

laguna beach living

21 Hours at Hotel Joaquin

January 17, 2019 · Lara Wilson



Two days before my reservation begins, I receive an email from [Hotel Joaquin](#). It's a gentle, automated reminder that its common areas are meant to be a serene space for all to enjoy — so no heavy Instagramming, I'm already looking forward to powering down my screens and taking a moment to myself.

3:15pm

Check in is at 3, so naturally I arrive only 15 minutes past. I'm here to make the most of every minute. I park temporarily at a meter and dovelat with a beautiful young man. I trail him closely enough to the heavy wooden front door that I'm inside the radius of his cologne.

Inside, service seems to be just getting started. *Am I the only person here?* The beautiful man has disappeared. But other friendly, not unattractive faces emerge from the blond, paneled woodwork. My reservation is retrieved at a wooden slab of a desk topped with a heavy book engraved in gold foil with the word, "RESERVATIONS," and also an iPad. I'm whisked to a bar with a glittering ocean view and offered my choice of complimentary spritz: rum, sweet vermouth, champagne, aperol.

I had caught up by phone that morning with the owner of the hotel, Paul Makarechian, CEO of Makar Properties and its Auric Road collection, with "petite resorts" in Palm Springs, Tucson, Laguna Beach, and Big Sky, Montana. "One of my fondest memories was going to this little French island in the Caribbean where all the hotels were small and quaint. There were no big hotels," he remembers. "I have my own personal passion for smaller pensions and inns — ones where there's a lot of private ownership and attention to detail, and the customer experience is one where you can personally engage with the team. The inspiration [for Hotel Joaquin] was that French Riviera-Mediterranean-St. Barth's intimacy, personalization, style, and sophistication, but marrying it with a Southern California freshness and the Laguna Beach heritage and history."

Right now, though, sipping my Auric Spritz, I am happily in Italy.



The beautiful man I had followed inside is back — he's the bartender. I remark on the view. He jokes about his "office." It could definitely be worse, I concur. He tells me that the hotel has only been open for two-and-a-half months. Like many of the Auric Road projects, it was upcycled from an existing property, in this case the underutilized but relatively inexpensive Laguna Motor Inn. Hotel Joaquin has kept the bones — and the topiary trees — but given the rooms a desperately-needed revamp.

Perched at the bar, I'm essentially in an open-plan, open-air living room. There's a record collection guests are permitted to borrow from (all the rooms have their own players), a couch, and a fireplace. Just feet from where I'm sitting, a patio is dotted with dining tables, Saline, the hotel's restaurant. Stairs on either side lead up and down to rooms. In the center of the space, graded levels drop sequentially from the restaurant to a grassy garden, a heated saltwater pool, a side street, and, finally, the ocean. The seawater sparkles into nothingness.

3:45pm

An employee named Nate turns a *key (a real metal key)* into my home for the night. Its key ring is stamped with a name, Maree. There are three levels of rooms, 22 in total, all unique, all named. Maree smells fresh but not floral or sweet. I breathe in deeply. She is tidy and luxuriously minimalist. There are trendy touches that feel almost obligatory, like a Herschel Supply fanny pack in the wardrobe. But when I unzip it and realize it comes stocked with beach cleanup gear, I'm sorry for calling it trendy.

Nate shows me how to use the record player and the shower, like I'm staying the night at a friend's house. I appreciate the record player guidance, since in some other hotels I've been to there are foreboding "YOU BREAK IT YOU BUY IT" labels everywhere with no instructions in sight. I put on The Doors and dance. I collapse on the bed and consider never getting back up. I open and close the curtains. I make a mental note to utilize the balcony. I stand under hot water for ages. I appreciate the shower guidance as well.



11:00pm

I take a bath, then I stand on the balcony overlooking the courtyard in my robe and listen to the dampened crash of the ocean. For the most part, the hotel has powered down for the night. It's a Wednesday in North Laguna, after all.

6:45am

My eyes open to light softly fading in through the double-layer curtains. You could probably black the windows out completely, but I'm a morning person. The sky is pink with spun-sugar clouds over the ocean. A card had been sandwiched into my door the previous evening, advising me of the precise timing of the sunrise: 6:49. It also invited me on an adventure — a hike or a yoga class — starting at 9. For now, the sunrise is adventure enough.

7:30am

My coffee order arrives, served in the beautiful Japanese Hasami porcelain I have by now vowed to begin collecting for myself.

8:30am

Breakfast at Saline is on the house and cooked to order. More gorgeous tableware, more microgreens piled high on a plate. This time they accompany an egg, delicately folded cured salmon and roe, a smear of Camembert and pumpkinseed toast. The oj is fresh and polpy.

