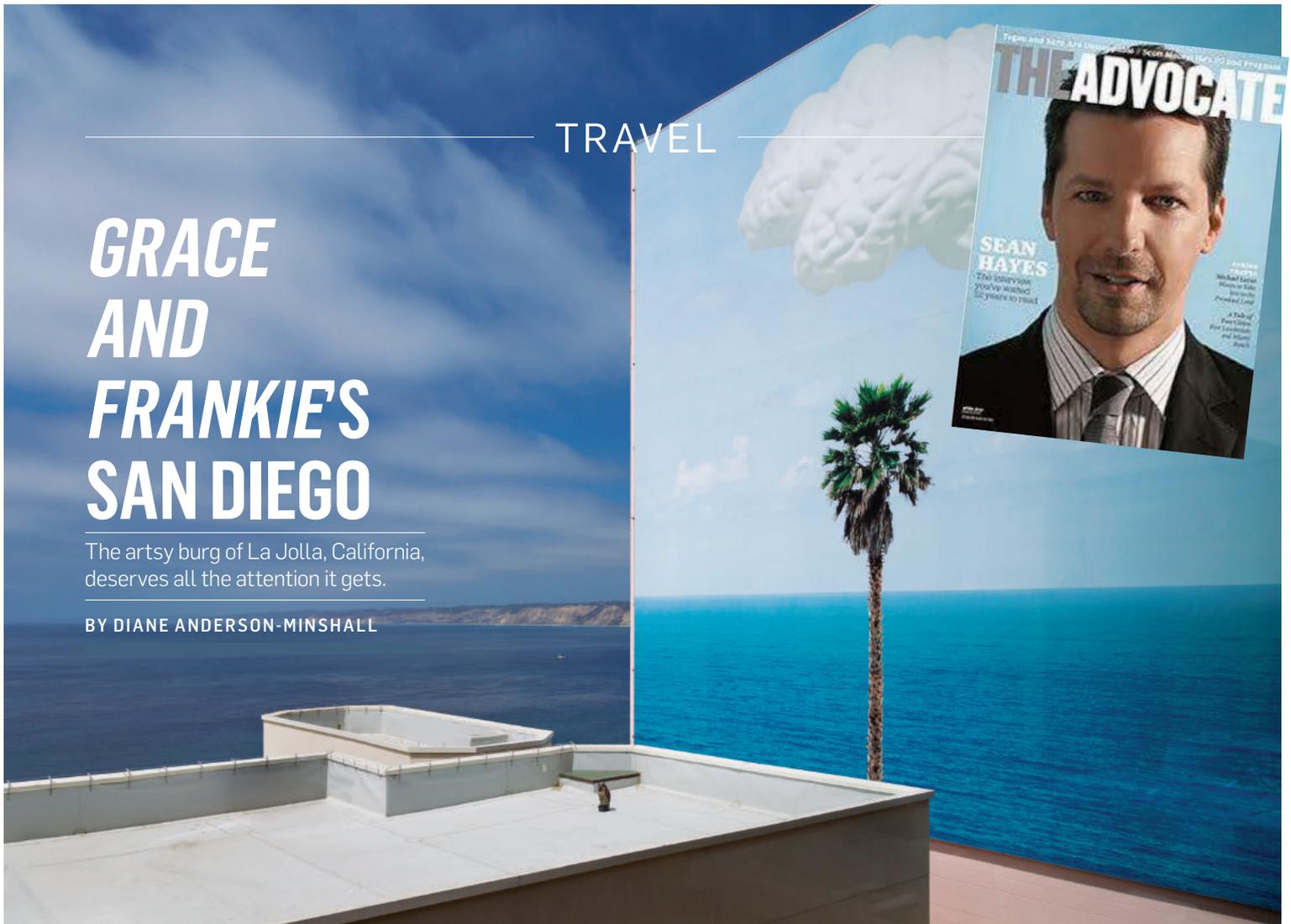


GRACE AND FRANKIE'S SAN DIEGO

The artsy burg of La Jolla, California, deserves all the attention it gets.

BY DIANE ANDERSON-MINSHALL



I'm sitting in a restaurant cuddling with my co-pilot, fully aware that, at this moment, I'm one of the most privileged people in the country, seated at San Diego's Marine Room watching the crashing surf wash over the dining room's floor-to-ceiling windows. It's not the customers (romantics and local power players are both in attendance) or the food (though if you go, don't miss the delicious Absinthe Butter Basted Lobster Tail and the Mayan Spice Chocolate Dome, *Domaine Canton Ginger Crème Brûlée*).

Actually, it's about the location. Being able to witness a safe oceanic engulfment was spectacular. The Marine Room, opened in 1941, is known for being on the finest beach in La Jolla, a section of San Diego that has been made more famous by the Netflix hit *Grace and Frankie*. The show—about two older women in San Diego whose husbands fall in love and come out as gay—features lesbian icon Lily Tomlin and feminist activist Jane Fonda coming to terms with their aging bodies, elder sexuality, and their agency in life.

Even though the show's famous beach house is actually located in Malibu, *Grace and Frankie* shines a light

on La Jolla, a jewel of California that's art-centric, LGBT-friendly, chic and affluent, but accessible. It's a wonderful spot for romance and water adventures, such as snorkeling with baby leopard sharks in the waters of La Jolla Cove, the only place in the U.S. to do so. There are tours—both kayak and snorkel—to the area's ecologically preserved waters and caves, and you can see the sharks (as well as yellowtail, garibaldi, and rays) from your kayak. The Birch Aquarium at the Scripps Institution of Oceanography, offers their own snorkel tours too.

Staying on the beach at La Valencia Hotel, you can literally walk out your door and dive in. Known as “The Pink Lady,” La Valencia is an enchanting, rose-colored Mediterranean-style oceanside resort that is pet-friendly—a rarity with a hotel this swank. The Café la Rue (Bistro + Bar) inside the hotel takes the European experience up a notch with terrazzo floors, Venetian plaster ceilings (think Paris in the '40s), and al fresco dining. (The Watermelon Fresca with Xicaru Mezcal and the Pink Lady cocktails are both divine; Chimichurri Steak is one of the best I've had.)

From the historic La Jolla Cave Store, we visited the world famous Sunny Jim

Sea Cave. A wooden staircase leads 145 steps down a manmade tunnel to the only sea cave here you can access by land. Like all of the 200,000-year-old sandstone and rock caves, the mineral deposits, kelp, and vegetation make for a carpet of amazing colors and fossilized shells. The cave, which is a huge hit with kids, was named “Sunny Jim” by Frank Baum, author of *The Wizard of Oz*, who thought the cave opening bore a resemblance to a 1920s cartoon character of the same name. On your long climb back up the stairs, reflect that it took two Chinese laborers two years to build the tunnel using only picks, shovels, and buckets (to move the rock).

After a lovely but too-short stay at La Valencia, we moved to Grande Colonial Hotel, the more than 100-year-old European-style hotel once favored by Hollywood legends from Groucho Marx to Charlton Heston. Many actors continue to stay there, because of its privacy and proximity to famed La Jolla Playhouse, which has incubated 28 productions that later ran on Broadway (earning 35 Tony Awards), and dozens more that have enjoyed international fanfare. Founded by La Jolla native Gregory Peck, the Playhouse remains a



From far left: One of La Jolla's famous murals by John Baldessari, La Valencia Hotel, kayaking La Jolla Cove, *Grace and Frankie* on the beach, and The Birch Aquarium at Scripps

top attraction for LGBT travelers and Hollywood heavyweights. (Between Nov. 7 and Dec. 10, you can see the world premier of *SUMMER: The Donna Summer Musical*, by director Des McAnuff and choreographer Sergio Trujillo, the Tony-winning team behind *Jersey Boys*.)

The Grand Colonial is lush, and what was once Peck's father's pharmacy inside the hotel (back when pharmacies had soda fountains and ice cream parlors) is now one of the best restaurants in San Diego, hands down. NINE-TEN's farm-to-table focus on seasonally fresh items pays off here—every egg feels freshly plucked from a chicken's nest.

Lunching socialites and aging fashionistas swig martinis with shopping bags by their sides (from the Rodeo Drive-style shopping and beauty salons nearby), but "Mercy of the Chef" prix-fixe menu dinners are the main

attraction. My favorites included a Stone Fruit Salad (with purslane, burrata, blackberries, charred cucumber, and peach vinaigrette), an extensive global cheese course, and an Alaskan halibut (with fava beans, chanterelle mushrooms, and a corn dashi emulsion). Between the hotels, the food, shows, and shopping, La Jolla offers a surprisingly sophisticated experience for a beachside resort. We spent our final morning absorbed in a walking tour of the Murals of La Jolla, commissioned by the Athenaeum Music & Arts Library and the La Jolla Community Foundation. During the guided tour, curator Lynda Forsha shares the history of each mural, introducing the artist and inspiration behind each image.

The Art Advisory Committee, comprised of the heads of the major visual arts organizations in La Jolla, first commissioned artists Roy McMakin and Kim MacConnel to adorn local buildings in 2010. Subsequent artworks have been printed on vinyl and installed on billboard-like structures. Each work is on view for a minimum of two years and has been generously

funded by private donations. Many amazing queer artists have been among those featured, including Catherine Opie and Mark Bradford.

"What's interesting about this collaboration is that the leaders of our arts organizations have come together to create an outdoor exhibition that makes artwork accessible to a larger audience, 24 hours a day, seven days a week," said California congressman Scott Peters. He's right. After our walking tour, we drove around marveling at the cosmopolitan art on display in this relatively small city.

Intimate, sophisticated, bold, adventurous, and California mellow—the words could describe La Jolla as much as they do *Grace and Frankie*. As Fonda and Tomlin, the titular heroes of the show prepare for yet another season (Netflix has renewed a fourth season for 2018), I'm going to get to La Jolla as much as possible before the rest of the country realizes what a gem it is. 📍



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