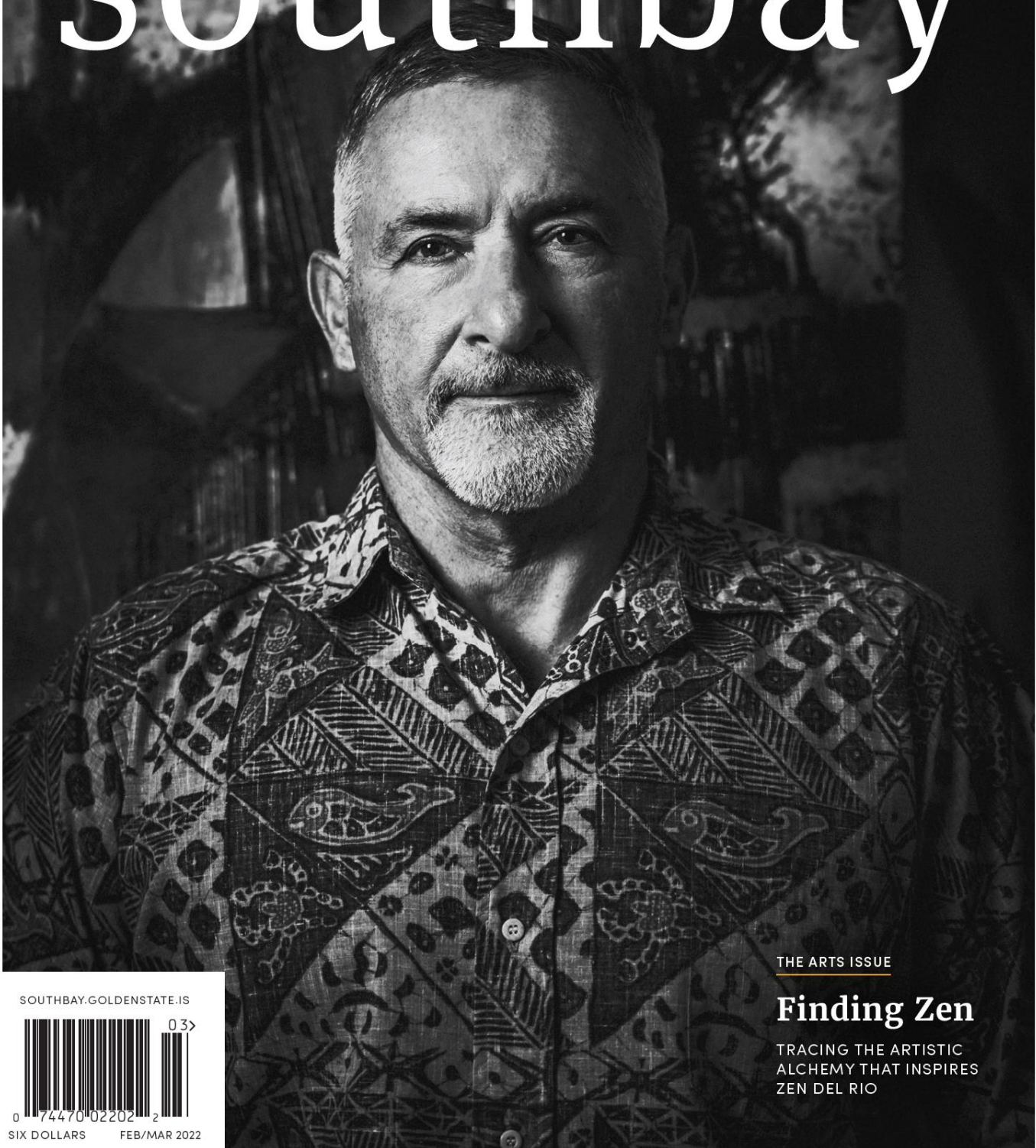


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THE ARTS ISSUE

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ALCHEMY THAT INSPIRES
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The Inn Crowd

ON THE EVE OF ITS CENTENNIAL CELEBRATION, PALOS VERDES ESTATES' HISTORIC LA VENTA INN WELCOMES NEW PROPRIETOR MEG WALKER.

Written & photographed by Kat Monk

For Chef Meg Walker, patience pays off. After years of daydreaming about taking the helm of the 99-year-old La Venta Inn, her wish recently became a reality. Her company accepted the opportunity to take over operations as exclusive caterer of the historic venue nestled into the hills of Palos Verdes Estates. The inn will continue as a celebration location for weddings and memorials but will also welcome the local community with new art events, lectures and wine tastings.

In its early years, La Venta Inn was considered a high-class hideaway for the rich and famous. Throughout the '20s and '30s, celebrities and movie stars seeking refuge from Hollywood would spend weekends at the inn. The prestigious guest list included stars such as Alfred Hitchcock, Cary Grant, Tyrone Power, Greta Garbo, Errol Flynn, Charlie Chaplin and Bob Hope.

"I was surprised when I got the call because I thought I had lost the deal more times than not," explains Meg. "I thought they were calling to celebrate our 1-year anniversary of negotiations." Her catering company, Made by Meg, signed a 10-year contract and reopened the venue after refreshing the interiors while preserving the iconic look of the property.

Raised in Manhattan Beach, Meg is one of seven children in a large, blended family. At 13, while staying with extended family over the holidays during her parents' travels, she sent out invites and cooked her first holiday meal. At that moment, Meg's fate would unknowingly be decided, and on her watch there would

be "no orphans" at the holidays.

Not that she believes this first meal was stellar. In fact, she admits that everyone was gracious and smiled as they ate. But Meg realized then how food brings people together.

After college she became a financial analyst for Merrill Lynch and Smith Barney, but she couldn't shake her passion for cooking. While working full time in the finance industry, she started culinary school at Le Cordon Bleu in Pasadena. During her last semester she secured an externship at Ortolan, a Michelin-starred Los Angeles restaurant. This opportunity afforded her the ability to work with famed Chef Christophe Émé.

Ultimately Meg made the fateful decision to quit her financial career and pursue her love of cooking full time. When a friend asked Meg to cater an event, things began to take off. Private catering requests started pouring in. She established Made by Meg in 2007, focusing on seasonal cuisine, and an entrepreneur was born.

Made by Meg caters more than 600 events a year and employs more than 250 people. Holiday meals are one of her specialties, especially Easter "because there is less pressure." The Thanksgiving turkey, injected with her herb butter, remains one of her favorite dishes. However, these days she thinks she spends more time behind a computer than in the kitchen—the price of being an entrepreneur.

Driven and goal-oriented, Meg was not going to allow the pandemic to crush her business. Although



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initially forced to lay off her staff, she was able to rehire some team members after being approved for Governor Gavin Newsome’s state-sponsored senior meals program. Soon she was driving a delivery van filled with boxed meals for our local senior citizens.

After arriving early at La Venta to meet Meg, I was greeted by Duncan Blount, Meg’s new venue manager. He not only remembered my name, but he offered me a cup of coffee or tea. Rather quickly he returned with my tea in a unique ceramic mug. With contagious excitement, he explained that the mug was from a talented ceramic artist named Ron Philbeck from his hometown in North Carolina.

Duncan had been working at another historic venue in Charlotte called Uptown Indigo. In search of a new opportunity, he cast a wide net hoping to become the food and beverage manager for an out-of-state company. Meg was so impressed with Duncan that she offered him the position of venue manager. He packed up and moved his family cross-country.

While I was speaking with Duncan that morning, Meg drove up and hopped out of her Range Rover with a smile—ready to tackle the day. Duncan glanced over and said, “Meg is always a rock star. That is why I moved my family out here.” ■



La Venta Inn Palos Verdes Estates, California



The Girl from Montmartre was filmed at La Venta Inn in 1925.

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