



MONTEREY COUNTY WEEKLY

ISN'T THAT SPECIAL

Behind the scenes of your local cemetery—
or harbor, park or any other one of 42 local
special districts that are government agencies
with autonomy, budgets and power. p. 20
By Pam Marino

FACE TO FACE

All Inclusive

Celebrated hotel designer Charles Gruwell returns home to launch his own boutique inn.

By Pam Marino

Charles Gruwell is home, right where he always wanted to be. After a 46-year career designing high-end hotels, residences and other spaces in places like San Francisco and Las Vegas, the award-winning designer has returned to his hometown, Pacific Grove, to design and open his own boutique hotel—The Charles Pacific Grove, with partners Don and Jay Desai—inside a historic Victorian home. It's the town's first hotel marketed as LGBTQ+ friendly, designed to be open to anyone—dogs included.

The hotel is two blocks from where Gruwell attended elementary school at Robert Down Elementary and just a few blocks from the Victorian house he grew up in. After graduating from P.G. High School in 1970 he left for Fresno State University then returned to begin a teaching career in Salinas. His life changed after meeting local designer Jonna Ball and shadowing her as she designed homes in Pebble Beach.

Realizing he wanted to be a designer, Gruwell went to San Jose State University for a design degree and applied for an internship, landing him with designer Marlene Grant of Falls, Grant & Lucas in Los Altos. He spent five years learning the trade from Grant.

Eventually Gruwell found his niche in hotel design and went on to create

luxuriously appointed spaces at such hotels as The Huntington Hotel in San Francisco—one of his favorite projects that landed him his first of many appearances in *Architectural Digest*—the Four Seasons and Mandalay Bay Resort & Casino in Las Vegas, Disney's Animal Kingdom Lodge in Florida, the Beverly Hills Inn, plus local hotels like the Tradewinds in Carmel and Hotel Pacific in Monterey.

At 73, many would have retired but Gruwell shows no signs of slowing down. The Charles opened at the end of June and now he's busy redesigning Carmel's iconic Cypress Inn, once owned by the late Doris Day.

Weekly: What brought you back to Pacific Grove?

Gruwell: I love it, that's the main reason I'm back. In the time that I was gone, which is nearly 30 years, I came to visit my mother on a regular basis. My mother was the love of my life and she lived to be almost 103. I was living down in L.A. and one of my very good friends said, "Why don't you move back home and take the property your mom left you and put a new home on it? It's the right thing to do and you should do it now." And I did...I have a brand new house and a brand new dog (Sophie) and I [will] live there happily ever after.



Charles Gruwell inside The Charles, the new boutique hotel he opened in June. He created a luxe look inside the former Victorian home using a rich brocade fabric for the drapes, pulling out colors of black, cognac and camel for the carpet and furniture.

What was it like growing up as a gay youth in P.G. back in the 1960s?

I didn't really know until I got into high school. I didn't really quite understand what was happening. So I just grew up here and did all the things most boys do. I didn't pay attention to that because it was so forbidden. I had to just not accept it myself—until I could. I was afraid—it was a very scary thing. And I didn't want to be rejected, I didn't want to be the outcast. So I just kind of went along with what everybody else was doing until I realized I can't do this anymore. I have to be honest with myself. And so I did, and I'm as happy as ever.

What makes the hotel LGBTQ+ friendly?

What we were throwing around eight months ago was what was lacking in the hospitality sector. And what I noticed is that there are no inclusive hotels. There are gay hotels, but there's really no established gay-friendly hotels that are open to everybody, open to the mainstream, the street traveler, the LGBT crowd. We decided, let's

brand a hotel that has style. We merged style and elegance into inclusion. We want people to know we are inclusive, so whoever comes here is going to be a mix of gay people with mainstream straight people and everything in between. Everybody's welcome here and we're going to really tell people the gay community is welcome here, which is why we have the rainbow heart on the front door and the back door.

Do you watch design shows on TV?

I haven't recently because I've been too busy. I used to watch *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy* when it first came on, oh, years ago. It was really, really good. There's so many I watched for a long time—Chip and Joanna Gaines in whatever that show was called [*Fixer Upper*]. And I watched *Design on a Dime*. I watched all those shows when they first came on television. I just don't watch TV like I used to. ★

The Charles Pacific Grove is located at 581 Pine Ave., Pacific Grove, 717-8692, thecharlespacificgrove.com.



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