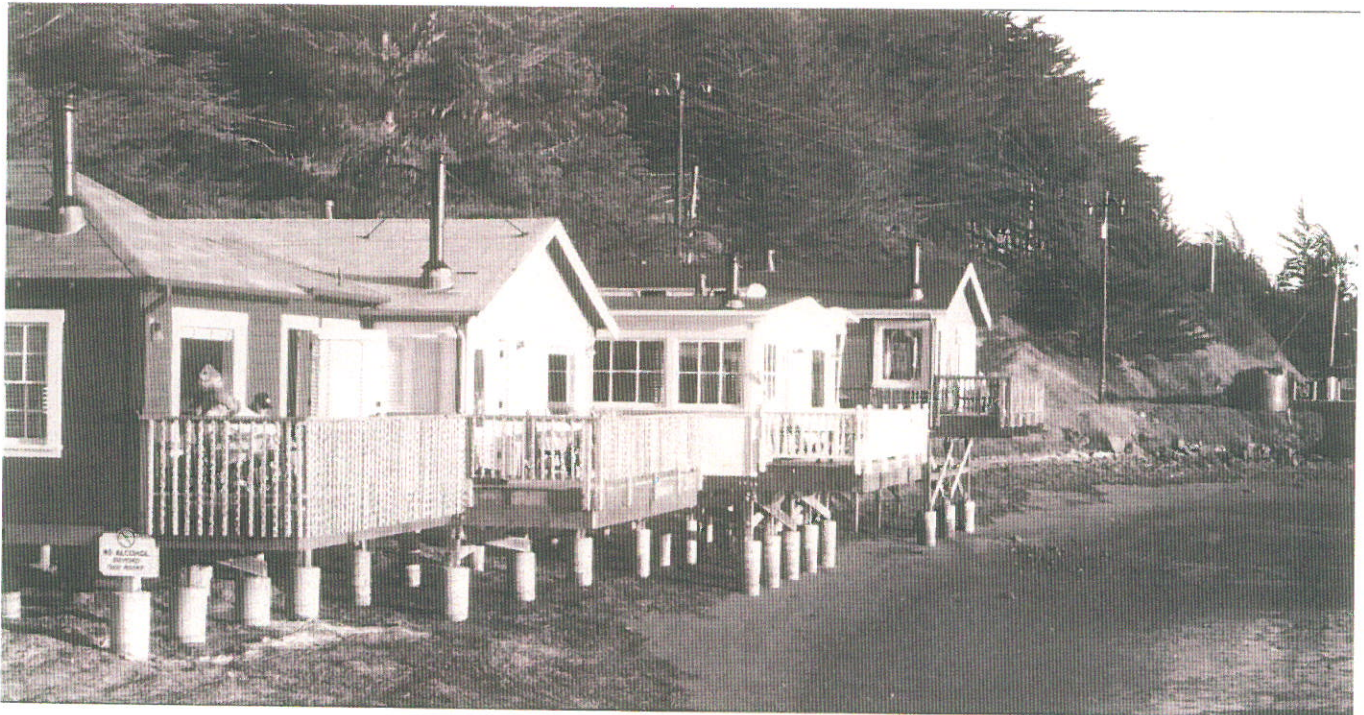


San Francisco Chronicle

TRAVEL



MARIN COUNTY, CA
PAT KULETO'S
LUXE COTTAGES
ON TOMALES BAY



JOHN FLINN / The Chronicle

Waiting for the tide: Five cottages at Nick's Cove hang out over the water — at high tide, that is. The developers gutted a collection of old fishing cabins and rebuilt them as ultra-luxe cottages.

Tides lap at luxury on the shore of Tomales Bay

Fine dining, idyllic cabins highlight Pat Kuleto's new resort

By John Flinn
CHRONICLE STAFF WRITER

Nothing kills the joy of a leisurely and indulgent supper like the prospect of a long drive home on narrow, twisting roads patrolled by officers with field sobriety kits.

That's one of the big selling points of Nick's Cove and Cottages, restaurateur Pat Kuleto's new property on the shore of Tomales Bay: At the close of the meal, sated diners can waddle a few steps to their private cabins and slip contentedly between sheets of crisp, 400-count Egyptian cotton.

Kuleto has transformed a ramshackle, 70-year-old roadhouse/fish shack and the adjacent cluster of decrepit fishing cabins into a hot new venue for destination dining in the west Marin hamlet of Marshall, a long way from anywhere. It opened in July to the kind of fanfare you'd expect for the man behind Boulevard, Jardiniere and Fog City Diner, among others. My colleague Michael Bauer reviews the restaurant on Page 24 of today's Chronicle Magazine; this story focuses on the cottages.

Workers have gutted the original fishing cabins of everything but their frames and reconstituted them as ultra-luxe little cottages, five of which stand on stilts above the slurping waters of Tomales Bay (when the tide's in, that is). Soon — possibly by the time this article appears — 12 cabins will be



KATY RADDATZ/The Chronicle

One-Tank Wonder West Marin

available for rent. When I visited the week before last, four were open and crews were putting the finishing touches on the others.

Before we proceed, a word is in order about prices. These cottages, like so many properties that open these days, are aimed at the deep-pocket traveler who doesn't blanch at spending \$500 or more for 19 hours' use of a room. And while the prices in the restaurant were in line with establishments of that quality, the cottage rates seemed a little, well, ambitious. Al's, the least inexpensive cabin available when I booked, currently goes for \$625 a night on week-

ends (\$475 midweek). Some of the new units opening on the other side of the Highway 1 from the bay will be a little cheaper.

The southeast shore of Tomales Bay is a happily somnolent place, full of cattle grazing on plump brown hillsides and oyster farms poking out of the shallow waters. Once my wife, Jeri, and I had lunched on succulent barbecued oysters at the Marshall Store, poked around the wonderfully eclectic Diekmann's General Store in the village of Tomales and considered (and rejected) renting a sea kayak for a few hours, we'd pretty well exhausted the possibilities. This is a place to quietly contemplate your last repast and anticipate your next.

At Nick's Cove, innkeeper Jamaica Littletree welcomed us to our cottage with a tray of local delicacies: figs, pistachios, bread and two big hunks of cheese, a luscious triple-cream from Cowgirl Creamery and a wonderfully pungent blue from Point Reyes Farmstead, both made a few miles down the road. Then she pulled the cork from a chilled bottle of Kuleto Estates dry rosé and poured us each a glass.

The wine and cheese tray were complimentary, as was everything else in our refrigerator: a couple of bottles of locally brewed ale, a bottle of mineral water and a small assortment of soft drinks. Unlike a lot of high-end properties, Nick's doesn't try to nickel and dime you once you're in the door.

Littletree showed us around the 450-square-foot cabin, which was done up in country rustic style with lots of found art — old oars, fishing poles, even a working crab trap — as decor. Inside an armoire was a small flat-screen TV mounted on an extendable, swivel arm. A comfy leather sofa faced a wood-burning stove with the makings for a fire installed, awaiting only a

If you go

GETTING THERE

Nick's Cove and Cottages is on Highway 1 in the town of Marshall, 52 miles north of San Francisco. A less-twisty, but still scenic alternative is to head to Petaluma and make your way west via Washington Street (which changes names every few miles) and Tomales Road.

WHERE TO STAY

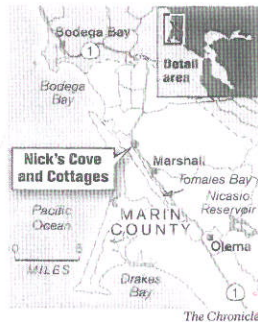
Nick's Cove and Cottages, (415) 663-1033, www.nicks Cove.com. Cottages, \$485-\$880 weekends, \$395-\$745 weeknights, includes continental breakfast. Five cottages — Ruthie's, Al's, Bandit's Bungalow, Nicolina and Big Rock — are over the water. The rest are on the other side of Highway 1. Bandit's Bungalow and Big Rock each have two bedrooms, but can be rented as a one-bedroom at a reduced rate. Ruthie's and Uncle Andy's are wheelchair accessible.

WHERE TO EAT

For a review of **Nick's Cove** restaurant, see today's Chronicle Magazine, Page 25.

Another option for lunch is **Marshall's Store**, where you can get your oysters barbecued, raw or Rockefeller-ed; also gourmet tacos and sandwiches. Most lunch entrees, \$8. 19225 Highway 1, Marshall. (415) 663-1339.

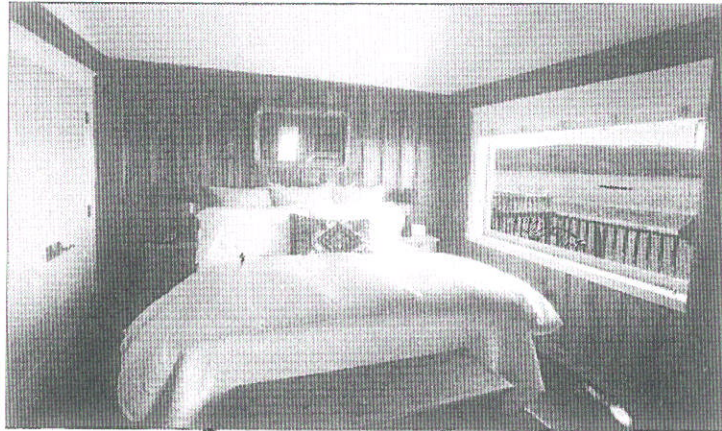
Hog Island Oyster Co., 20215 Highway 1, also in Marshall, has



picnic grounds for large groups and barbecues for grilling oysters. \$8 per person weekends, \$5 weekdays. Reservations essential. (415) 663-9218, www.hogislandoysters.com.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

West Marin Chamber of Commerce, (415) 663-9232, www.pointreyes.org.



CRAIG LEE / *The Chronicle*

Pier review: A rebuilt pier leads out to a shack that will be used for conferences, left, while guests in the waterfront cottages, above, have a view of Tomales Bay right outside their windows.

was the perfect venue to savor the sunset.

At these prices I expect everything to be spot-on perfect, and Nick's Cove fell short in a couple of areas. The big claw-foot tub and overhead rain shower had no shelf on which to put the EO organic grapefruit and mint glycerin soap or the French lavender shower gel. The back deck is sorely in need of a little table. And there was a bit of road noise from nearby Highway 1 — but, frankly, it wasn't too frequent or bothersome.

The cottages have free, high-speed Wi-Fi Internet access, but other than that communication with the outside world was a little tricky. Cell phones don't work there, and when my boss tried to reach me on a semi-urgent matter she got the front desk's voice mail.

Her message wasn't relayed to me for over an hour.

In the end, it's hard for me to say with any authority whether Nick's Cove and Cottages is a good value, because I don't regularly wade into the deep end of the price spectrum. But if you're the sort who thinks nothing (or almost nothing) of laying down six Benjamins for one night's lodging, I suspect you'll find this a cozy and welcoming place in which to sigh contentedly and loosen your belt after a multi-course, wine-soaked bacchanal.

One-Tank Wonder is an occasional feature on places near the Bay Area where dining, lodging and leisure are close at hand. John Flinn is executive editor of Travel. To comment, visit sfgate.com/travel.