

# San Francisco Chronicle

## Suite Spot: Revived hotel blends Old West and casual elegance

By Ginny Prior

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Lake County's water-rich resources have always been a draw. In the late 1800s, the Tallman Hotel was a popular stagecoach stop for travelers. San Franciscans Bernie and Lynne Butcher bought the Upper Lake property in 2003. Bernie, a banker turned high school history teacher, and Lynne, a retired leasing agent looking for her next project, fully restored the 17-room

luxury hotel and adjacent full-service restaurant and bar, the Blue Wing Saloon.

“Much of the town was largely abandoned when we decided to restore and redevelop the property about 15 years ago,” says Bernie. “The town has now come back to life, and visitors can walk the main street of town and enjoy a number of attractive antique and gift shops with a western theme.”

**Setting:** With the Mayacamas Mountains on the west and the Inner Coast Range to the east, Lake County has several impressive landmarks, including Mount Konocti and Clear Lake. The volcanic land undulates with the largest geothermal fields in the U.S., and fertile valleys yield walnuts, grapes and pears. Upper Lake has a walkable Main Street that seems far removed from the Bay Area hustle. Cottonwoods sway gracefully, as if fanning the breeze from the Blue Lakes chain just a few miles west on Highway 20.

**The appeal:** Built in the late 1890s with locally sourced redwood, the Western-chic Tallman Hotel was added to the California Register of Historical Resources in 2008. The hotel’s original 1902 Kimball upright piano is still used during live jams (held weekly) in the Blue Wing Saloon. Suites range from the upper level Bungalow (most spacious) to ground-level Main Street Suites and a disabled-accessible Farmhouse Suite with a sun-filled sitting room. Garden Rooms offer both upper-level and lower-level garden-view accommodations. All guest rooms are furnished with custom wall treatments, hand-painted lighting and luxury linens. An artsy courtyard beckons visitors to sip local Lake County wines under the shade of native trees. The Tallman’s wraparound porch has rockers for more rhythmic relaxation.



Photo: The Tallman Hotel

The Tallman Hotel, which was originally built in the 1870s, rebuilt in the 1890s and sat vacant for 40 years until it was revived and opened in 2006.

**Insider's tips:** Lake County Wine Studio, directly across the street, offers free tastings of Lake County wines to Tallman Hotel guests. Nearby Clear Lake is the largest natural freshwater lake in California and a birder's delight on the Pacific flyway. A pontoon ride with photographer Faith Rigolosi ([www.eyesofthewild.us](http://www.eyesofthewild.us)) reveals eagles, ospreys, ducks and herons, along with gaggles of grebes — birds that perform a water dance as part of their mating ritual. Heron Days are celebrated the weekends of April 28-29 and May 5-6.

**Good to know:** The lower garden rooms have private patios with Japanese *ofuro* soaking tubs under rural skies known for their stars. "These are deep teak tubs ... that we keep at approximately 100 degrees," says Bernie,

adding that the Japanese build an entire vacation around a stay in ryokans (traditional Japanese inns) featuring in-room soaking tubs.

**Details:** 9550 Main St., Upper Lake. (707) 275-2245, [www.tallmanhotel.com](http://www.tallmanhotel.com).

Weekday rates start at \$179, including Continental breakfast and free WiFi.

An outdoor pool is open seasonally. Weekend rates start at \$199 (plus 9 percent state and county tax).

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