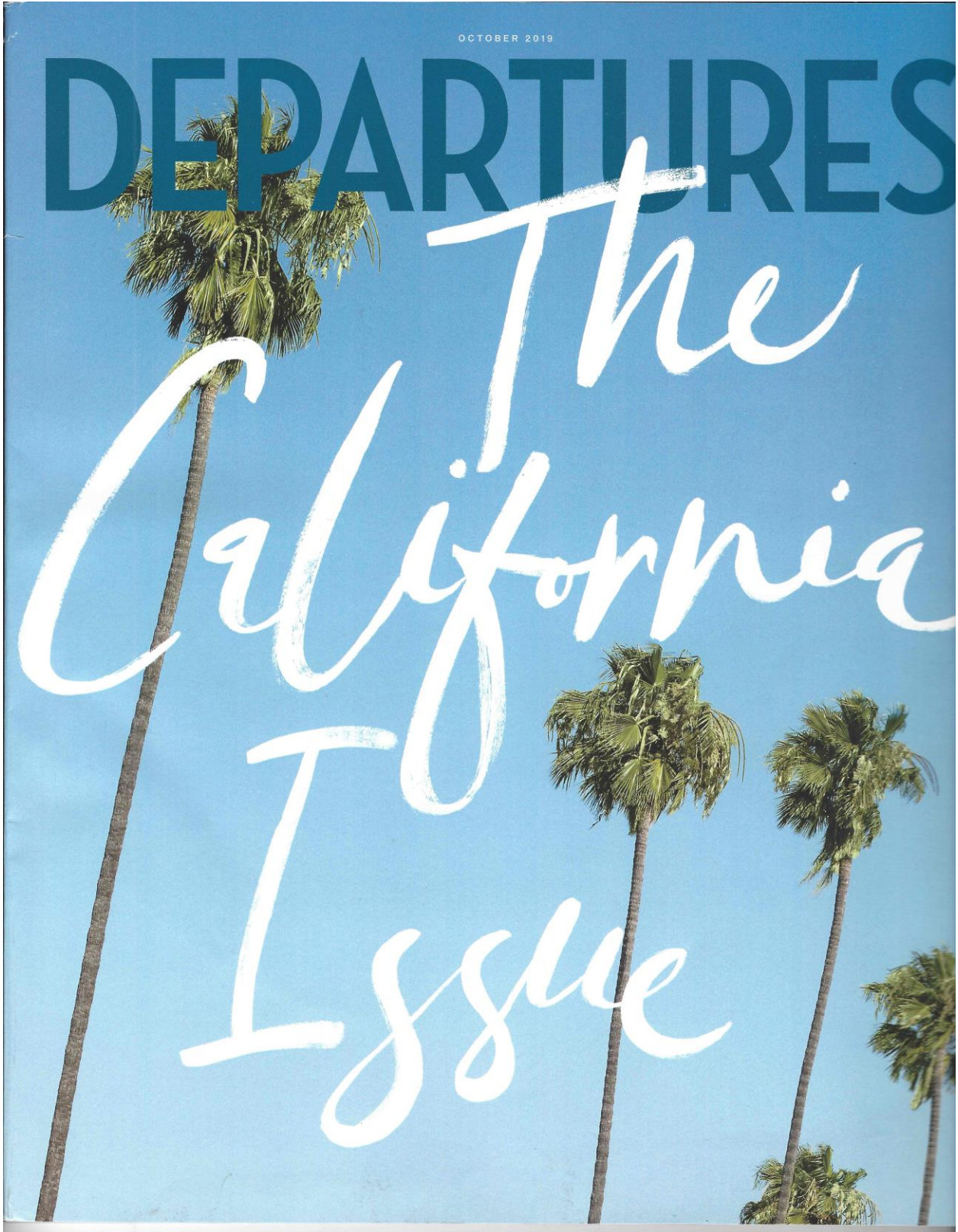


OCTOBER 2019

DEPARTURES

The  
California  
Issue





From left: The pool at Hotel Joaquin; the Montage Laguna Beach.



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sells a smorgasbord of enticing offerings, ranging from my beloved Blackwing pencils (replete with packets of extra erasers and an accompanying sharpener) to some simple cotton dresses and pants. There is an excellent, deceptively small lingerie store on Ocean Avenue named **I. C. London** ([iclondon.com](http://iclondon.com)) that has been around for decades, where I availed myself of some new bras, thanks to Elizabeth Benton, the attentive owner, whose motto is “We try to tell it like it is.”

Another boutique worth checking out, especially if you have a yen to dress like the hippest of red-carpet celebrities, is **Fetneh Blake** ([fetnehblake.com](http://fetnehblake.com)) in North Laguna. The owner, who founded the shop 18 years ago especially to appeal to the growing level of sophistication among local residents, describes her taste as counterintuitive to the “what’s up” surf culture. The racks carry wispy dresses of understated glamour, plus a scattering of shoes, bags, and fine jewelry. All is carefully chosen to surprise and delight; it’s the sort of shop that makes you want to throw away your dress-up clothes in exchange for a few memorable pieces in which to hit the town.

Perhaps the most unusual fashion outpost in Laguna is **Anastasia Boutique** ([anastasiaboutique.com](http://anastasiaboutique.com)) on Ocean Avenue, which bills itself as a shop, café, and gallery all in one. Opened in 1983 by Amir Gharavi, a loquacious and opinionated Iranian, Anastasia specializes in European and Japanese designers. You can find Dries Van Noten nestled next to

Issey Miyake, Rick Owen next to Comme des Garçons and Ann Demeulemeester. Gharavi is an unpushy salesperson—he almost acts as though selling were beside the point—but his ideas, about the culture of the city (“Laguna is boring,” he announces, “but you get addicted,” and “This is the only place where a councilman can get elected solely on the basis of deprecating remarks”) make for entertaining listening. Meanwhile, his adjoining café serves the best breakfast in town, whether it be squeezed-on-the-spot orange juice, perfectly cooked huevos rancheros, or fluffy pastries.

Sitting at Anastasia, enjoying both the intriguing conversation and the innovative designs, I was struck by what a surprisingly seductive place Orange County is—a vibrant mix of laid-back bohemia, art, and eclectic shopping set against a background of sun, sand, and green hiking trails. It may have its flash, and sometimes too many tourists in flip-flops and skimpy, Hawaiian-print clothing, but beyond all that is a small-town enclave with big-town aspirations. I was told that houses never go on the market here, and I can believe that to be true. I was sad to leave and am already planning to go back.

## Where to Stay in the O.C.

### MONTAGE LAGUNA BEACH

A beachfront resort and spa with elegant interiors and excellent views. 🏠 Rooms from \$945; [montagehotels.com](http://montagehotels.com).

### RITZ-CARLTON, LAGUNA NIGUEL

Modern SoCal luxury on a 150-foot bluff overlooking the Pacific. 🏠 Rooms from \$769; [ritzcarlton.com](http://ritzcarlton.com).

### HOTEL JOAQUIN

A chic new surfside bungalow with art-filled interiors. 🏠 Rooms from \$359; [hoteljoaquin.com](http://hoteljoaquin.com).

### MONARCH BEACH RESORT

Recently remodeled ultra-plush environs with a Miraval spa, six restaurants, three pools, a golf course, and a private beach. 🏠 Rooms from \$609; [monarchbeachresort.com](http://monarchbeachresort.com).

### THE RANCH AT LAGUNA

A stylish, low-key resort situated in a picturesque canyon, with the prettiest beach in the area a short walk away. 🏠 Rooms from \$263; [theranchlb.com](http://theranchlb.com).