

# colorand<sup>a</sup>roma

The Wine Magazine For Everyone

## *Wild West-Side* Wine Country

Paso Robles, the epicenter of the  
California Central Coast wine boom

### Synergistic Magic

The best chefs and restaurants  
of the Central Coast

### Boutique Hotels

The hippest hotels for the  
coolest people

### Small Winery Renaissance

Straight off the SoCal vine

### Cult Wines

The bling-bling of pop wine culture

### Martin Diedrich

A Passion for Coffee

[www.colorandaroma.com](http://www.colorandaroma.com)





# Boutique Hotels

## *Hip Hotels* for *Cool People*

BY RAY WYMAN JR AND STAN BRIN

What is a boutique hotel?  
It might be easier to tell you what it isn't.



---

Michael Kelly, owner of Ivy Hotel in San Diego

A boutique hotel is not a cookie-cutter, big-name, high-rise monster with 1,400 rooms. It's not a place to get your hair done, buy women's clothing or browse knick-knacks for Auntie Jane. It's not a little old lady's home converted to host a dozen or so guests (that's a different thing altogether).

A boutique hotel also isn't a place where you'll end up with a sudden case of *déjà vu* because your room is nearly identical to the one you stayed at in Boise, Berlin or Bombay. There are a few resemblances with traditional hotels - you may find some of the same amenities and usually the prices about the same as what you'd expect from a comparable class. But after that, just about anything goes.

Quirky, stylish, trendy and fun, boutiques sprang up in

the hip enclaves of San Francisco, New York and London about 25 years ago. According to Gary Bedian, founder of Bedian International and an investment advisor and asset manager based in Los Angeles, they showed up at just the right time.

"In the race to serve mass audiences, hoteliers standardized every aspect of their service so that guests knew what to expect and felt secure with the brand," says Bedian, who manages about \$1.2 billion in capitalized assets including several major hotels and resorts in California and Nevada. His work also includes structuring and managing "repositioning" projects - complete makeovers to make older hotels more competitive.

"For a while, the 'one-size' strategy worked very well," he continues. Then travelers got bored. "You have to admit, where's the fun in sitting in a room that's practically identical to dozens of rooms in as many cities and even countries?"

Just as the dot-com era met its infamous bust, travelers began seeking out boutiques for a little adventure and style they couldn't find at a Hilton. "Boutiques did an excellent job of filling a gap the major brands couldn't fill," Bedian says. "Basically the boutiques beat the big brands at their own game; the big guys didn't anticipate the smaller guys' nimbleness and some of them made the mistake of assuming it was a novelty, a passing fad."

Bedian is currently working on a top-secret project (can't

West Restaurant and Lounge, the penthouse restaurant on top of Hotel Angeleno



even say what city) to reposition a former big brand hotel as an exclusive boutique. “This kind of work requires a great deal of advance planning,” he comments.

Gary Bedian, founder of Bedian International



“Boutiques are successful because they can generate a strong and loyal customer base.”

Bedian runs through a checklist of features and amenities that make boutique hotels successful. There’s the all-important intimate setting, sexy ambiance, hot restaurant and nightlife venues, price and, of course, location. Some hotels are location-centered, they’re actually parked in the middle of a tourist destination. But, from a marketing perspective, says Bedian, the key is flexibility.

“The reason boutique hotels grew so quickly,” he says, “is

because they answered a unique need in the marketplace. Travelers wanted an escape from the generic, cookie-cutter chain.” As long as the flow of innovation continues and their unique position is maintained, boutique hotels will flourish.

Along with their heavily themed intimate settings and à la mode furnishings, many boutiques have added an array of extras like exclusive fine wines, culinary excellence, multi-room suites, wi-fi and white-glove butler service. And the price range has expanded from moderately priced

(\$100) to high-end (\$350 plus). By and large, they’re still independently owned and usually small (between 50 to 200 rooms), but they continue to distinguish themselves as trendsetters in a highly competitive market.

But don’t count the big brands out yet. While boutiques are growing in popularity, many major brands are launching their own boutique sub-brands. “A lot of money is being invested to give the old properties a bit of that boutique magic,” Bedian comments.



Lobby at the Hotel Angeleno

Joanna Perlman, co-owner  
of the Hotel Angeleno



### Oasis by the 405

If you're still having a hard time justifying a stay at a boutique for business, try the Hotel Angeleno located at the crossroads of upscale Brentwood and Bel-Air and within eyeshot of downtown Los Angeles.

The lobby offers a hint of retro and a large steel-and-glass outdoor screen has a dual purpose as an architectural accent and a sound barrier against the frontal assault of traffic whizzing by on the 405 Freeway a few dozen yards away. The hotel uses its accessibility to its practical advantage, which proves that good taste and design are not only within everybody's reach, they can also be sensible and affordable.

With rooms starting at \$189, your accountant will definitely approve of an overnight stay. While a six-month, multi-million-dollar remodeling can't hide the fact that it was once a Holiday Inn (the telltale is the distinct 60s exterior

profile), the interior is a modern mix of warm and cool elements that blend dark woods with slate, stone and glass accents.

Overall, the Angeleno is a milder variety of the boutique species, but there are a few touches that scream boutique - like the haute cuisine that comes out of the Italian steakhouse in the penthouse as well as the fashionable furniture, iPod Nanos and the ample places for social, business and private gatherings.

Designed to meet the tastes of any discerning traveler, the Angeleno is also one of the best-managed hotels you'll find on the Westside, thanks mainly to Chip Conley's celebrated management firm, Joie de Vivre. "We looked at different options for remodeling and repositioning our hotel," says Angeleno co-owner Joanna Perlman. "But I can't say enough about Chip and his company. They really made the difference for us."

### Such a Lovely Place...

The next stop is the Hotel California. That's right, there really is a Hotel California. Two of them, actually: one by the beach in Santa Monica and the other in downtown San Francisco. Although both hotels certainly have been around long enough, management doesn't claim the Eagles wrote their famous song about either - neither is directly off "a dark desert highway." But both are what a boutique hotel is supposed to be and both are moderately priced, from \$149 a night. Both are equal in terms of unique ambiance and full service, and both are right *where* they're supposed to be (location, location, location).

The Hotel California in San Francisco is within easy walking distance of Union Square, cable cars and Chinatown. Santa Monica's Hotel California, on the other hand, is only a short stroll - with the sea breeze in your hair - from

the beach and the Santa Monica Pier. Every one of its 29 rooms is designed around a surfing theme. Even the hand-carved headboards, unique to each room, are modeled after surfboards. Many tourists stay at the Santa Monica hotel to take in the beach and the nearby Venice boardwalk, but typical of boutique hotels, a lot of the clientele are business-oriented. New York-based producers stay there while negotiating deals. Writers rent rooms for inspired scripts.

With 87 rooms, the San Francisco Hotel California is much larger and offers a different perspective. As a way to guarantee certain standards and manage bookings, the owner actually bought a Best Western franchise. "Best Western inspects rooms, sees to it that mattresses are changed periodically and that comments by guests are tended to," says novelist Leo Furey, who is also the hotel spokesman. "But they don't tell us how to decorate the hotel or dictate the type of services we provide. It's our decision to provide 500-count sheets, and wine and cheese in the afternoon."



### Envy the Ivy

If you really want to splurge, the Ivy Hotel in downtown San Diego is braded with the kind of exquisite design and luxurious amenities that would satisfy even the Donald himself. The average nightly rate, according to TripAdvisor.com, is \$336 but there are package deals starting at about \$265. Incidentally, Donald-type rooms fetch a neck-wrenching \$4,000 a night.

The Ivy trumps location; it's only blocks from the convention center and borders the stylish Gas Lamp Quarter. Touches like leather-lashed pillars in the lobby and a two-story-high impressionistic painting draws in lots of sophisticated ambiance. With its sweeping spiral staircase, the basement bar indulges guests with techno features such as neon accents and intimate seating. The rooftop

“ultra lounge” (the largest I’ve ever seen on a roof) has unbeatable skyline views.

With only 159 rooms, this hotel seems larger than it really is. Even the low-end rooms have plenty of space and natural light. Premium rooms have suite-like layouts and bathrooms with glass walls. The amenities, too, are extraordinary: high-end dining in the Quarter Kitchen, iPod docking stations, 42-inch plasma HDTVs, premium beds - you get the idea.

Michael Kelly, the owner and the hotel’s chief inspirator, showed me his basement wine cellar, which contained more fine wine than I have ever seen all at once. With an original Picasso print looming behind us, he explained that his goal was to make a very special audience feel right at home here:



---

Damon Gordon's Quarter  
Kitchen at the IVY Hotel

“I want people to relax and enjoy what I’ve built. It wasn’t enough to just build a hotel - anybody can build a hotel. My dream was to give guests a place that is fun and exciting; a place that makes people feel good and creates social excitement.”

Incidentally, sources from the San Diego Comic Book Convention say the Ivy is the hotel of choice for their VIP celebrity visitors: Jessica Alba and the entire cast of “Lord of the Rings” have all been guests.

### Boutique Mecca

If you’re sporting for some boutique investment diversity, San Francisco is prime paradise. The downtown sports literally hundreds of older buildings of just the right size for renovating or converting to small, intimate, quirky (in a good way) little hotels.


Under these conditions, it was inevitable that an entire chain of boutique hotels would spring up, all within walking distance of each other.

Prestige Hotels is a group of seven boutiques that has taken great care to give location a unique flavor and business plan. Hotel Union Square stresses the area’s history: formerly known as the Golden West, the hotel was originally built for the Panama Pacific Exposition of 1915 and offers a wide variety of period memorabilia. Famed *noir* mystery writer Dashiell Hammett stayed here while writing his stories.

In contrast, The Hotel Diva, is pricier and business-oriented with more contemporary décor. Its four complimentary internet lounges were each designed by a different artist. The Metropolis hotel is more New Age with an “Earth, Wind, Fire and Water” theme. A waterfall behind the desk adds a Zen touch.

This is also where the firm of Joie de Vivre originally honed their impressive record of hotel management. The firm manages no less than 26 hotels in Northern California, most of them in

the greater San Francisco area. In terms of pricing and service range, the majority of these places are comparable to the Angeleno, a handful are a tad higher. All are popular destinations with leisure and business tourists.

Which brings us back to the basic concept of a boutique hotel. Of all the factors - smaller size, ambience, personal service and location (and price, of course) - the most relative point is how each hotel makes the guest feel. Every boutique hotel is a unique creation, so each is designed to serve individual needs. You might even see yourself “belonging” to a particular hotel because of the way it makes you feel - hip or cool or a little of both. It’s this feeling of individuality that gives boutiques an edge over their competition. Yet, while not one boutique hotel can be considered a cookie or a cutter, they are being regarded as models for how to build hotels in the foreseeable future. 

## Custom Pet Portraits



Capture their Charm & Personality Forever  
by Commission • oil & varnish on linen

Kate Riegler Studios • 949.280.8813  
kateriegler@cox.net • www.kateriegler.com