



Step Inside The Madrona, a 19th-Century Manse Turned Wine Country Hotel

Filled with many of its original antique trappings, The Madrona marks Jay Jeffers's entrée to hospitality

By [Kathryn Romeyn](#)

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For designers, there's a special aura around hotels. "I'm always inspired by the design," effuses Northern California residential interior designer [Jay Jeffers](#), as he recalls seeing [Kelly Wearstler](#)'s Viceroy Santa Monica just after it opened: "Suddenly, I was in love with everything Kelly Wearstler." It's not just the furnishings and decor that captivate him—it's the staff uniforms, guests' ensembles, music, food, and cocktails. "It's always been a secret dream to have a little hotel—it's every designer's secret," he says. "But I never really thought I would actually have one!" Nevertheless, this month, the designer, along with his brother Kyle and business partner Cory Schisler, is opening his very own 24-room boutique hotel in California's [wine country](#). Starting April 22, [The Madrona](#)'s guests will get to see for themselves that no detail has gone unconsidered.

It was Memorial Day weekend of 2020 when a real estate agent friend called Jeffers—who lives in San Francisco and the Napa town of St. Helena—to ask if he'd like to scope out a property just going on the market. "If it had not been a pandemic, we probably would have been traveling, but for fun we went over there," he says. The place was a mile outside of Healdsburg, a buzzy wine country town home to outposts like Montage Healdsburg and The Matheson. Jeffers and Schisler drove through 1920s gates, up a hill, and through the gardens. To the left, they saw an 1881 mansion; to the right, expansive views of the Dry Creek Valley.



An antique-filled space at The Madrona in Healdsburg. The hotel, which will host guests starting April 22, is managed by Mosaic Hotel Group. Photo: Matthew Millman

“I literally went into every single room,” Jeffers recalls. “I was immediately saying, ‘Let’s paint all the buildings white, the pool needs to be fixed over here.’ I could see its entire future and that’s only happened a few times in my life.” And he imagined music: remixes of iconic songs à la Hôtel Costes in Paris, the cool syncopated rhythms of bossa nova, and—because Jeffers is a huge ’80s fan—some pop tunes from later eras, too. “I was also like, ‘We’re gonna have an ’80s night in the dining room!’”

Clearly, Jeffers never envisaged The Madrona as a period hotel. But his dream for the venue was an anomaly in [California](#)’s wine country, where architectural vogue has transitioned from Italian villa style to modern farmhouse chic, under the influence of Howard Backen.



The hotel's restaurant, which is run by Michelin-starred chef Jesse Mallgren. Photo: Matthew Millman

The 10,000-square-foot former family residence sits on eight acres—including a quarter-acre garden—and came with 750 pieces of furniture and art. After purchasing the estate, cataloguing its contents, and embarking on an elegant reimagining of the interiors, about 250 of those pieces made the cut. (Around 30 of them date back to the home's first owners, the Paxton family.)

Jeffers says he decided to commit to “respecting the architecture.” “I feel like I’m a steward for this property for the next owner in however many years, because we’re only the sixth,” he says. Jeffers distributed the original furnishings among the 12-foot-ceiling bedrooms and public spaces, “so there’s at least one piece of history in each room.” They mingle with 20th-century objects as well as custom-designed pieces with a more modern (but never, ever minimalist) edge. Jeffers’s team gutted and enlarged all the bathrooms with contemporary touches, like heated floors, to bring the amenities into the 21st century.



Arts and Crafts pattern and 19th-century ornament meet more contemporary furnishings in a sitting room at The Madrona. Photo: Matthew Millman

In the grand hall entryway, 14-foot ceilings are hand-painted in a sumptuous, moody floral, a nod to the U.K.'s Aesthetic Movement, which was unfolding at the time of the mansion's construction. Motifs in the space have their origins in transferware that Jeffers showed artist [Willem Racké](#). Once the space was stripped of draperies and drenched in natural light, Jeffers says he thought, "OK, this is not a white-interior hotel. This is colorful and rich," even though at first he had envisioned it in white. Periwinkle blue and ochre yellow—shades pulled from the property's gardens—became a dominant palette. "It came from a desire to bring in some color and personality," Jeffers says.

The restaurant dining room, run by Michelin-starred chef Jesse Mallgren and opening April 21, has its own point of view. "I think we've upped the elegance a little bit," Jeffers says. "There are a lot of places [in the area] where, if you go dressed up, you feel a little out of sorts." Not here: In this elevated interior, guests will want to show off a new dress or blazer. Still, it doesn't take itself too seriously. On the walls, beneath a dramatic Lumifer fixture and saturated yellow coffered ceiling, hang photographs from Beth Moon's *Literary Chickens* series. "I call them my

ladies who lunch,” laughs Jeffers, “because one appears to have a fabulous fur hat, another looks like she has a fur stole around her neck. They’re just so dreamy and wonderful.”



A neutral palette—and plenty of cozy textiles—in a guest room. Photo: Matthew Millman

The private dining room tells a story, too, with a custom digital mural by Phillip Jeffries depicting The Madrona’s history, including its winery (taken out by the 1906 earthquake), orange grove, and namesake madrone tree. Along with reverence to the past, Jeffers wove in modernity via creative collaborations, like the chandelier by local artists [Tuell & Reynolds](#). “When Randy [Tuell] heard we were the new owners, he sent me a note saying, ‘We’re local and we would love to be part of this process,’” Jeffers says. “I’ve got a few things in my warehouse, do you want to come [and] look?” It was love at first sight when Jeffers saw the fixture, which is one of five now hanging in The Madrona.



Smart pattern and a dramatic stone vanity in a bathroom at The Madrona. Photo: Matthew Millman

Jeffers begged Detroit watercolor artist [Kelly Ventura](#), whose wallpapers he fell in love with through Instagram, to let him use her design for a custom carpet (a collaboration with Blended LA) in the private dining room. Her wallpaper, meanwhile, features in the living rooms of one-bedroom suites. Jeffers also developed a line of four rugs and a hair-on-hide wallcovering for the hotel with [Kyle Bunting](#), two of them modeled after original tiles from the estate. Jeffers's good friend Lisa Chadwick, owner of San Francisco's Dolby Chadwick Gallery, curated the art collection that is available for purchase and is hung salon-style, "like someone who really couldn't help themselves when they found a beautiful piece of art."

Initially, Jeffers wanted each guest room to be completely unique, but ultimately matched custom beds and nightstands. "Three rooms in I was like, "This is crazy. I will lose my mind if I design 24 rooms completely differently!" I abandoned that very quickly." Throughout the project, he relied on his network to help navigate challenging budgets

and the hospitality field in general. "One thing I would definitely do in the future is a model room," Jeffers says. "You measure it 17 times and then you hope it comes in the way it's supposed to." Jeffers's team got lucky—their care led to success. But, Jeffers says, "I would have slept better at night having the ability to tweak things after seeing it all in a room before ordering 24 of them!"

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