

## Beau Santa Barbara

In the 1920s, there lived a gentleman named Beau. He was a renaissance man—a painter, writer, craftsman, investor, and a collector of watches. He was also an observer, living life unrushed.

Beau is, to be accurate, a figment of publicist and entrepreneur Starr Hall's imagination, but he's a product of wishful thinking, too. "I've dated enough to think to myself—what happened to chivalry?" says Hall, "To opening the door? To buying a drink [for someone] without expectation?" It was enough to inspire Hall, who has created various Central Coast bar concepts in her professional past, to conjure up a gentleman to star in a book series and, concurrently, as the main attraction of downtown Santa Barbara's latest bar, **Beau** (frombeau.com).

"One of the things I've seen across my career that hits the mark, is storytelling," says Hall. "If a brand can tell a story and involve their audience, they've got a hook." The literary element at Beau stems from a book that Hall will release in its entirety in early 2027. Until then, she's launching the chapters—Beau's journal entries—monthly, and in nonsequential order. Upon arrival, Beau patrons are given clues (fragments from each chapter) that they're encouraged to piece together. Each clue solved is rewarded with an entry in a monthly drawing to win a prize.

Recently, a first clue upon entry read: *He returned the next day, the table was as he left it, or so it seemed. If you wish to follow what he noticed, begin where he sat. The second clue awaits at this location ...*

"People get a kick when they solve the clues," says Hall. "They high-five each other." And although participation in the hunt for Beau's unfolding story is not mandatory, since the doors opened in March,

"about 60 percent of people opt to get involved," she says.

The bibliocentric approach here—framed by a speakeasy vibe, a living room layout, and thoughtful touches, like layered rugs and warm lighting—has an ulterior motive: "To create an experience that's an escape from today's world," Hall says, "which is riddled with technology, lack of attention, and lack of in-person conversations. That's why I wanted to bring something totally different to Santa Barbara, a place where time slows down." Beau even provides a box for guests to store their phones in while they're at the bar.

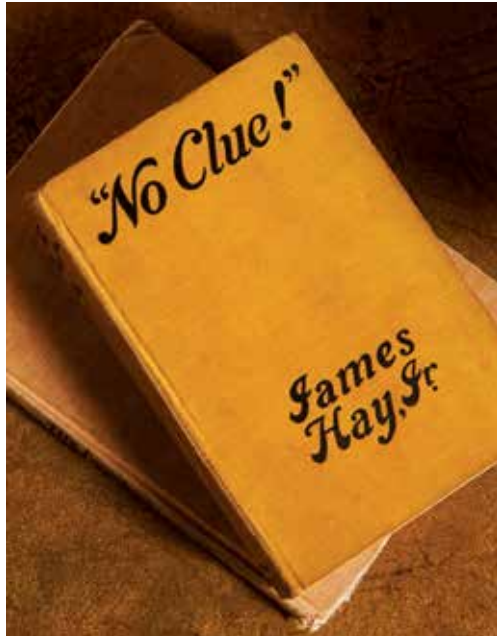
For now, the establishment has a wine and beer license, and the focus is on a worldly array of wines with a handful of Central Coast brands featured monthly and through periodic paired dinners. There are also sake flights, international lagers, hard teas, and a mix of nonalcoholic drinks. Aperitifs, or low-proof cocktails, include the UB40 Sangria, made with cabernet franc, and The House Ledger, featuring vermouth and walnut and orange bitters. The succinct food list includes charcuterie boards, a selection of olives, and sweet treats.

Beau also offers a club membership, priced at \$150 a month or \$1,500 a year. Members enjoy discounted prices, priority entry to the bar and special events, early access to limited small-case wine releases and cigars, and house-account privileges.

It should come as no surprise that Beau has a love interest. "Why wouldn't I bring a lady into his life," declares Hall. Esther is an intrepid time traveler, who Hall says, "brings a lot of depth to Beau's life." Beau's leading lady has inspired her own storytelling bar, which is expected to open next year. Three more books about Beau and his escapades are also in the works. ♦



Bruce Rolla (above) co-owner and director of operations at Beau, a Santa Barbara storytelling bar named for the protagonist in a soon-to-be-released novel, mixes an Esther's Vice cocktail (opposite; top, left), made with Veso Solstice, demerara simple syrup, bitters, and Lieu Dit Cabernet Franc.



Supporting the literary premise, Esther's corner, an intimate sitting area (top, right), is designed in the style of Beau's lady love, while furnishings, books, a chess game, and other decorative details throughout the rest of the bar are meant to represent the main character himself. Founder, co-owner, and curator of the narrative Starr Hall raises a glass with Rolla (bottom, right).

