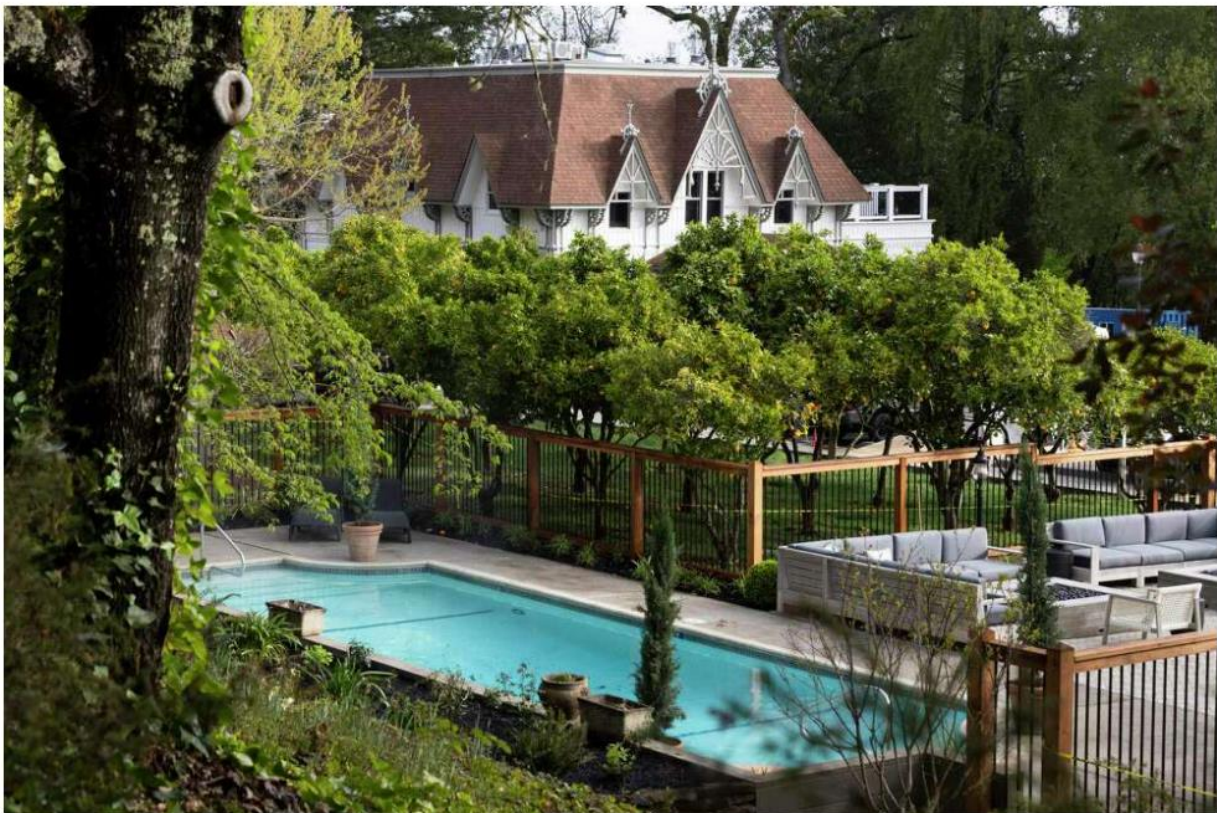


# San Francisco Chronicle

FOOD // WINE, BEER & SPIRITS

## Inside Healdsburg's famed Madrona, a quaint country inn turned swanky resort



Jessica Christian / The Chronicle



JESS LANDER April 5, 2022



The Madrona, the historic Healdsburg hotel that's best known for its namesake Michelin-star restaurant, is gearing up to reopen in April after a one-year, \$6 million revamp.

The transformation, led by noted interior designer Jay Jeffers, took this once quaint country inn and turned it into a swanky resort with a bold and playful design and an all-day food and beverage program. The revamp is emblematic of the bigger changes afoot in Healdsburg, previously a sleepy agricultural town that's become one of the hottest destinations in Wine Country.

Healdsburg's modern-day renaissance started with the opening of three-Michelin-starred SingleThread in 2016. In late 2020, the Montage Healdsburg debuted its sprawling luxury resort (with rooms priced in the thousands), and that was followed by the three-story Matheson restaurant in 2021. A series of other lauded winery and restaurant openings in the past few years — like Aperture Cellars, Marine Layer and the Quail & Condor Bakery — has solidified Healdsburg's place as one of the top tourist destinations in Northern California.



Top photo: After a \$6 million makeover, the revamped Madrona mansion reopens in April as a resort with a pool and deck surrounded by a citrus grove on the historic 8-acre estate. The mansion, above left, was built in 1881 as a private residence. Following the remodel by noted designer Jay Jeffers, it now features a revamped garden house, above right, and wedding lawn. Photos by Jessica Christian / The Chronicle

What sets the changes apart from other buzzing destinations (like Napa), for some Healdsburg residents is that it doesn't feel too corporate. "It's not Wine Country Vegas," said Kyle Connaughton, co-owner of SingleThread. Connaughton and his



wife, Katina, will open their new Healdsburg restaurant, Little Saint, later this month. Connaughton attributes that to the fact that multigeneration wine families coexist in Healdsburg with a new group of people that are bringing changes to the town.

“The Madrona is really exciting because it represents both of those things: It’s a historic property with an amazing legacy and they’re preserving that while still carrying it forward into the future,” Connaughton said.

The Madrona’s redevelopment came about after Jeffers and other investors bought the hotel property for \$8.6 million in 2021. Originally established as a working farm in 1862 and listed on the National Register of Historic Places, the Madrona now has 24 rooms. Starting at \$750 a night, they are divided up between the original Victorian mansion and carriage house, and a handful of private bungalows scattered throughout bucolic grounds. The property also features culinary gardens, a pool and a fitness center.



Antique pieces, like this dresser, above left, can be found in each room. Jeffers preserved about 250 pieces that came with the purchase. The guest rooms, above right, were designed with soothing blue tones. Photos by Jessica Christian / The Chronicle

The hotel, previously known as Madrona Manor, garnered acclaim in 2008 when its restaurant received a Michelin star. It retained one for 13 consecutive years after that. Jeffers changed the restaurant as well; it will now serve a less formal, all-day menu.

Sonoma native and chef Jesse Mallgren, who has worked at the inn since 1999, stayed on to run the kitchen. In the restaurant's former life, Mallgren served a tasting menu at dinner; it was the kind of place where families would come to celebrate birthdays, engagements and anniversaries, he said. Now the restaurant will serve breakfast, lunch and dinner, in addition to weekend brunch and a bar menu.

The dishes are inspired by Mallgren's travels and fresh ingredients from the on-site garden, managed by Aris Curtis, a regenerative farming expert who has worked with many Michelin-star chefs, including Dominique Crenn. At the new restaurant, the plating will be "less precious" and more substantial. "It lends itself to sharing with friends, having a cocktail and a bite to eat as opposed to dedicating three hours to dinner," Curtis said. "I still think we're fine dining, just more approachable and fun."



Chef Jesse Mallgren, above left, earned the inn's previous restaurant a Michelin star for 13 consecutive years. Outdoor dining is offered on the Palm Terrace, above right. Photos by Jessica Christian / The Chronicle

Mallgren is bringing back two dishes: his onion veloute soup with a slow-cooked egg; and a fried chicken that will be served at brunch. Other dishes include a corned beet tartare made with lacto-fermented roasted beets; lemon-cured anchovies with fennel pollen from the garden; and a chicken paillard served with spicy brown butter and toasted rice powder, inspired by a trip to Thailand.

The main dining room, which seats about 14 people, is a bold contrast to the rest of the mansion: It boasts mustard-color walls, a massive, modern light fixture with light pink bulbs and wallpapered ceiling panels depicting Victorian-era plates.

The bulk of the restaurant seating, more than a dozen additional tables, is on an expansive, covered terrace. It's an ideal spot for brunch service, said Cory Schisler, a partner in the Madrona who worked closely with Jeffers throughout the remodel. "I want it to be rowdy and musical," Schisler said.



The dining room at The Madrona in Healdsburg, Calif. Tuesday, March 29, 2022.  
Jessica Christian / The Chronicle



Jeffers said the hotel was dark, tired and insular when he acquired the property; the exterior was painted a “lemony yellow” with a green trim, while the interior was mostly beige. He brought in more light and color to the property, painting the exteriors white and going in the opposite direction inside. The interiors are whimsical with lots of blue tones and a purposeful mishmash of eclectic art that Jeffers commissioned from his friend Lisa Chadwick of San Francisco’s Dolby Chadwick Gallery to blanket the walls.

This design style is inspired by the Aesthetic Movement, which started toward the end of the Victorian period in the late 19th century around the time that the mansion was built in 1881 as a private residence. Jeffers said Aestheticism championed “art for art’s sake and beauty for beauty’s sake” instead of serving a practical or moral purpose.



Bay Area designer Jay Jeffers, above left, bought the Madrona mansion with an investment group in 2021. An eclectic private dining room, above right, connects to the main dining room. Photos by Jessica Christian / The Chronicle

To preserve the estate’s history, he refurbished about 250 antique pieces that came with the purchase — including mirrors, beds, armoires and light fixtures — distributing them throughout the Madrona’s many rooms to create a juxtaposition

between old and new. “That’s what I love about design,” he said, “mixing things together and making it feel like it’s been collected over time.”

Jeffers restored the mansion’s original wraparound front porch, which was removed at some point. Now it looks out at a panorama of vineyards. Inside, the first room to the right houses Hannah’s Bar, named after the property’s original matriarch. The Madrona partnered with West Bev, a Bay Area consulting firm founded by a group of industry veterans — including Che Fico bar director Christopher Longoria — to develop its beverage program. Cocktails include the Coconut Vesper, made with coconut fat-washed vodka, Lillet, gin and a lime peel; and the Madrona Cup, a house spin on the traditional Pimm’s Cup.



The Bessie & Blitz cocktail, clockwise from top left, is served with a honey tuille; chicken paillard was inspired by chef Jesse Mallgren’s visit to Thailand; a bartender adds Napa Cabernet to the Santa Catalina cocktail; the onion veloute soup is one of two menu items that Mallgren has brought back from the Madrona’s previous restaurant. Photos by Jessica Christian / The Chronicle

The first floor of the mansion features several other common areas, including a light-filled parlor with a fireplace and lavender-blue walls, a library and two dining rooms (one for private events).



Rooms at the mansion are located on the second and third floors. Many have high ceilings and fireplaces and four have spacious terraces with chaise lounges and a view either of vineyards or the estate.

The rooms in the bungalows and the carriage house feature the same clean design and subdued tones as those in the main mansion. Jeffers commissioned designer Kyle Bunting to create a series of laser-cut panels of horses made from horsehair and hide for the carriage house's entryway. It's a nod to the Madrona's origins, but also a significant period in the town's history, a period when Healdsburg began to move away from farming cows and orchards in favor of wine grapes. When the Madrona reopens in a few weeks, it will likely become a notable part of the town's evolution.



The view of Sonoma County from the front porch of The Madrona in Healdsburg, Calif. Tuesday, March 29, 2022.  
Jessica Christian / The Chronicle

“The Madrona is bringing a really great experience, rooms and a culinary offering, and if that brings more people to Healdsburg, everyone else in the community benefits,” Connaughton said.

*The Madrona. Opening April, 2022. 1001 Westside Road, Healdsburg*

<https://www.sfchronicle.com/food/wine/article/Inside-Healdsburg-s-famed-Madrona-a-quaint-17057030.php>