

Timber Cove Inn

Jon Bonne

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Timber Cove Inn Perched on a bluff 15 miles north of Jenner, the Timber Cove Inn is an ambitious outpost on a wild, largely untraveled part of the Sonoma County coast, not far from where Russian traders established Fort Ross in the early 19th century. Built in 1963, it was once a popular stop along the coastal highway but lost its sheen before being purchased for a reported \$8 million last year by Irvine-based R.D. Olson Development. Then came a \$2.5 million overhaul, modernizing rooms and refurbishing the historic lodge, which evokes an oversized A-frame cabin, complete with a three-story stone fireplace dominating the lobby.

Comfort zone:

The vaulted ceilings and fireplace say ski lodge, though the single rooms themselves are between modest and cramped. (Suites are more spacious.) Bedding's simple but plush, with four synthetic pillows. Most rooms have a deck, including those on the ocean side, with a sweeping view of the coast just 50 yards away. You can request a gas fireplace or a hot tub, though my original tub-enabled room had a musty smell that sent me back to a very accommodating front desk to switch.

Bath and beyond

Basic, though modern and newly refurbished. Toiletries from Green Natura included a "waste-reducing exfoliating body cleanser" the size of a soap bar but hollowed out, just big enough for a hotel stay - a small, thoughtful touch.

Geared up

Free Wi-Fi covers the inn, which is good because cell service fades somewhere around Jenner. My room included a large flat-screen LG TV and an iPod-compatible alarm clock. Lighting was at a premium - just one tiny overhead and two night table lamps. The Coleman lantern "for power outage" reminds you you're not in Healdsburg anymore.

Grounds

Choose between a view of the densely forested hills or the ocean, just down a short path outside the dining room. A fire pit near the barren bluff provides a spot to enjoy the nearby waves. Landscaping fits the setting, with cut stone, ice plants and semi-arid native grasses blending in with the raw coastal soils.

But this is all prelude. What you can't possibly miss is "The Expanding Universe," a looming, garish 72-foot-high obelisk on the nearby rocks, the work of San Francisco sculptor Benny Bufano, who toiled for seven years to complete it in 1969, even drawing mention from Herb Caen. Hike to its base and enjoy the sweeping view of the coast.

In the vicinity

Numerous state parks dot the coast, including the Fort Ross State Historic Park and Salt Point State Park. Plenty of fishing and hiking is available. Some notable vineyards are in the area; none are open to the public, though the inn recently opened a tasting room for local wineries.

Good to know

A fully stocked bar and restaurant, Alexander's, serves until 9 p.m. during the week, with some focus on Sonoma ingredients. It's the only food within about 10 miles, and all other dining necessitates a labyrinthine drive along Highway 1. The lobby is well stocked with books, newspapers and that fireplace, perfect for curling up after a meal. Chef Jonathan Mortimer is planning a series of dinners with local vintners.

Highs and lows

The restaurant includes a six-course tasting menu for \$50; individual main courses can be pricey (\$25 to \$36). For a lighter meal, try the bar menu, with a kobe beef burger (\$15) and mussels (\$10). Timber Cove has again become an ambitious step up - a worthy revival of a longtime haunt for many Highway 1 regulars.

Vitals: 21780 Highway 1, Timber Cove. (707) 847-3231. www.timbercoveinn.com. 50 rooms (two wheelchair accessible). \$199-\$499 nightly.

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<http://sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?f=/c/a/2009/05/07/NSJD16UU9R.DTL>

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