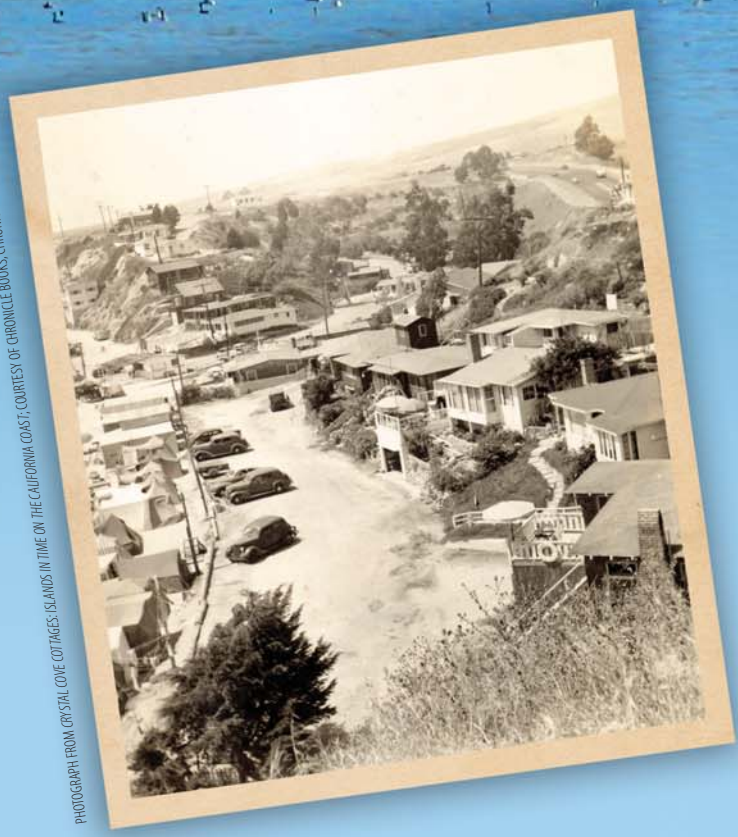




Photograph by John Connell from *Crystal Cove Cottages: Islands in Time on the California Coast*; courtesy, Chronicle Books, chroniclebooks.com.

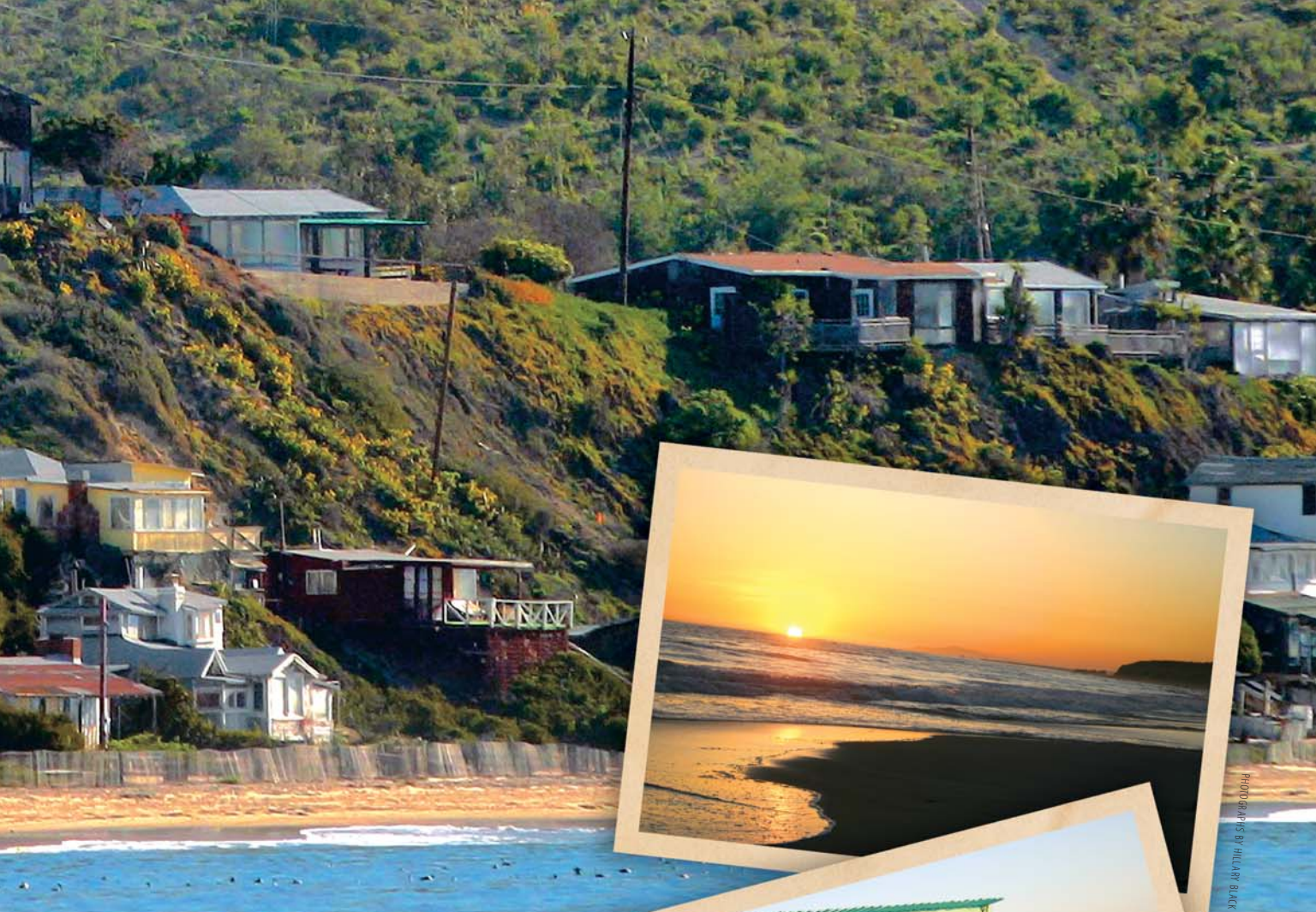


PHOTOGRAPH FROM *CRYSTAL COVE COTTAGES: ISLANDS IN TIME ON THE CALIFORNIA COAST*; COURTESY OF CHRONICLE BOOKS, CHRONICLEBOOKS.COM.

California Dreamin'

Just off the Pacific Coast Highway, Southern California's Crystal Cove boasts a rich history and is seemingly untouched by the hands of time.

BY REBECCA J. RAZO



PHOTOGRAPHS BY WILLIAM BLAKE

WITH THE REAL ESTATE BOOM OF THE LAST FIVE YEARS nearing legendary status, land around the country is developing at record speed. On the West Coast, and in areas along the illustrious Southern California coastline in particular, the beauty of the natural landscape has become increasingly overrun with uninspiring homogenous housing developments and strip malls. Coastal residents are losing their views of the Pacific Ocean to high-rise condos, while activists continue to wage campaigns to preserve the region's precious wetlands and ecological reserves.

But sandwiched between the affluent Orange County communities of Newport Beach and Dana Point is Laguna Beach: a picturesque town known for its timeless charm since its early days as a small artists' colony. Here also is Crystal Cove State Park. Comprising nearly 3,000 acres of woodland and coast, including a 3.2-mile stretch of pristine sandy beach dotted with vintage cottages, it's no surprise that Crystal Cove, known simply as the "Cove" to locals, has been drawing people to its shores for centuries—long before the area was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1979.

above:

Watching the majestic sunset dip into the horizon at Crystal Cove never gets old. Today's visitors can almost imagine the days when luaus, tiki parties and sing-alongs lasted late into the night. Thanks to the Crystal Cove Alliance, the historical cottages will be preserved for generations to come.

opposite:

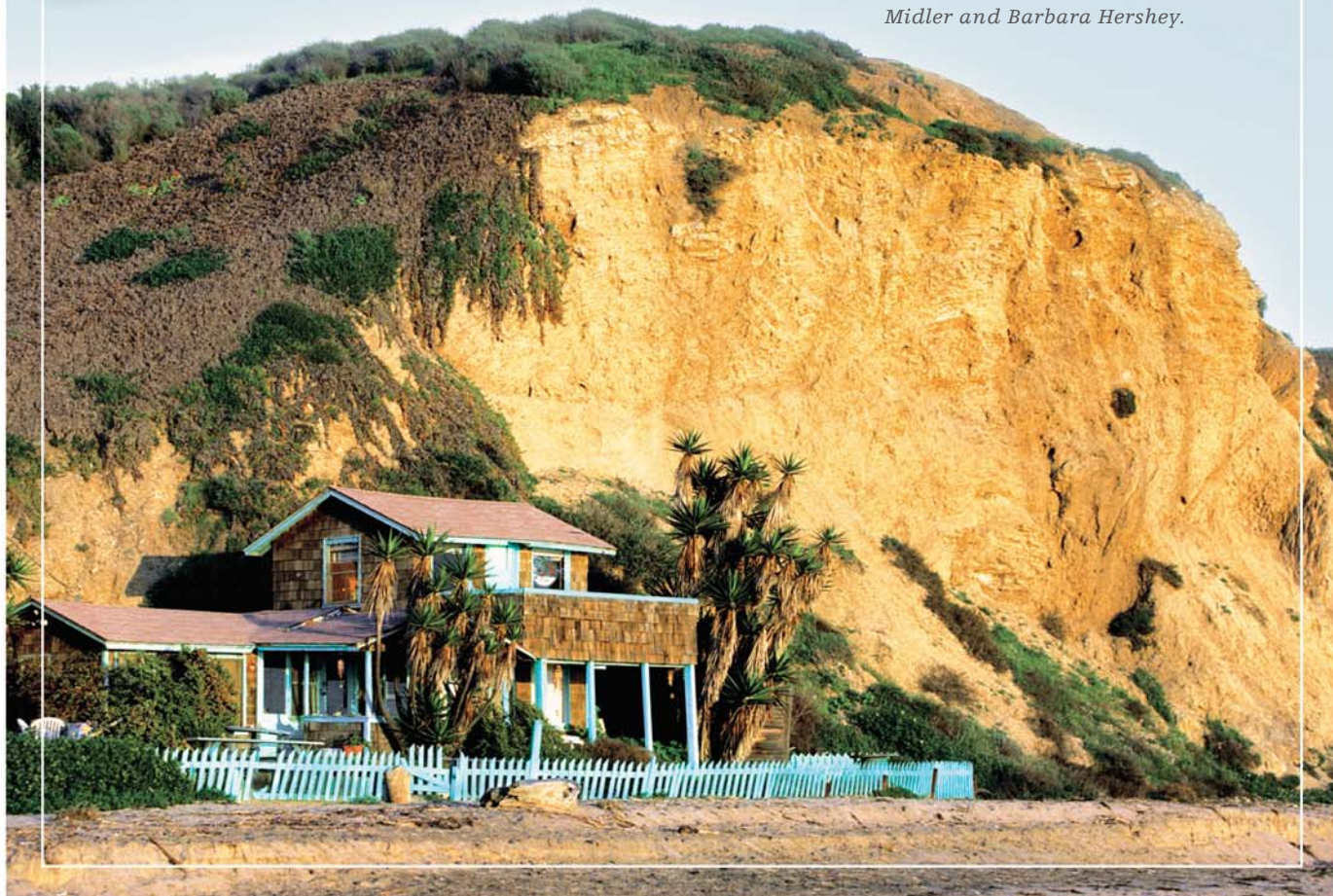
Crystal Cove as it looked at the peak of its popularity, c. 1940s.

PRESERVING CRYSTAL COVE

Formed in 1999, the Crystal Cove Alliance is a nonprofit 501(c)(3) corporation dedicated to the restoration and preservation of the Crystal Cove State Park Historic District. The Alliance solicits private donations and sponsors special fundraising events and membership programs for the purpose of protecting the cultural, historic and natural environment, including marine habitat. The Alliance also seeks to facilitate educational and research opportunities, among many other objectives. For more information, call (949) 640-5220 or visit crystalcovealliance.org.

below:

*At the far end of the cove and somewhat isolated from its neighbors is the Beaches Cottage, so-named for its role in the 1988 movie *Beaches*, starring Bette Midler and Barbara Hershey.*



According to *Crystal Cove Cottages: Islands in Time on the California Coast*, by Karen E. Steen, Laura Davick and Meriam Braselle, 4,000-year-old archeological evidence indicates that some of the area's earliest inhabitants were nomadic Native Americans who established villages for seasonal hunting and fishing. Following their departure, Crystal Cove remained uninhabited until the early 20th century, when the advent of the motorcar and access roads encouraged people to take excursions along the scenic route that, in 1928, was appropriately christened the Pacific Coast Highway. Crystal Cove soon became a hotbed of activity, drawing everyone from artists, actors and circus performers to Prohibition-era rumrunners and filmmakers during the height of the silent-film era.

At the time, rancher and conservationist, James Irvine Jr., owned the land; however, visitors were free to explore the Cove, and Irvine even allowed friends and employees to build thatched huts and pitch tents for overnight camping. Though rudimentary in design, some of the "Coveites" began building cottages on the beach—*sans* electricity, gas and running water—when a boat capsized and teak wood from its remains began washing ashore. Cottage construction continued through the '30s, and all of the cottages were eventually equipped with gas and electricity.

The last of the 46 cottages was built by 1939, but the years following WWII brought additional campers who set up more sophisticated tents—many of them army surplus—which they termed "cabañas." For the next two decades, tiki parties, luaus and cocktail hour were regular events from Memorial Day to Labor Day at the Cove. But with the continuing growth of the surrounding areas and mounting complaints of overcrowding, tenting on Orange County beaches was outlawed in 1962, according to the authors. With James Irvine Jr. long dead—his business now the corporate Irvine Company—and no one to challenge the ruling, tenting at the Cove closed for good, truly marking the end of an era.

THINGS TO DO NEAR CRYSTAL COVE

1. **Crystal Cove Beach Cottages**
Off Pacific Coast Highway
crystalcovebeachcottages.org
2. **Laguna Beach Visitors and Conference Bureau**
252 Broadway
(949) 497-9229
lagunabeachinfo.org
3. **Laguna Canyon Winery**
2133 Laguna Canyon Road
(949) 715-9463
lagunacanyonwinery.com
4. **Christie Repasy Designs**
3295 Laguna Canyon Road
(949) 707-1691
christierepasy.com
5. **Pacific Marine Mammal Center**
20612 Laguna Canyon Road
(949) 494-3050
pacificmmc.org
6. **Festival of the Arts/
Pageant of the Masters**
650 Laguna Canyon Road
(800) 487-3378
foapom.com
7. **The Laguna Playhouse**
606 Laguna Canyon Road
(949) 497-ARTS
lagunaplayhouse.com
8. **Shopping in downtown
Laguna Beach**
at Pacific Coast Highway and
Laguna Canyon Road
9. **Laguna Art Museum**
307 Cliff Drive
(949) 494-8971
lagunartmuseum.org
10. **Montage Resort and Spa**
30801 South Coast Hwy
(866) 271-6953
spamontage.com

COTTAGE RENTALS AT THE COVE

Visitors yearning to experience Crystal Cove in the spirit of the “Coveites” of the ‘30s, ‘40s and ‘50s can now do so. Located on some of Southern California’s most beautiful coastline, several carefully restored and fully furnished vintage cottages are now available for short-term stays year-round. Accommodations consist of 11 individual cottages or three dorm-style cottages, located either directly on the beach or atop the bluff overlooking the Pacific. The cottages book up fast, but new rentals are available on the first of each month. For more information, visit crystalcovebeachcottages.org.



A close-up of the front door of cottage 33 shows the care and detail that went into the restoration of these historical gems.



above:

While Laguna Beach artist Christie Repasy took artistic liberties by adding a lighthouse to her painting of the Crystal Cove shoreline, she flawlessly captures the location's idyllic charm and timeless beauty.

The cottages remained inhabited, but the future of the Cove's residents was tenuous. Essentially required to relinquish ownership of their cottages 20 years earlier, they had no legal rights to the land. In 1979, the California Department of Parks and Recreation purchased Crystal Cove, which was followed by two decades of litigation and wrangling over issues ranging from the residents' rights to historical preservation. The last of the Cove's inhabitants left for good in 2001.

Today, the park continues to draw artists, locals and tourists who enjoy a wealth of activities, including tidepooling, surfing, picnicking, and hiking along the coastal bluffs and in the backcountry. As of June 2006, 14 of the historical cottages have been fully restored and are now available for brief overnight stays [see "Cottage Rentals at the Cove" sidebar].

While the luau and tiki-party days of merriment may be past, those precious memories will be forever imprinted on the lives that Crystal Cove touched most profoundly. And moving forward, as future generations experience the Cove in a whole new way, its magic and allure will undoubtedly transcend time with an influence equally as resonant. **CB**

ILLUSTRATION BY REBECCA BRADLEY
SEE RESOURCES, PAGE 110.