

View of the Golden Gate Bridge from The Presidio.

Restoration as Resilience

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From a Byzantine estate in Greece to a former Army post in San Francisco, two historic properties prove that heritage and innovation can both drive sustainability.

THE PRESIDIO: REINVENTING A MILITARY FORTRESS AS A PARK

At the northern edge of San Francisco, the Golden Gate Bridge rises out of the mist — and just beyond it, the Presidio unfolds across 1,500 acres of eucalyptus groves, windswept bluffs, and historic brick barracks. For more than two centuries, it was a military post, closed off from the city it guarded. When the Army left in the 1990s, its parade grounds and warehouses stood silent — relics in need of a new purpose.

The Presidio's rebirth began with a vision: not to erase its past, but to reimagine it as a community rooted in resilience. Since 1998, the Presidio Trust has turned the former fortress into a national park and living model of sustainability, where history and ecology are stitched together with care.

Strolling its trails today, the transformation is ever-present. Pavement has given way to wildflower meadows and wetlands alive with herons. Creek beds once buried under asphalt now run clear, reducing flood risks and restoring habitats. The Presidio Nursery cultivates hundreds of thousands of native plants each year, ensuring that restoration is ongoing, not cosmetic.

The buildings, too, tell a story of renewal. Of the 800 Army structures on site, more than 600 have been rehabilitated instead of razed. Two of them host boutique hotels — the Inn at the Presidio and the Lodge at the Presidio, while others are the home of eateries — where recycled materials, energy-efficient systems, and robust composting prove that historic hospitality can also be sustainable.

Sustainability here isn't hidden in reports — it's woven into the daily activities of the park. A zero-waste program diverts the majority of refuse, while green waste is composted on site to nourish restored landscapes. The grid is being modernized for full electrification, from shuttle buses to building systems, powered increasingly by renewable energy.

For visitors, all of this translates into experience. Families gather at the new Tunnel Tops, cyclists ride bike paths, and hikers trace coastal trails with views of the bridge. Free electric shuttles make it easy to traverse the park without a car, while bike shares wait at trailheads for spontaneous exploration. It has become a park alive with possibility.

KINSTERNA HOTEL: A SELF-SUSTAINING ESTATE

Set in the rolling hills of the Peloponnese, just outside the medieval fortress town of Monemvasia, Greece, Kinsterna Hotel occupies a restored Byzantine mansion with sweeping views of the Aegean Sea. The rooms are beautifully cozy, a calm counterpoint to the estate's rugged surroundings. The property has 41 rooms, suites, and villas, each tastefully decorated to balance historic character with serene, modern comforts.

When the owners took on the crumbling estate, their vision wasn't to create another luxury boutique stay — it was to rebuild a working estate where past and present could thrive together. Every decision flowed from that idea: Restore what was there, revive what has been lost, and reimagine it for today.

At the heart of Kinsterna is the ancient cistern that gives the 25-acre estate its name. It gathers spring water that irrigates orchards and gardens with over 250 native plants, fills the pools, and sustains the grounds as it has for centuries. Around it, vineyards, olive groves, and orchards yield wines, olive oil, honey, marmalades, preserves, and soaps — all crafted on site. Guests at Kinsterna are invited to become part of a rhythm where creativity and nature combine. Depending on the season, they can stomp grapes, press olives, bake bread in the wood oven, make soap, or pour their own candles.

The chicken coop supplies fresh eggs, and the small farm with goats and donkeys recalls the property's rural heritage. Instead of ornamental pools beside the villas, gardens sprout with vegetables and herbs destined for the table. The estate's food is a revelation: Rustic yet elevated Greek and Mediterranean dishes showcase the bounty grown steps away. Every meal ties back to the land and to a vision that has turned a ruined mansion into a model for sustainable living.



Kinsterna Hotel. Photo courtesy of Kinsterna Hotel

In 2024, Kinsterna unveiled a photovoltaic park that now powers the entire property with renewable energy, eliminating fossil fuels and preventing more than 400,000 kilograms of carbon dioxide from entering the atmosphere each year. Surplus electricity is donated to local institutions, from the Monemvasia kindergarten to nearby churches and vulnerable households.

From the rugged Peloponnese to the urban edge of San Francisco, the Kinsterna Hotel and the Presidio stand as powerful testaments to a shared truth: Honoring the past doesn't mean clinging to it — it means breathing new life into historic structures and landscapes to create resilient, thriving models for a more sustainable world.