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return to the most beautiful place in the world," he said. "We used to call it the 'circle of enchantment' — Monterey, Pacific Grove, Big Sur, Carmel, Seaside, Marina. So many microcosms of beauty."

The idea, he said, began two years ago when Dawn Desai approached him with a challenge: remodel the shuttered P.G. Inn and turn it into a space that specifically welcomes the LGBTQ+ community, their families, friends and allies, across all backgrounds.

"Most hotels include the LGBTQ community, but they don't actually declare it," Gruwell said. "We are raising the bar — our website says it, our rainbow flag says it, and every detail of this hotel says: you are welcome here."

The Pacific Grove Inn closed abruptly back in 2018 after its operator, Malibu businessman Gary Peterson, filed for bankruptcy.

Peterson, who served as president of PG Inn Inc., had managed the 16-room hotel since 2009 but had fallen behind on multiple financial obligations in the months leading up to the closure.

Despite the mounting financial issues, the hotel closed without notifying guests, employees or local businesses — many of whom found out via a note taped to the front door.

After the height of the pandemic, the hotel operated in a contactless format, guests received codes via email and had no interaction with staff. Gruwell said that model may have worked post-COVID, but it lacked warmth and community.

"There was no breakfast, no social hour, no one to greet you — it was basic," Gruwell said. "We wanted something different. We brought back the innkeeper model because hospitality is about people."

Now, The Charles features 11 rooms and suites,



PHOTO BY MARY E. NICHOLS

The Charles in Pacific Grove, with the owners priding themselves on creating a bed and breakfast that is inclusive and for everyone.

a daily elevated continental breakfast, afternoon wine and charcuterie and personalized service from live-in innkeepers. Gruwell describes as "like a personal concierge for every guest."

Staying true to the build-

ing's historical roots, Gruwell leaned into traditional British interior aesthetics, inspired by a recent trip to London where he and his partner toured more than 30 bed-and-breakfasts.

"The mansion's Victorian

architecture deserved classical, elegant design," Gruwell said. "But I also wanted it to reflect my artistic sensibilities and my identity as a gay designer. Everyone — gay, straight, and everyone in between — deserves

a beautiful, inclusive place to stay."

Gruwell said The Charles is designed for families, couples, solo travelers and even pets.

"Everybody's welcome. It's warm, comfortable and feels like a private residence. That's what people say when they walk in."

The Charles is also a full-circle moment for Gruwell. Raised in Pacific Grove, he's a P.G. High School and Monterey Peninsula College graduate who taught in Salinas before pursuing hotel design full-time.

"I love hotels. I love design. I love architecture. To combine all those passions into a property with my name on it is like a dream come true," he said.

And he credits his partner and client, Don Desai, with helping that dream become reality.

"This was his idea. I have tremendous gratitude for Don. He gave me an opportunity I never imagined. I couldn't ask for a better partner or friend."