWER23; [www.t23hotel.com](http://www.t23hotel.com)**

My long board is squeezed into my SUV along with an overnight bag, a pair of inline skates and sun block. My destination is Tower23, a modern boutique resort perched on the water's edge in Pacific Beach. As I pull in, the hotel's modern lines are inviting. The crisp white lobby, sleek aluminum chairs and row of Zen-style flower arrangements enhance the clean, light ambiance.

Never has cool felt so warm.

Tower23, named after the numbered lifeguard tower that sits on the beach during the summer, has been a huge success since it opened in July 2005. One of the big attractions of Tower23 is its coastal *urban* location. Within three blocks are boutiques, a surfing school, live music venues, bars and a host of eateries. Just 15 minutes on foot is Mission Bay, San

Diego's 4,200-acre water park, where you can rent almost any kind of water toy imaginable.

When the bellman opens the door to my Surf Pad, an unobstructed view of the Pacific Ocean engulfs me. I slide open the balcony door to let in the rumble of the surf and the ocean breeze, then stretch out on the ultrasuede chaise to enjoy the view. A luxurious bathroom, flat-screen HD television and wireless broadband Internet access are just a few of the added comforts I wish I had at home. At a cost of \$16 million for its 44 rooms, Tower23 has invested significantly to create an intimate and soothing environment for its guests.

Before hitting the surf, I fuel up at JRDN, the hotel's upscale restaurant, named for hotel owner Brett Miller's inspirational father. I am given a table on the outdoor patio and order a pair of jumbo

crab cakes with kaffir lime aioli to start, then a satisfying grilled chicken-breast sandwich with fontina cheese on toasted ciabatta. Fronting the hotel is Pacific Beach's boardwalk, where there flows a compendium of Southern California's active population. Toned tri-athletes put in their miles as they weave between families with strollers and bikini-clad Rollerbladers. European tourists walk hand-in-hand as tattooed young men pedal chopper-style bicycles. Surfers cruise on skateboards past seniors out for a Sunday stroll.

While some hotel guests relax in sand-free serenity on the Tower Deck, I grab my board and head down to the wide beach below. It's late February and 73 degrees—endless summer. I paddle out on the north side of the historic Crystal Pier and catch ride after ride on easy rolling waves. Between sets, a young boy shouts down from the pier, "Hey, there's a seal behind you!" I turn to find a young harbor seal bobbing on the surface not 10 feet from me, happily munching on silvery fish.

As sunset approaches, the bar and dinner crowd converges at JRDN. The restaurant's Dune Wall, cast from wind-blown sand and lit in ever-changing color, is as mesmerizing as the setting sun. Beyond the cozy fire pit and waterfall, the Crystal Pier becomes silhouetted as the sky shifts from blue to orange then red to lavender. A pod of dolphins appears just outside the surf zone, riding the waves, kicking out with a splash, and thrilling surfers nearby.

Within the restaurant's airy, modern surroundings, patrons enjoy wine collected from regions influenced by the Pacific Ocean—New Zealand, Chile, Japan and California. As I dip my spoon into a rich bowl of lobster bisque, I know the sea has provided yet another great reason to return to Tower23.

Doubles range from \$169 to \$419, depending on season and degree of view. Suites range from \$379 to \$719.





## W SAN DIEGO

421 West "B" Street, San Diego

619-231-8220; [www.whotels.com](http://www.whotels.com)

Like Alice dropping into a 21st century Wonderland, walking through the doors of San Diego's W transports me from plain urban streets to the ultimate of cool. A symmetrical pair of doormen welcomes me into a breezeway fashioned with floor-to-ceiling fabric, then into the expansive "Living Room" that serves as the hotel's lobby. Though late afternoon daylight still streams through the windows, candles glow on tables and walls. Contemporary music plays in the background, with added punch from hidden subwoofers, at a volume that is intended to influence the mood, not just expunge the silence.

Even before I cross the floor to check in, I notice that the patrons lounging about the lobby are more stylishly dressed than at other hotels I've visited. Either the W attracts style-conscious patrons, or somehow the couture environment has inspired its guests to dress the part.

I have been a fan of architecture and environment for decades. Each time I watch an impeccably stylish movie—whether it's the timeless decor of a Merchant Ivory film or the futuristic fashions in *Gattaca* or *Aeon Flux*—it is clear that good style can enhance the spirit as much as poor design can repress it. Having

the opportunity to live and dine in a space of exceptional design takes the experience of art to another level—you are immersed in it. And W's design team has left nothing to chance.

I'm greeted by young, attractive staff members in tailored black suits standing behind a low marble reception counter, replete with sleek Apple monitors. Wheat grass centerpieces and art books adorn tables. Subtle paintings in muted grays are perched on white shelves. The use of clever names breathes new life into the mundane: The valet service is "Wheels"; the pool is called "Wet"; the spa becomes "Sweat"; and the venerable concierge has been christened "Whatever/Whenever." British terms such as "Lift" and "WC" are applied to elevators and restrooms. The rooftop bar, Beach, has heated sand on the deck, spacious cabanas and a cozy fire pit. Every element of the hotel experience has been orchestrated for maximum impact.

The rooms at the W are compact, efficient and styled to the nth degree. When I enter a guest room for the first time, W's signature CD is playing; the large television is streaming W's exclusive programming; Voss bottled water sits on the nightstand along with copies of *Wired* and *Rolling Stone*. The room's contrasting whites and vibrant colors round out the impeccable presentation.

Rice, the hotel's restaurant, is worth raving about. Executive chef A.J. Voytko, who made his reputation at the Inn at Rancho Santa Fe and Chive, runs an impeccable show. The seared scallops are butter soft and cooked to perfection. The local sea bass is partnered with a garnet yam puree and molasses vinaigrette. For dessert, a warm chocolate cake with peanut butter ganache and peanut brittle ice cream is out of this world.

If you've ever wanted to experience the life of the metro chic and beautiful, a night's stay at the W San Diego will fulfill your fantasy.

Doubles start at \$279 with suites running to \$1500. ▲

*Rob Dunton lives in San Diego.*