

The Great Tide Pool

TALES OF PACIFIC GROVE, CALIFORNIA

by local award-winning author, Brad Herzog

THE BLISSFUL DRIP CAFÉ

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I well remember a day several years ago when I ambled through downtown Pacific Grove and down to Lovers Point Park. I expected to see the expanse of green beckoning me toward the rocky coastline and the crashing waves. Instead, I saw... a rustic outdoor coffee shop. In the middle of the park. As if it had sprung up virtually overnight. Which it did.

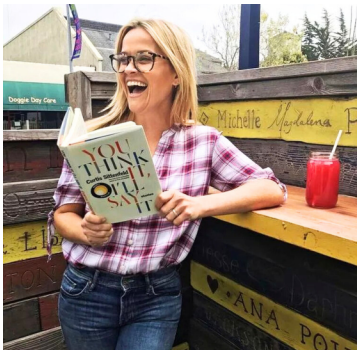


I suppose I should explain: In 2014, author Liane Moriarty published a bestselling novel about several complicated women embroiled in a homicide investigation - in Sydney, Australia. Three years later, a limited series based on the book premiered on HBO. Over two seasons and 14 episodes, Big Little Lies became a phenomenon, winning a haul of Emmy Awards and bringing the likes of actresses Reese Witherspoon, Nicole Kidman, Laura Dern and Meryl Streep to America's Last Hometown.



Oh yes, that's the important part: The setting was changed to the Monterey Peninsula.

Although it was set locally, various scenes in the show, which aired from February 2017 to July 2019, were filmed everywhere from Malibu to Pasadena to Calabasas. But several nearby locales also featured prominently. Big Sur's Bixby Bridge was featured in the show's opening credits. The exterior of Kidman's character's house was in Carmel. Monterey's aquarium, hospital and airport made appearances.



Most exciting for this story's purposes, however, Pacific Grove made more than a few cameos. A key plot point in the first episode - Witherspoon's character rolling her ankle - occurred at the intersection of Esplanade Street and Ocean View Boulevard. Two characters started seeing a marriage counselor... located at 130 Fountain Avenue. And Lovers Point? It served as a backdrop in several scenes.

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But the Blissful Drip Café – the pop-up faux coffee shop that existed for only 12 days before being dismantled – was PG’s star. It was THE hangout for the show’s main characters in Season 2. In season 1, Paluca Trattoria on Monterey’s Fisherman’s Wharf ostensibly served as the setting for the show’s Blue Blues café, but the showrunners actually recreated the outdoor seating area on a soundstage in Hollywood. Not so for the Bliss Drip Café. It was built on site. In Pacific Grove. At Lovers Point.



And I believe that says something dramatic about the setting. The café was conjured up out of thin air but you can’t recreate blissful scenery. Film location managers don’t mess around when it comes to choosing key settings. They have myriad options, particularly in California. With a show like Big Little Lies (in which the locale is a significant part of the story), the scenery has to be near perfect. Like Lovers Point.

Rumor has it that HBO donated the café set to PG after filming wrapped with the understanding that the company would have access to it if the show ever airs a third season. And, more than a half-dozen years later, recent scuttlebutt in the tabloids suggest this may actually happen. Kidman and Witherspoon have hinted at it, revealing that they’re waiting on another book by Liane Moriarty.

So it’s a bit of a cliffhanger regarding the coastal cliffs in Pacific Grove. Will Big Little Lies return? Will the A-list actresses once again enjoy the PG scene (breathless observers revealed that Kidman visited Passionfish and Witherspoon liked to frequent Happy Girl Kitchen). Will the Blissful Drip Café reprise its role? Stay tuned...

Meanwhile, whether or not Hollywood wants to imagine up its own version, Pagrovians have the opportunity to enjoy that blissful setting every day. And each of gets to play our own role in the story. As Moriarty wrote in her original novel, “None of us really see things as they are; we see things as we are.”