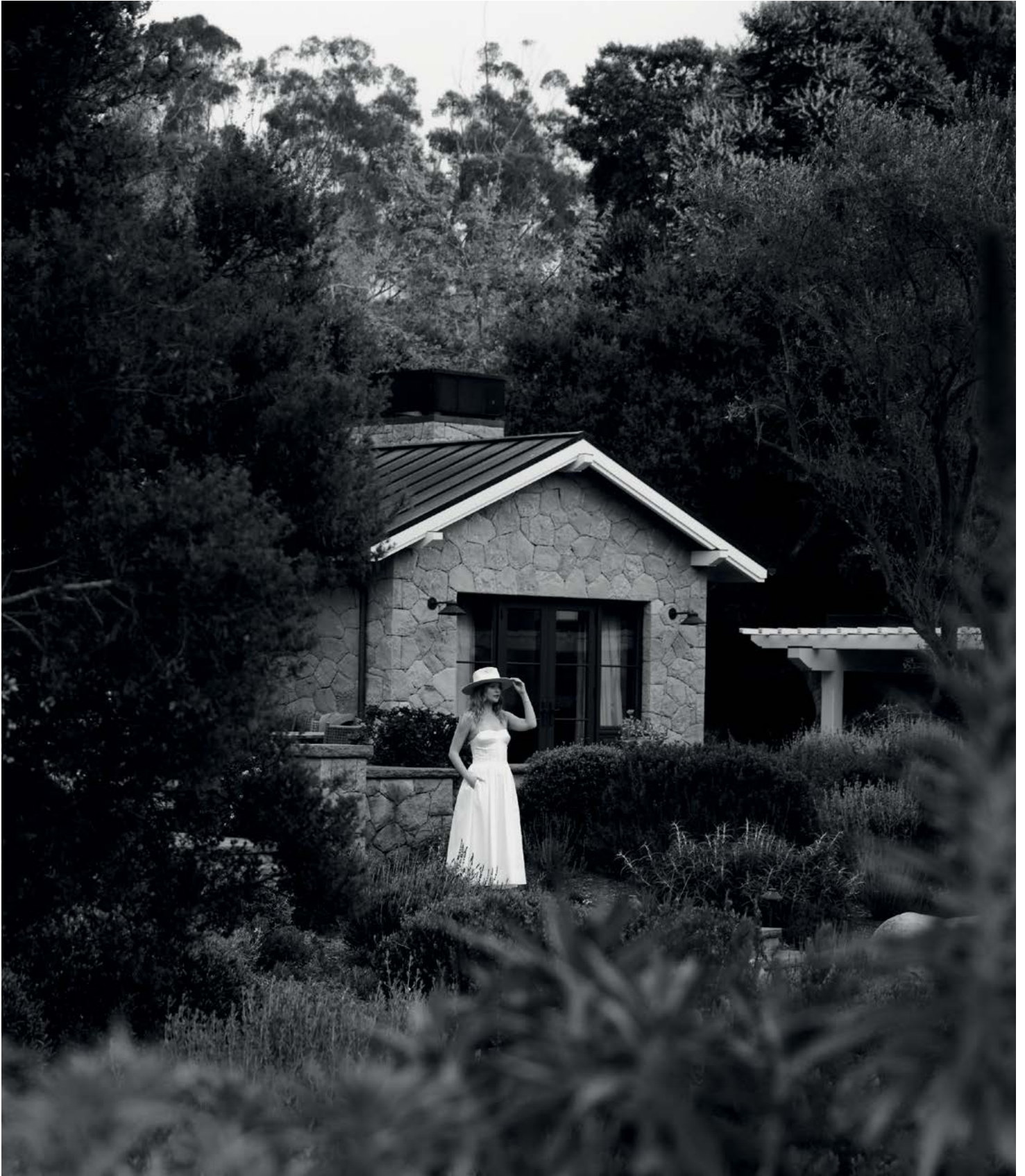


S B L S

Santa Barbara Life & Style Magazine

May/June 2024



FORWARD THINKING

k- OHANA- iki

PRIVATE RESIDENTIAL COMMUNITY AND GOLF CLUB KOHANAIKI
IS AN ADULT PLAYGROUND ON HAWAII'S KONA COAST

BY *Alexandra Lee*

Summer is approaching, and everyone is in need of a vacation. Exhibit A: my plane touches down on a runway nestled between acres of black lava flow on the Big Island of Hawaii. Where I'm headed, although it includes the quintessential vacation amenities of a world-class spa, oceanfront golf course, and company of well-heeled bon vivants, is a different type of getaway. It's the sort of destination where guests check in without a return flight booked, where celebrities and billionaires (literally) come to hide away with the promise of extreme privacy. It's what could be considered the world's most luxurious home away from home.

I keep this in mind as my driver pulls up to the gated entrance of Kohanaiki, a one-of-a-kind, members-only private residential community located on a 450-acre swath of pristine Kona coastline. I glimpse a few baby goats, the most adorable trespassers, traipsing the black rock adjacent the lush, palm-lined driveway before being whisked away to my one-bedroom house (or hale, in the local tongue). Though the property is sprawling, I'm informed that it's only about a third of the way built—470 total residences are projected, in addition to the standing 100.

My hale is complete with a fully-outfitted kitchen stocked with local coffee and snacks, and a full backyard featuring a free-hanging daybed, hot plunge pool, and outdoor shower. The kitchen's sliding pocket doors disappear to reveal a fusion of indoor-outdoor living, while spa music infuses the air through the Sonos sound system. Much to my delight, I discover a mini fridge piled with Häagen-Dazs ice cream bars ready and waiting in the backyard. Perhaps my favorite amenity, however, is the two electric golf carts, both labeled "Lee 'Ohana," to be my designated vehicles of transport throughout my stay. I muse that I could get my steps in by walking...but isn't driving a golf cart way more fun?

My first joyride through the property proves an exhilarating thrill in navigating its maze of roads, though I eventually make my way to the landmark Clubhouse. A traditional canoe marks its entrance, where the concierge desks and computers are stationed outdoors—something you would only find on the leeward side of a tropical island. Famished from my morning flight, I pull up a barstool for an obligatory pre-dinner snack before gazing around the 67,000 square-foot space, designed with natural wood and accents in an ode to traditional Hawaiian architecture.

KOHANAIKI DINING



“Though its list of members is *beyond exclusive*, the atmosphere at Kohanaiki couldn't be more *dressed-down*.”

Though its list of members is beyond exclusive, the atmosphere at Kohanaiki couldn't be more dressed-down. The restaurant servers don Hawaiian shirts and an approachable sense of humor while helping you decide between poke selections. The relationship between guests and staff is mutually beneficial, I'm told, each party revealing that they come to know each other like family, and would rather ask how each other's wife is doing than what the menu specials are. At this home away from home, the meaning of "ohana" rings true.

I find myself seated across from Kohanaiki's Director of Wine, Andy Myers, who also happens to be one of only 273 Master Sommeliers in the world, and the only one on the island. For the prestige of the title, Andy doesn't look the part—his relaxed, joke-riddled persona matches his casual Hawaiian shirt and mismatched compression socks, which he sports with confidence. Andy launches into tales of his background in wine, which begin with the break-up of his high school punk rock band ("Surprise, we didn't make it," he jokes), and continues with his time spent working for acclaimed chef and personality José Andrés.

As he pours the rest of my Veneto region white into a roadie and hops in my golf cart's passenger seat, Andy divulges that his speciality is actually European wines. "It might sound strange coming from a guy who talks a lot, but I like my wines to *listen*."

We arrive at Beach Restaurant, where dining tables pepper the sandy beachfront, just as the sun is starting to set. Andy pulls out his phone to show me a video of a whale breaching only 50 yards offshore a week prior. Pork belly lettuce cups arrive, and Andy cracks open a rare bottle of 2009 Rioja. Samantha Tsui, Kohanaiki's Director of Marketing, sits to my right, and we dive into a discussion about island life over fresh seafood. Her morning commute to work, I learn, is the 30-minute flight from Oahu to the Big Island. I'm taking notes—sounds a lot better than rush hour traffic.

That night, after narrowly avoiding the draw of a Häagen-Dazs bar, I tuck into bed early, anticipating my 7:30 a.m. pilates class. I'm a clear novice next to guests whose non-shaky form is a hint at their expertise in the subject. I stroll to the adjacent Clubhouse and fill a to-go cup with Kona coffee before embarking on a morning stroll around the golf course. Designed by Rees Jones, who is renowned for reconstructing famous courses including East Lake in Atlanta and Torrey Pines in La Jolla, the course features six oceanfront holes and is intentionally built around the property's sacred lands, including 13 impeccably preserved ahus. Three awe-inspiring "golf hailes," or comfort stations, line the course, each fully

decked out with mai tai machines, Kohanaiki brews, and self-serve ice cream. I stop to sip on my coffee and observe as the morning crowd gets their clubs ready for action on the house-grown bermuda grass (yes, there's also a grass farm on property).

Breakfast soon follows at Kōnane Restaurant, where I indulge in another Kona coffee and toast with Kona avocados and Kamuela tomatoes. Back at the hale, I take some solitude time to journal in the backyard before packing a beach bag. By now, I'm getting used to the maze of roads, and it's less than 10 minutes before I've parked along the beachfront, leaving my keys unattended. A margarita and cabana nap later, I head down to the water, examining seashells and clusters of rocky shoreline until something flickers in the corner of my vision. A black crab, camouflaged seamlessly with the volcanic rock, scuttles by. As my eyes adjust, I realize scores of them have been there all along, perched proudly atop their territory with watchful eyes towards me, the giant newcomer.

Sun-soaked hours pass until it's time for an appointment at the spa. I slip into a robe for my 90-minute Noni Pohaku massage, which uses a combination of healing noni leaf to saturate the skin while hot stones, or "pohaku," melt every bit of tension from my back and legs. I wrap up my spa treatment with a measly attempt at the cold plunge pool, followed by warming up in the dry sauna.

My evening cravings for fresh fish lead me back to Kōnane, where the specialty sushi roll changes every night, and the highest-quality fish is flown in from Japan. I go for a classic spicy tuna roll, miso soup, and a few pieces of Otoro nigiri, a sumptuous (albeit rich) end to the meal. I skip dessert in search of late-night adventure, exploring the Clubhouse's lower level, where a neon sign reading "Cinema" draws my attention. The movie theater is occupied, so I stock up on a bag of fresh popcorn, licorice, and M&Ms before heading home for a personal movie night on one of the hale's flat-screen TVs.

The next morning at breakfast, the waitress remembers my coffee order and aids in my indecisive struggle between the Kona Local, a heaping breakfast of fried rice, eggs, and ponzu marinated salmon, or lighter fare. I opt for the latter, as I'm set for a date with the Adventure Team at 9:30 a.m. I soon find myself face to face with a four-person outrigger canoe, while Toby, our adventure guide, instructs me to take the helm, while informing me that our paddling must be in sync or we run the risk of flipping over. *No pressure*, I think to myself, trying not to picture what marine life could be lurking beneath the glassy surface.





MASTER BEDROOM



We've eventually paddled far enough to the right that we get a clear view of Pine Trees, and though it's overcast, several surfers are out testing their luck. Kohanaiki prides itself on the fact that this beachfront, which takes up 100 acres of its 450, has been dedicated back to the county for public access, part of the property's mission to uplift and give back to the local community. The Kohanaiki Foundation has contributed over \$1.2 million to charitable organizations throughout the island, while Kohanaiki 'Ohana is a 501c3 nonprofit founded to run local educational and stewardship opportunities.

After returning to shore and successfully spying bright coral at Kohanaiki's reef, I prop myself up in a beach chair, gazing out at the jewel-toned ocean before picking up my book. Yet again, something flickers in the corner of my eye—this time, a moving fin. I'm in disbelief as I watch the shark fin swim back and forth, suddenly extra grateful that I had obeyed Toby's instructions.

"When you come to Hawaii, you're not coming to a different state, you're coming to a different country," Andy had said during our first meal. I come to find that everything at Kohanaiki circles back to this sentiment, from the practice of Hawaiian language and traditional "talk story" to the preserved artifacts displayed from generations of ancestors—for example, the KapaKapa canoe carved out of a log that belonged to Cultural Advisor Uncle Reggie's ancestors. Or, his late mother "Aunty" Elizabeth Maluhi Lee's intricately woven pāpale hats, for which she was named a Living Treasure by the Office of Hawaiian Affairs.

From the four-lane bowling alley, on-site microbrewery, and movie theater to an exclusive Chateau Mouton Rothschild collection, personal wine lockers, and secretive concealed cigar room, perfectly orchestrated treasures lie in wait of discovery around every palm frond. Guests will never have to pull out a wallet, enforcing the true mentality of an escape far from the throes of reality. If anything, my visit confirms that Kohanaiki is full of hidden gems designed to take days, weeks, and months to fully uncover, much like the sacred ancestral treasures that adorn the Clubhouse's artifact room.

Rather than a private residential community, Kohanaiki is an adult-friendly playground in paradise where virtually every answer is yes. So, it's your turn. Book a flight and say yes.*

WHAT to PACK

Islander Essentials

1 STAUD CROSS-COURT TWO-TONE MINIDRESS

\$245

Sport this fashion-meets-function number for practice swings on the driving range and endless rounds of tennis. The classic silhouette will aid your ace and ensure you're the best dressed on the court. saksfifthavenue.com



2 VERSACE MEDUSA HALTER SWIMSUIT

\$725

Quiet luxury is still in, and it doesn't stop at clothing. This sleek, structured staple one-piece will take you from water aerobics classes to oceanside cold plunges, and everything in between. saksfifthavenue.com

3 CLE DE PEAU UV PROTECTIVE CREAM SPF 50+

\$140

More than your basic sunscreen, this luxurious cream protects while providing 10-hour moisture and diminishing fine lines, so you won't get dried out from hours spent in the sun. Win, win! cledepeabeaute.com



4 JACQUEMUS LE BOB SOLI

\$455



While we love a wide brim, this woven raffia bucket hat will effectively shade your face without taking up loads of room in your carry-on. Plus, its neutral color goes with everything! jacquemus.com

by ALEXANDRA LEE