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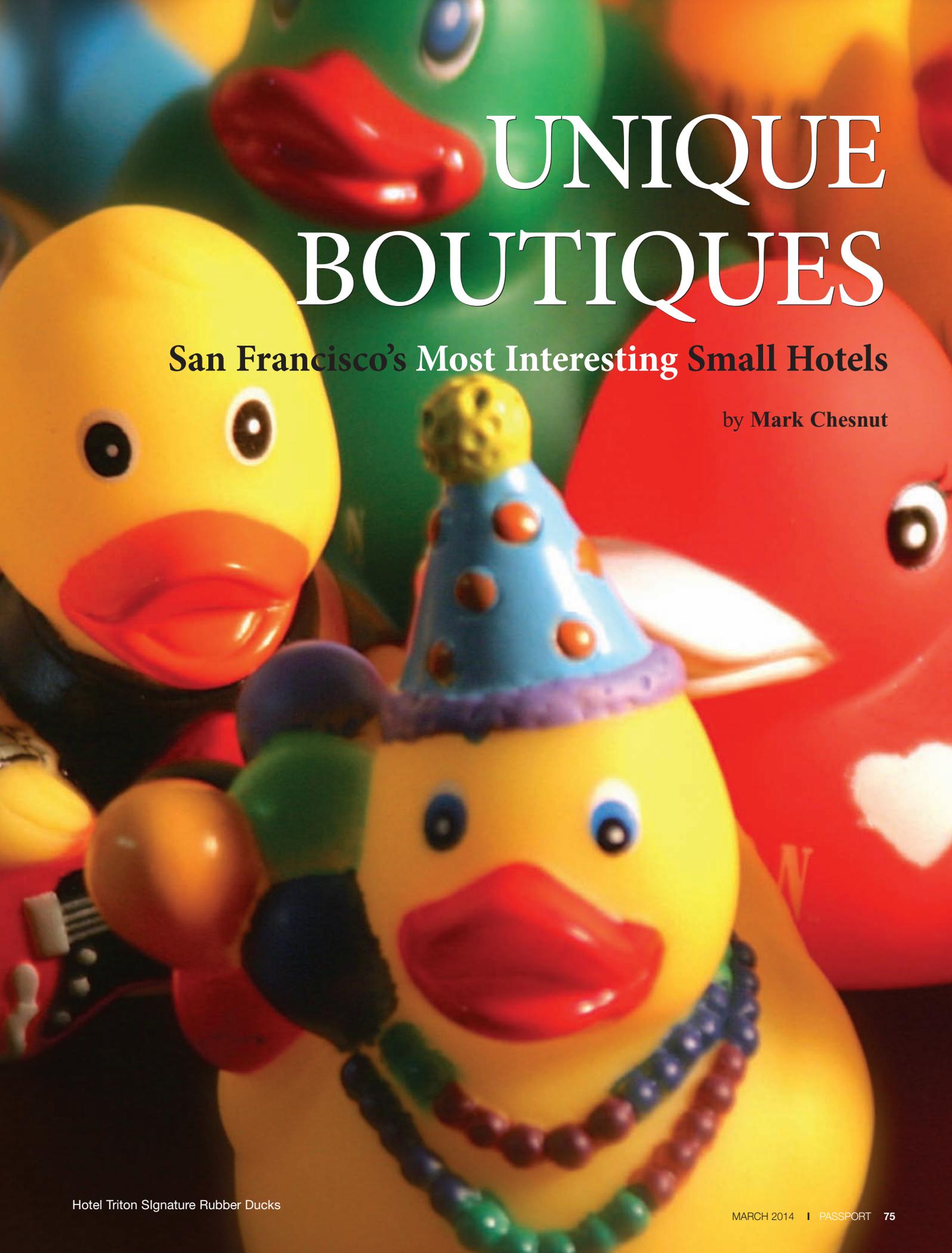
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UNIQUE BOUTIQUES

San Francisco's Most Interesting Small Hotels

by Mark Chesnut

San Francisco is known for its quirkiness and originality, and the city's often offbeat approach to life extends to its hotel scene as well. Indeed, few other destinations this size have such an intriguing array of unique hotel options. In the City by the Bay, it's easy to make your next stay a truly different experience.

In San Francisco, even the larger, locally based hotel groups pride themselves on being different. Most hotel companies, after all, go for a rather cookie-cutter approach to the hospitality experience, with ambiance, furniture, and décor that's more or less the same in every property, regardless of whether you're in Des Moines, Dubuque, or Dubrovnik. Not so with the hotels based in San Francisco. They may not be global brands, but these companies work to make each hotel unique. So whether you're checking into a Kimpton, Joie de Vivre, or Personality Hotels property, you can choose a setting that suits your style.

Kimpton Hotels, which was rated one of the best places to work for LGBT people by the Human Rights Campaign in 2013, is among the experts at creatively interpreting the hospitality experience. Kimpton also hosts same-sex weddings, LGBT non-profit events, and business meetings. The company's loyalty program also allows you to check LGBT for special offerings specific to the community.

At Kimpton's recently renovated **Hotel Triton** (342 Grant Ave. Tel: 415-394-0500. www.hoteltriton.com), near the Chinatown gate, guests can choose from a variety of celebrity suites that give your trip a starry luster, while the property's eco-friendly practices will have you feeling good about your environmental impact. The hotel's Kathy Griffin D-List Suite and the Jerry Garcia Suite feature artwork, photos and memorabilia chosen by the celebrity (and the Garcia suite also uses upholstery and bedcover from the J. Garcia fashion line). Also available is the Häagen-Dazs Sweet Suite, which is decked out in tasty-looking vanilla and caramel colors, as well as scented candles in chocolate, vanilla, and dulce de leche, and an all-you-can-eat supply of ice cream.

If nautical is your thing, consider Kimpton's **Argonaut Hotel** (495 Jefferson St. Tel: 415-563-0800. www.argonauthotel.com) that sits along the popular Fisherman's Wharf. Located in a former warehouse that dates to 1907, the hotel reflects San Francisco's strong ties to the sea, and its guestrooms are appropriately maritime in nature with whitewashed furniture, captain's style chairs, and sea-blue tones. The hotel restaurant, the



Blue Mermaid Chowder House and Bar, continues the theme with fresh seafood dishes complementing the seafaring décor.

Personality Hotels operates a number of noteworthy boutique hotels in San Francisco. Its **Hotel Diva** (440 Geary St. Tel: 415-885-0200. www.hoteldiva.com), located just a couple blocks from Union Square, is a great choice for anyone who recognizes the important role that fabulous females play and have played in society. The celebrity-signed sidewalk in front of the entrance makes for great photo opportunities, and inside, quotes from stars pepper the property. Even families can get in on the celebrity excitement; the Little Divas Suite celebrates famous child actors, actresses, and characters, with colorful artwork and memorabilia. The two-room suite, which sleeps a family of four, includes bunk beds, a Mac computer, a karaoke machine, Wii gaming system, drawing table, and toys. The hotel also has meeting rooms, called Designer Diva Lounges, that are styled with input from diverse companies including Perrier, San Francisco-based Colleen Quen Couture, and cool furniture retailer Design Within Reach.

Also in the neighborhood is Personality's **Hotel Union Square** (114 Powell St. Tel: 415-397-3000. www.hotelunionsquare.com). Unique to this hotel is the Dashiell Hammett Suite, named after the legendary mystery writer. You just might feel like crafting your own tales when you check into this suite that has an antique suitcase filled with Hammett books, as well as an old-fashioned typewriter and vintage radio. For creative inspiration, you can gaze at a collage dedicated to his books and movies, black-and-white photos of Hammett's wife and daughters, and a mural of *The Shadow of the Thin Man*. Sports fans, meanwhile, can book the Dugout Suite that is chock full of orange-and-black San Francisco Giants memorabilia: from the window shades to the king-size bed topped with Giants pillows and blanket. You'll even be able to dig into a basket full of baseball-style treats like Cracker Jack, peanuts, and bubble gum. The colorful Kids Suite, meanwhile, features whimsical artwork depicting famous kid-friendly San Francisco landmarks. The suite, which sleeps two adults and two children, has a cherry-wood trundle bed, Nintendo Wii, storybooks, and a computer with history-related games.



The stylish Viceroy Hotel Group, operates trend hotels in destinations as diverse as New York City, Palm Springs, and Mexico's Riviera Maya, and has a noteworthy presence in San Francisco with **Hotel Zetta** (55 Fifth St. Tel: 415-543-8555. www.viceroyhotelgroup.com). Set



Diva Perrier Lounge



Diva Kids Suite

strategically close to SoMA, Mid-Market, and Union Square, the 116-room hotel exudes boutique sophistication with fun touches including an “interactive lobby” that serves as a social hub with Mac computers. On the second floor is a Playroom and lounge with a pool table, shuffleboard, multiple gaming consoles, and a Plinko game wall. Healthy play is also encouraged at the wellness center that’s equipped with Technogym equipment, an ARKE wall with tools for core-centric personal training, and TRX station.

Another San Francisco-based hotel brand, Joie de Vivre Hospitality, is also one of the best-known specialists in boutique style, from traditional and cutting-edge Japanese to retro-American and literary themes, this company keeps it creative.

Two of Joie de Vivre’s properties are located in the Japantown district and offer an interesting chance to experience Asian culture, in two very different ways. At **Hotel Tomo** (1800 Sutter St. Tel: 415-921-4000. www.jdv.com), Japanese pop culture permeates the hotel’s 125 guest rooms decorated with works of art, including anime-style wall murals by Tokyo-based illustrator and designer Heisuke Kitazawa. You can also sample all-you-can-eat shabu-shabu and all-you-can-drink beer and sake at Mum’s restaurant, located on-site.

A more traditional Japanese vibe is served at **Hotel Kabuki** (1625 Post St. Tel: 415-922-3200. www.jdv.com), where you can choose guestrooms that have Japanese-style soaking tubs and enjoy Japanese-influenced light food and cocktails at the O Izakaya Lounge. Both of these properties offer easy access to the sushi bars, kimono shops, and other interesting retail establishments in Japantown.

Also in the Joie de Vivre family is **Hotel del Sol** (3100 Webster St. Tel: 415-921-5520. www.jdv.com), a 1950s-inspired motor lodge that’s been re-imagined as a family-friendly hotel with a hip edge. Located near Lombard Street in the Marina District, this little property is graced with palm trees, hammocks, and a heated outdoor swimming pool. Cheery colors and bathrooms that the company describes as “small and loveable” characterize guest rooms, although travelers looking for more space can upgrade to a suite or a room with a kitchenette. Free parking, free continental breakfast, and free car service to the financial district and convention centers on weekday mornings are added pluses.

Retro motel chic is also the draw at Joie de Vivre’s **Phoenix Hotel** (601 Eddy. Tel: 415-776-1380. www.jdv.com), located in San Francisco’s Tenderloin district. Named one of America’s coolest “hipster hotels” by *Travel + Leisure* in 2012, the property has welcomed stars including Keanu Reeves, Joan Jett, the Red Hot Chili Peppers, the Psychedelic Furs, and Lit-



Zetta Premier Studio

tle Richard. This so-called “rock ‘n’ roll” hotel isn’t known for its peacefulness; rather, it’s something of a magnet for festive creative types, with 44 guest rooms set around a central courtyard where the heated outdoor swimming pool has a mural by Francis Forlenza titled “My Fifteen Minutes” on the bottom. The 250-square-foot, bungalow-style rooms come with free parking, while the three Deluxe King rooms and three suites feature additional amenities including refrigerators, microwaves, and coffeemakers. Guests at the Phoenix also get free passes to the Kabuki Springs & Spa.

Travelers looking for an intellectual environment with Joie de Vivre might want to consider **Hotel Rex** (562 Sutter St. Tel: 415-433-4434. www.thehotelrex.com), that aims to recreate some of the ambiance of literary salons of the early 20th century. Guest rooms are decorated with hand-painted lampshades and the work of local artisans. The hotel’s book-filled Library Bar hosts live jazz every Friday.

Kimpton, Joie de Vivre, and Personality Hotels may be among the city’s largest purveyors of creative boutique style, but several other hoteliers do an impressive job as well.

Near Union Square, the Financial District and Chinatown, **Hotel des Arts** (447 Bush St. Tel: 415-956-3232. www.sfhoteldesarts.com) exhibits the work of contemporary artists and photographers. Each of the 51 rooms



Bijou Lobby

and the public corridors has a different décor including various artwork, making the experience akin to staying in an art gallery. The hotel commissions work from emerging artists, making it a great place to view cutting-edge pieces, and perhaps buy some for your own collection.

Hotel Fusion (140 Ellis St. Tel: 415-568-2525. www.hotelfusionsf.com) blends traditional Asian elements with modern-American style. In addition to its central location near Union Square, the hotel offers easy access to a nightclub and restaurant, where you can sample pan-Asian cuisine.

Travelers looking to tap into San Francisco's legendary 1960's vibe should consider the **Red Victorian Bed, Breakfast & Art** (1665 Haight St. Tel: 415-864-1978. www.redvic.com). This B&B-style property exudes hippie-cool in the heart of the Haight-Ashbury district. The property has just 18 guest rooms, each with a different name and décor designed by founder and artist-in-residence Sami Sunchild. The Summer of Love room, for example, has retro posters, a lava lamp, and a tie-dye canopy over the double bed. The Peacock Suite honors the eponymous bird, with amenities including a canopied

king bed, stained glass windows, and a sitting room, with two single divans and an antique electric fireplace. The Red Vic, as its often called, is part of the Peaceful World Center and organizes activities focused on social change. This property is also home to the Peaceful World Café and is great for visitors looking for value and ambiance.

If you're a fan of Alfred Hitchcock, you probably already know that he loved northern California and set several of his movies in the region. One of them is commemorated at **Hotel Vertigo** (940 Sutter St. Tel: 415-885-6800. www.hotelvertigosf.com), a stylish property in the Nob Hill district. The film plays on a continuous loop in the hotel lobby, and trendy décor blends old and new styles. The hotel also has a fitness center and free wine hour in the lobby on weekdays. You won't be hit over the head with Hitchcock-themed décor, however. With simple color schemes and occasional eye-catching decorative items like horse-head lamps, interior designer Thomas Schoos has created a restrained sense of style and function. You may not be able to reenact your favorite scene from the movie in an exact replica of the movie set, but there's no reason why you can't feel a bit like Kim Novak or James Stewart as you stroll through the lobby.

Hotel Vertigo belongs to a company called Haiyi Hotel, that also operates the **Good Hotel** (112 7th St. Tel: 415-621-7001. www.thegoodhotel.com) an eco-friendly property in the SoMa district. The furnishings here are constructed almost entirely from reclaimed and recycled materials, with stylish contemporary results and reasonable room rates.

Movie fan's should also check out **Hotel Bijou** (111 Mason St. Tel: 415-771-1200. www.hotelbijou.com), a film-themed property near Union Square. Movies set in San Francisco, including Alfred Hitchcock's *The Birds* and Clint Eastwood's *Dirty Harry*, inspire much of the décor here. Reserved exclusively for guests their Petit Theater has a free nightly double feature and complimentary popcorn. Whether you check into the room that pays tribute to *The Graduate*, *Sister Act*, *Interview With a Vampire*, or *Nine to Five*, you'll find lots of star-studded possibilities here. ■



Tomo Guestroom