

## Bill Foley Opens The Society: State & Mason in Santa Barbara's Hotel Californian

Vintner, Financier, and Now Hotelier Brings His Many Wine Brands to Lower State Street



*Credit: Courtesy Hotel Californian*

By [George Yatchisin](#)

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"I could see the excitement in Bill's eyes because of this space," recalls Warren Nocon, who's been managing the Hotel Californian since it was opened by the original owners in 2017. "It led to one of the fastest sales of a hotel I've ever seen."

That space, formerly a boutique, will be unveiled this week as The Society: State & Mason, the new Santa Barbara home for the Foley Food & Wine Society. And that Bill, if you don't know, is Bill Foley, a businessman whose bio features the abbreviation NYSE quite a lot. But most importantly, at least for this story, he also owns 23 wineries around the world, assuming he hasn't bought one since this story was filed.

What most attracted Foley, who bought the Californian in September 2021, to this corner spot are the huge windows offering expansive views both inside and out, a well-lit showcase that's perfect for seeing and being seen. Indeed, back in February when I enjoyed an exclusive tour and tasting, a Foley Society member was outside snapping paparazzi-style photos of us inside. Not every place in Santa Barbara is a social media sensation weeks before its opening.

"Opening The Society in Santa Barbara, adjacent to the iconic waterfront, is incredibly meaningful for my family," said Foley. "We are all thrilled to be part of this unique opportunity for locals and guests alike to experience Santa Barbara hospitality, lifestyle, and winemaking in this quintessential location."

The Society team aims to engage guests right when they walk in the door. "Being experiential is what we're all about," said Lindsey Jessup, Foley's senior director of guest experiences, as a splash of creamy French bubbly by Lucien Albrecht in Alsace was poured into my glass. "We like to use the word



*Credit: Courtesy Hotel Californian*

edutainment. Let's have fun with it!"



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Leading the fun every day is Alex Erotas, The Society's director of guest experiences. "We want to open with a mood of celebrating and welcoming," he explained. "We want you to feel at home."

I had to joke that my home, alas, doesn't welcome me with sparkling wine, nor is it so meticulously designed in a cool mix of Santa Barbara Spanish-meets-Moorish style. Think white walls, light wood, black and blue furniture, swivel chairs to ease that seeing and being seen, and that intricate grille work you can find throughout the Californian property. (Amy Cooper, formerly owner of the sadly now gone Plum Goods, advised on the design.)

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After the sparkling splash, all sorts of temptations ensure. The spot is meant primarily to be a home for members of the Foley Food & Wine Society Connoisseur Wine Club, who get special perks and can pick up their shipments on-site. (Their former clubhouse was at the Ritz-Carlton Bacara in Goleta.)



Credit: Courtesy Hotel Californian

But non-Connoisseurs have plenty to do as well. To start, it's a wine store for bottle sales of Foley's nearly two dozen wineries, including Lincourt and Foley Estates (Bill's initial forays into wine, founded here in Santa Barbara County in 1996) as well as Chalk Hill, Roth, Sebastiani, Foley-Johnson, and Chalone, to name only five more.

Or you can order wines by the glass and nibble from the shareable bites menu featuring plates like hummus, crispy chickpeas, and chips (both crisp lavash and warm pita), or a seasonal, mix-and-match chef's selection of imported cheeses and charcuterie. Then there are the two tasting flights, which will shift quarterly. Upon opening, the "Taste of Wine Country" features a Ferrari-Carano chardonnay, a Lincourt pinot noir, a Firestone merlot, and a Ferrari-Carano cabernet sauvignon/syrah blend. This celebration of California, starring some of Foley's premier properties, costs \$35.

But the "Riviera Reserve" really captures the lavish soul of The Society. Not cheap at \$100 a person, the flight pairs each wine with specific bites, only

happens twice a day (book on Tock), and ends with a monument to all that's huge and delicious in a Napa cab: the 2015 Merus, packed with well-integrated new French oak.

Chef Travis Watson doesn't miss a cue on his pairings — take the foraged mushroom fricassée in a tartlet that accompanies the fungi-forward Four Graces Courtney's Reserve Pinot Noir from Oregon's Willamette Valley. And speaking of edutainment, the room for these 90-minute tastings comes complete with monitors to show maps, vineyard shots, and more.

"What Chef Travis and The Society: State & Mason team have put together with the Riviera Reserve tasting is a great nod to our company initiatives and commitment to elevating experiences for all who interact with our wines and winery sites," said Foley.

Centering The Society in the heart of Santa Barbara means much to the company, as Foley planted his first vineyard in the Sta. Rita Hills a quarter-century ago. "It still is Foley *Family* Wines," asserted Erotas. "People forget that the Lincourt name comes from Bill's two daughters, Lindsay and Courtney."

The family's wine passion is already infecting the next generation: Courtney, who was formerly head winemaker at Chalk Hill, is now executive vice president for the Foley Family Wines portfolio. She is just one of the many Foley winemakers who may drop into The Society from time to time, making it even more of a buzz-worthy wine mecca.

36 State St.; (805) 882-0100; [hotelcalifornian.com](http://hotelcalifornian.com)



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