



A DIFFERENT KIND OF
'STOREY'

*Travel off the beaten (tourist) path to these
Virginia City treasures*



LOCALS KNOW VIRGINIA CITY for its colorful past, ghosts and legends. Treasures like Mark Twain's Territorial Enterprise, the Old Washoe Club and the Bucket of Blood line C Street, the town's main thoroughfare, promising a trip back in time to Nevada's historic past.

But what many locals may not know is that a different Virginia City can be experienced beyond the C Street routine.

One mile south of Virginia City on Highway 342 is the Gold Hill Hotel, established in 1861 and renowned as Nevada's oldest operating hotel.

"Visitors are often surprised Gold Hill used to be bigger than Virginia City," says hotel manager Rita Wheeler of the town's gold rush days. The hotel's original stone structure, erected two years after the town was settled in 1861, still houses four rooms — smaller, more charming spaces decorated in period style.

An addition was built in 1987; larger and more contemporary in feel, these rooms offer upscale amenities, some even boasting fireplaces and flat-screen televisions.

"We want the experience to be authentic yet comfortable," Wheeler says. "But of course, part of that authentic experience includes the ghosts."

Ghost hunters are regular visitors to the property, some even from the national and international stage.

"We do see a lot of paranormal activity," Wheeler says while standing in the lobby trying to conjure spirits using dousing rods, a technique she uses to communicate with the hotel's more notorious customers. "When there's tragedy, like the mine fire that killed 39 men right outside of our Miners' Cabin, you tend to get ghosts."

Wheeler notes that visitors should make the trip if not for spirits, then for spirited conversation with locals in the property's historic bar and for remarkable dishes offered up by the hotel's new chef, Serge Marchale. The classically trained French chef will celebrate a year at the property in September and he has completely revamped the Crown Point restaurant's menu.

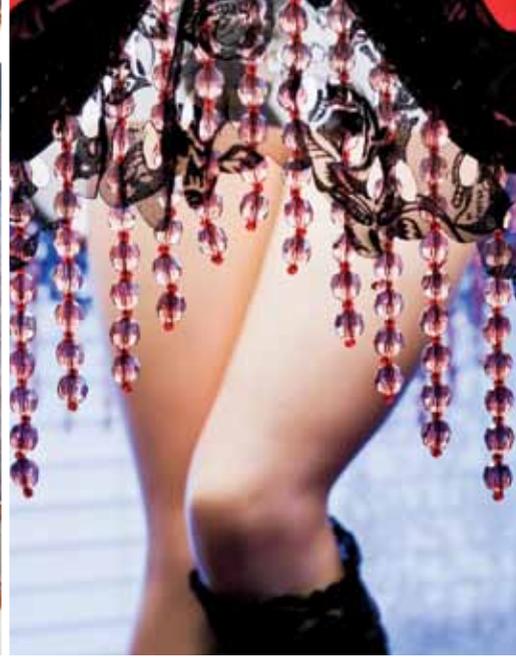
"I like to do things the right way," Marchale says,

ALL THAT GLITTERS — IS GOLD HILL 

Clockwise, a house-made dessert trio of crème brûlée, tiramisu and chocolate brownie; exterior of the Gold Hill Hotel; Executive Chef Serge Marchale poses inside the Crown Point Restaurant; dinner entrée of filet mignon accompanied by Marchale's signature escargot.



Do



“The gold and silver
from these hills
built San Francisco.”

—PAUL YANDRE

“not opening cans and getting food from the freezer. We make our menu items from scratch.”

Marchale is a native of Monaco, learned his craft in Nice, and he has cooked alongside culinary giants throughout the United States.

On this particular night, a delicate Chilean sea bass with mango salsa is the chef’s recommendation. Another diner chooses rack of lamb — with resounding results.

“I’m from Australia, and I’m a farm girl so I grew up with lamb,” says California resident Trixie McGowan. “This lamb was cooked to perfection — even better than I’ve had in the finest restaurants in San Francisco.”

HISTORIC LODGING

Another off-the-beaten-path Virginia City destination is found a few blocks to the east of C Street at the Cobb Mansion. Originally built in 1876, the home — its ornate façade a direct reflection of history — was erected during a time when hundreds of millionaires lived in opulence in Virginia City.

Owners Paul Yandre and Jeff Teague originally bought the mansion as an investment property, hoping to bring it up to code to become a bed and breakfast. But the plan was to sell it and move on.

Seven years later, the pair still operates the B&B, providing guests with comprehensive property tours and even escorting them around town in a vintage 1948 Chrysler Town and Country “woody” convertible.

“There’s so much history around here, yet 99 percent of visitors to Virginia City never make it off C Street,” Yandre pauses during a brief lesson about the significance of the Comstock Lode. “The gold and silver from these hills built San Francisco.”

TREASURES FROM PAST AND PRESENT

First row, left to right: Paul Yandre and his dog Tasha cruising C Street; visitors report smelling cigar smoke from spirits of the past at this spot inside the Gold Hill Hotel; a unique lamp in the Julia Bulette Room at the Cobb Mansion. Second row: Bay windows and lush landscape adorn the exterior of the Cobb mansion; Tasha smiling for the camera; the formal parlor of the Cobb is furnished with a mix of Victorian era antiques, including a Tiffany-style stained glass panel over the fireplace. Third row: The Carlson Room features a magnificent view to the east and an antique bed; detail shot of iron headboard; Virginia City SUV, circa 1815.

HALLOWEEN IN VIRGINIA CITY

With such explosively colorful history confined to a tiny mining town, it’s no surprise ghost hunters view Virginia City as a must-visit destination. And of course, Halloween is the perfect time to explore the town’s spirited past.

Bats in the Belfry offers a guided ghost-walking tour during this Halloween season — and year round.

“It’s a behind-the-scenes look at some of the most haunted places in town,” says owner Debbie Bender. “And we’re just hoping we have the same level of paranormal activity this year as we did last Halloween. It was quite amazing.”

For reservations, visit virginiacityghosttours.com and follow the links to “Halloween.” Or call 775-815-1015. Ticket prices will be around \$40 for the walking tour, with a limited number of tickets (about \$80 each) available for an after-hours investigation.

The home offers six elegant, personality-infused rooms — from the Julia Bulette suite bathed in crimson tones and lace, to the expansive Harris Suite, boasting a 100-mile view from ornate bay windows. Guests are escorted by the B&B hosts around the home, gaining a history lesson as well as a global introduction to the treasures collected by Teague and Yandre in their many travels.

“Yeah, we get around,” Teague says with a laugh. “We’ve been to every continent except Antarctica.”

An unforgettable breakfast of Eggs Florentine, homemade bread and cinnamon rolls, and an array of fresh fruits welcome guests in the morning, right before the one-hour tour conducted by Yandre and canine sidekick Tasha in the classic convertible.

“Our guests come in strangers but walk away friends,” Yandre says.

Visitors Diane Martin and Patrick Liston from Concord, Calif., found themselves in awe of their surroundings and their new friends.

“This has been an incredible experience,” Martin says. “We just love history, and we love how personal Jeff and Paul make it. We’ll definitely be back.”