

No Mystery

Murder She Wrote chose Mendocino scenery

By CARY ORDWAY

When the producers of TV's *Murder She Wrote* were looking for the perfect stand-in for the fictional New England coastal village of Cabot Cove, they found it about 3,000 miles this side of the East Coast in the Northern California community of Mendocino. So it's no mystery that, with all of the TV exposure, Mendocino has become one of the most popular getaways on the California coast.

The series ran 12 years altogether, filming its last episode in 1996. During that time, 264 episodes were broadcast to millions of viewers each week, each segment serving up a good



helping of scenery in and around Mendocino. Interestingly there were just nine episodes actually filmed in the town – the other 255 shows used stock exterior footage the producers grabbed while in town for those nine shoots.

When you visit this town for the first time, the seascape just reaches out and touches your spirit. It's not just Mendocino – the entire stretch of coastline heading north into Mendocino yields view after view, each a little more spectacular than the last one. Driving this part of Highway 101, you really do have to make an extra effort to focus on your driving, lest you be lulled into some sort of meditative trance.

Mendocino is perched high on a bluff overlooking the vast Pacific. It's not a big town – it's just what you might imagine a New England fishing village to look like. A mixture of Cape Cod architecture and historic storefronts gives the town an almost theme-town kind of appearance. Windswept trees, rolling grassy hills and steep cliffs are footsteps from the Village by way of several miles of coastal trails that are perfect for hiking and photography. Down below are remote beaches and the cragged, rocky



shoreline.

In the Village you'll find a variety of eclectic shops – unusual records, one-of-a-kind musical instruments, vintage toys, you name it -- mingled with historic homes, inns and fine restaurants. With more than 60 movies filmed here, it seems like everybody has a movie connection of some sort. *Blair House* bed and breakfast was the fictional home of Jessica Fletcher, the character Angela Lansbury played in *Murder She Wrote*. Over at Heritage House, their claim to fame is that the inn was used as the setting for the movie *Same Time Next Year*.

And so it goes.

Our accommodations for the night did not have a connection with the movies, although the popular MacCallum House bed and breakfast inn has a strong connection with Mendocino history. The home was built in 1882 by Alexander MacCallum, whose father-in-law was one of the town's earliest settlers. Eventually the house was turned into a bed-and-breakfast inn and went through a series of owners until it was purchased just two years ago by local residents Jed Ayres and Noah Sheppard.

The 30-something Ayres took a rather unconventional route from Mendocino high school student to proprietor of MacCallum House. He started in the hospitality business while he was still a college student, working summers at Heritage House as a waiter, bell hop and assistant manager. But after earning his MBA, he took a summer internship with computer reseller AmeriData that eventually led to a position as General Manager of the company's Bay Area office supervising 100 employees and sales of \$60 million. Then Ayres was recruited away to an even bigger job for a start-up DSL provider that, unfortunately, went bankrupt the very next year. It was time for a decision.

"I wanted to move home and do something different and raise a family," Ayres explains. And so it was then that he and longtime friend and local contractor Sheppard put the deal together to buy the MacCallum House, where Ayres had once worked. Ironically, they bought the restaurant from Alan Kantor, who had hired Ayres way back when as a dishwasher. A graduate of the Culinary Institute of America, Kantor has remained with the restaurant and is today recognized as one of the best chefs in the area. Ayres has gone from dishwasher to semi-mogul, Mendocino's version of Donald Trump.

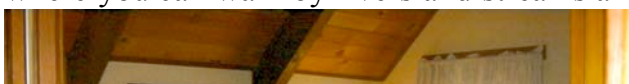


In the short time that Ayres and Sheppard have owned the inn, occupancy has skyrocketed, due in part to the technical savvy that Ayres brings to internet marketing. The partners have gone on to buy more buildings including the well-known Reed Manor, which is the newest and perhaps most luxurious hotel in Mendocino. It's now known as MacCallum Suites.

Our stay at MacCallum House was quiet and restful, and gave us a great chance to just walk down the block to visit the local merchants or to hike on over to the headlands where the trails offer breathtaking views of the coastline and the town itself. We stayed in the "Upper Barn Suite," a second-floor unit in a building across the lawn from the main house. This is the largest room on the MacCallum property and enjoys views of the ocean. The unit features a private deck as well as a stone fireplace, wet bar, refrigerator and a large living room in addition to the bed, bath and kitchen areas. Furnishings are generally antique – or approaching antique.

Of course, dining at MacCallum House is a big part of the treat and, fortunately, we elected to have dinner there in addition to the breakfast that normally comes with your room. Both meals were well up to expectations. Breakfast for example, might include a Butternut Squash Omelet or Red Potatoes with Cremini Mushrooms or, the entree we tried, Lupe's Breakfast Burrito, a delicious combination of apple-turkey sausage, scrambled eggs, white cheddar, onions, peppers and salsa on a fresh tortilla. Most of the dinner menu items highlight entrees that are regional and fresh.

You'll want to walk off those ample portions and there is no shortage of places in and near Mendocino to get some exercise. In addition to the previously mentioned trails, there are lots of areas where you can walk by rivers and streams and even enjoy Redwood forests. Near Mendocino, you'll find a total of five state parks as well as five state beaches awaiting your exploration. The hikes range from casual to





moderately challenging.

A slightly different kind of walk is available when the many local fine art galleries open their doors for special artist openings and group shows between the hours of 5 and 7 p.m. This is offered the second Saturday of each month. In fact, the beauty of Mendocino has always beckoned artists and the Mendocino Art Center will even teach you how to become an artist.

Finally, if you think you have to go to Napa to experience fine California wines, the Anderson Valley is an easy drive from Mendocino. Altogether there are 40 wineries and 16,000 acres of vineyards in Mendocino County. The valley has a different climate at each end of the valley so, taken together, the Anderson Valley has excellent growing conditions for a wide variety of grapes.

Yes, the only mystery that Jessica Fletcher really can't solve is how so much natural beauty ended up all in one place: Mendocino, California.

AT A GLANCE

WHERE: Mendocino is about 150 miles north of San Francisco and is reached by taking Highway 101 north, then Highway 128 northwest to the coast. Scenery abounds once you get on 128.

WHAT: Mendocino is one of several Northern California Coast destinations that each offer spectacular views and a special coastal charm. Mendocino is perhaps one of the most scenic, which is why it has been used as a backdrop in more than 60 movies. When you think of a California vacation, the coast often comes to mind and this is one of the most scenic stretches of coast in the entire state.

WHEN: Any time of year. Summer is warmer of course, but any time of year is subject to fog along the coast. If rough weather hits, Mendocino is more protected from flooding than most communities in the area – but it's still near the water and can get storms off the Pacific. A lot of people consider the weather part of the charm. Be sure and check out travel deals and vacation packages during certain times of the year that are considered to be the "off-season."

WHY: Great scenery and atmosphere plus some of the nicest accommodations on the coast.

HOW: For a recommended list of Mendocino lodgings, please click [here](#). For more information on MacCallum House, go to www.maccallumhouse.com or phone 800-609-0492. The inn has a variety of accommodations including the "Upper Barn Suite," which rents for \$295 per night. MacCallum House also offers day-long limo tours into the Anderson Valley. To learn more about Mendocino, please go to www.gomendo.com or phone 866-goMendo to reach Mendocino County's official visitor website. If you have last minute travel plans, be sure and ask your lodging operator about any last minute travel deals.

OTHER DESTINATIONS: If Mendocino is your kind of California vacation, be sure and check out other California Weekend articles on [Bodega Bay](#), [Point Reyes National Seashore](#) and [Santa Cruz](#).



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