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The Whaling Bar has returned to La Valencia Hotel in La Jolla with its signature whale mural restored. Photo courtesy of Joann Van Noy

La Jolla's Historic Whaling Bar is Back

HOSPITALITY: 'Mediterranean-Moroccan Lounge Feel' Design

■ By RAY HUARD

LA JOLLA – The fabled **Whaling Bar** in La Jolla's **La Valencia Hotel** has reopened with a new look that pays homage to the original, but without trying to replicate it.

"Those who might remember the Whaling Bar from its original days will see there are some elements that are the same," said **Troy Longwith**, general manager of La Valencia.

But **Matt Spencer**, owner and operator of **SDCM Restaurant Group**, said that the re-opened Whaling Bar has its own look.



Matt Spencer
Owner & Operator
SDCM Restaurant
Group

"We realized really quickly trying to redo something like the old Whaling Bar, button for button, stitch for stitch, is a fool's errand," Spencer said. "We went in a completely different direction with the design. It's kind of a Mediterranean-Moroccan lounge feel."

SDCM, based in La Jolla, and **Schoos Design**, based in Los Angeles, developed the look of the new Whaling Bar.

"We knew that if we tried to recreate the old Whaling Bar, it would have fallen flat," Spencer said. "It's kind of like Whaling Bar 2.1."

The look is meant "to be kind of sexy and sophisticated," Spencer said, appealing to a new generation as well as the old regulars.

"We feel that there's going to be a new demographic that's going to come into the area to experience the Whaling Bar," Longwith said.

A Trend

Entry is through huge, handcrafted Moroccan-inspired doors.

The new bar has down-filled emerald tufted booths that Spencer said are meant to give the area a lived-in look.

The booths are similar to those that were in the original, "for those private conversations and business deals that happened over many years in the Whaling Bar," Whitworth said.

Subdued lighting comes from brass pendant lights, and an open kitchen lets patrons watch food preparation.

The bar also opens onto an outdoor patio on Prospect Street.

The most notable nod to the Whaling Bar's history



Troy Longwith
General Manager
La Valencia Hotel

is a mural by **Wing Howard**, "The Whale's Last Stand," a 20-foot mural that had been in storage and was preserved in four pieces in the new bar.

The original Whaling Bar opened in 1949 and became the hangout for such notables as **Raymond Chandler**, the novelist and creator of the Philip Marlowe character, actor **Gregory Peck**, **Theodor Geisel** of Dr. Seuss fame, the late **Helen Copley**, publisher of The San Diego Union-Tribune, and former San Diego mayors **Maureen O'Connor** and **Susan Golding**.

The bar closed in 2013. The new Whaling Bar serves cocktails like those in the original, including The Whaler, a mix of cognac, whipped cream, and ice cream that was introduced in 1965 and recreated by Beverage Director **Eric Johnson**.

In its heyday, the Whaling Bar was known for its three martini lunches and the new version has a mini-martini happy hour.

Food offerings, prepared by Executive Chef **Brian Redzikowski**, will include a new take on the liver and onions served in the original bar, a large crouton stuffed with steak tartar, and prime grilled New York strip loin.

Spencer said that the reemergence of the Whaling Bar is part of a trend.

"We think there's a big rebirth in hotel bars being cool, chic, vintage – that sort of thing," Spencer said.

Because of its place in La Jolla lore, redoing the Whaling Bar was a bit daunting, Spencer said.

"Opening up the old Whaling Bar is a lot of pressure, the pressure of 'don't screw this up' is in the air," Spencer said. ■

La Valencia Hotel



FOUNDED: 1926

HEADQUARTERS: La Jolla

GENERAL MANAGER: Troy Longwith

BUSINESS: hotel

EMPLOYEES: 160

WEBSITE: www.lavalencia.com

CONTACT: 855-476-6870

NOTABLE: Opened on December 15, 1926 as Los Apartamentos de Sevilla, coinciding with Hollywood's Golden Age, La Valencia was a go-to destination for the biggest stars of the time, including Mary Pickford, Ginger Rogers, and David Niven. In 1928, the hotel was officially renamed "La Valencia" and adopted its signature pink hue in the 1950s.