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Hotel Belmar and the new look of success in Costa Rica



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Main building, Hotel Belmar, Monteverde, CR

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“We’ve grown smaller,” Pedro Belmar said quietly as we sampled the crisp [organic](#) kale with parmesan tapas. That would not ordinarily be a hotel’s best business plan, but as a Small Distinctive Hotel of [Costa Rica](#), the Hotel Belmar strives to reduce its carbon footprint while at the same time expanding its hospitality. That sentiment has greater resonance coming from a second generation heir to a hotel that has his name on everything.

A pleasant reminder of Pedro Belmar’s vision for the new look of success is as close as the hotel’s La Chispa [cocktail](#). It’s firmly rooted in the forest and the 21st



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- > cedar pine needle smoke
- > premium Sloane's Gin
- > black tea syrup
- > fresh lime

Crushed ice is swirled in a cocktail glass. Local dry cedar pine needles on a flameproof dish are lit with a torch. Discard the ice and invert the glass over the flame which should extinguish immediately and rest it on the needles capturing the smoke. The gin, syrup and lime are stirred in crushed ice. Upright the glass and strain the cocktail into the captured smoke.

Sipping a smoky cedar scented La Chispa ensconced in the all-cedar Hotel Belmar overlooking the cloud forest tumbling down to the Gulf of Nicoya is an expression of "growing smaller." The black tea syrup was made from ingredients in the Hotel Belmar's organic garden as well as fresh limes. The cedar pine needles are on site. The gin may be imported, but the new craft cocktail menu anchors the Hotel Belmar's commitment to sustainable growth and 21st century eco-luxe travel.

When his parents, Pedro and Vera Belmar, opened their home as a bed and breakfast in 1985 in the heart of the country's fabled Cloud Forest, Monteverde was a remote hamlet among lush subsistence farms. Located 85 miles northwest from the capital at San Jose, backpackers and naturalists exploring the cloud forests were the area's



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first tourists. Isolation and climate conditions favorable for a plethora of unique indigenous flora and fauna helped Monteverde develop a mystic for natural wellness.

With nary a paved road to what is recognized today as a biological treasure, travelers to the cloud forest grew from just backpackers to seekers of tranquility with comfort. The 13 room all-cedar Hotel Belmar main building is Pedro and Vera's homage to a love of alpine architecture. The extensive amount of cedar wood made opening a wood shop on site a logical decision. Handling all the work for hotel maintenance, it made sense for the wood shop to design and craft designated tableware for both the dining room and bar such as the sectional plate for the craft beer and tapas tasting.

Under the second generation the past five years, Pedro, Jr, and his sister have renovated the hotel and transformed the original home into the sleek wood and glass nine room Chalet. The Chalet is the center of the hotel's wellness program, spa services and organic juice and tea bar. The juices are made from fruits and vegetables grown on site.

On eight cultivated acres at the nearby Belmar family farm and the compact but expanding hotel organic garden, chickens for eggs, coffee, dairy, sugar cane, bananas, avocados, curly endive, lettuces, kale, watercress as well as sunflowers, nasturtiums, fennel, amaranth seeds and dozens more items supply the hotel's Celajes Restaurant.

A smoke house made from recycled materials smokes cheese, bacon and churresso sausage with the wood shop supplying the cedar chips. Plans are to grow mushrooms using the farm's coffee hulls and natural compost.

Methane gas is collected for kitchen use through the hotel's biological

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water filtration system. The system uses no energy yet produces methane, which is stored in a tank for the kitchen. Clean water is returned to the mountain stream in exchange for energy.

“My parents had the ideas,” says soft spoken Pedro taking little credit for the Hotel Belmar’s successful transition into a 21st century **Small Distinctive Hotels** retreat that consistently achieves Costa Rica’s highest awards for sustainable tourism. Knowing that the caché of **Monteverde and the Cloud Forest** is the region’s draw, Pedro wants to position the Celajes Restaurant and bar as the hotel’s unique attraction. It starts with the view: located on the main lobby floor, the spacious Celajes Restaurant and bar commands a sweeping vista of the forest, mountains and Gulf of Nicoya far below.

The bar reaches deep into the hotel’s organic garden for unique flavors to combine with premium sprits. Bitters and syrups are house made from reduced stout, coffee, eucuplytos and garden plants such as palo santo, a lemony scented herb that has been burned in South America to cleanse spaces of contrarian spirits – like sage. Room mini bar options include excellent house bottled **Hotel Belmar** cocktails.

Roberto Saenz is the Hotel Belmar’s brew master. The compact brewery just down the hill from the main hotel building was created using recycled equipment. All bottling is done on site. An inventive beer and food tasting is offered to guests at the bar or after the brewery tour.

The Aura Pale Ale was light with a refreshing hint of citrus and paired well with veggie ceviche: chiole, green bananas, cilantro and lime were fresh and tangy on a small tortilla. The dark, earthy hops of Dos Maros IPA melded with the rich meat of house smoked churesso. A creamy Stout had a great vanilla nose and a lingering molasses flavor.

Coffee and chocolate notes in the stout blended well with smoky and lightly candied house made bacon. The small batch brews change often so pairing combinations will vary – that’s fun.

The freshness of both the ingredients and artistry of Celajes Restaurant does not disappoint. Breakfast can include a coconut milk and yogurt with chia seeds, fruit, tarragon and basil accompanied by house made granola. A lunch of beef carpaccio was a visually stunning platter of ultra thin slices of raw beef napped with a caper vinaigrette.

At dinner house baked bread is served with chimichuri sauce harkening back to Pedro, Sr, Chilean roots. Roasted beets, micro greens, grilled carrots, fennel flowers, basil, sunflower seeds with a yogurt dijon vinaigrette made a colorful salad. Beef tenderloin was seasoned with soy sauce, lemon juice, cilantro and fennel flowers. Wild sea bass was gently poached in butter. The perfume of a light dessert of verbana water, lavender flowers, tarragon, tropical fruit and guanabanas sorbet linked the dinner to the scents of a Cloud Forest evening.

The ethos of Hotel Belmar and of all Small Distinctive Hotels of Costa Rica is to succeed by taking less from the Earth. What is taken must be sustainable and is often delicious. Pedro Belmar and his diverse staff enhance the guest experience by living the true meaning of less is more.

When you go: Juan Santamaría International Airport ([SJO](#)) is served by many airlines worldwide and is within an easy 20 minute drive of downtown San Jose and 3 hours to Monteverde. *Getting around:* Costa Rica has an extensive inter city bus system and many tourist van options. The easiest transportation is renting a car. Costa Rica’s road system is generally in good condition.

Disclaimer: The author was a guest of [Hotel Belmar](#), [Small Distinctive Hotels](#), [ENroute Communications](#) and [Revista Ander de Viaje](#).

Transportation within Costa Rica was provided by [Toyota Rent a Car of San Jose](#). A Rav4 made Costa Rica's mountain roads, especially the few unpaved, safe and comfortable.

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