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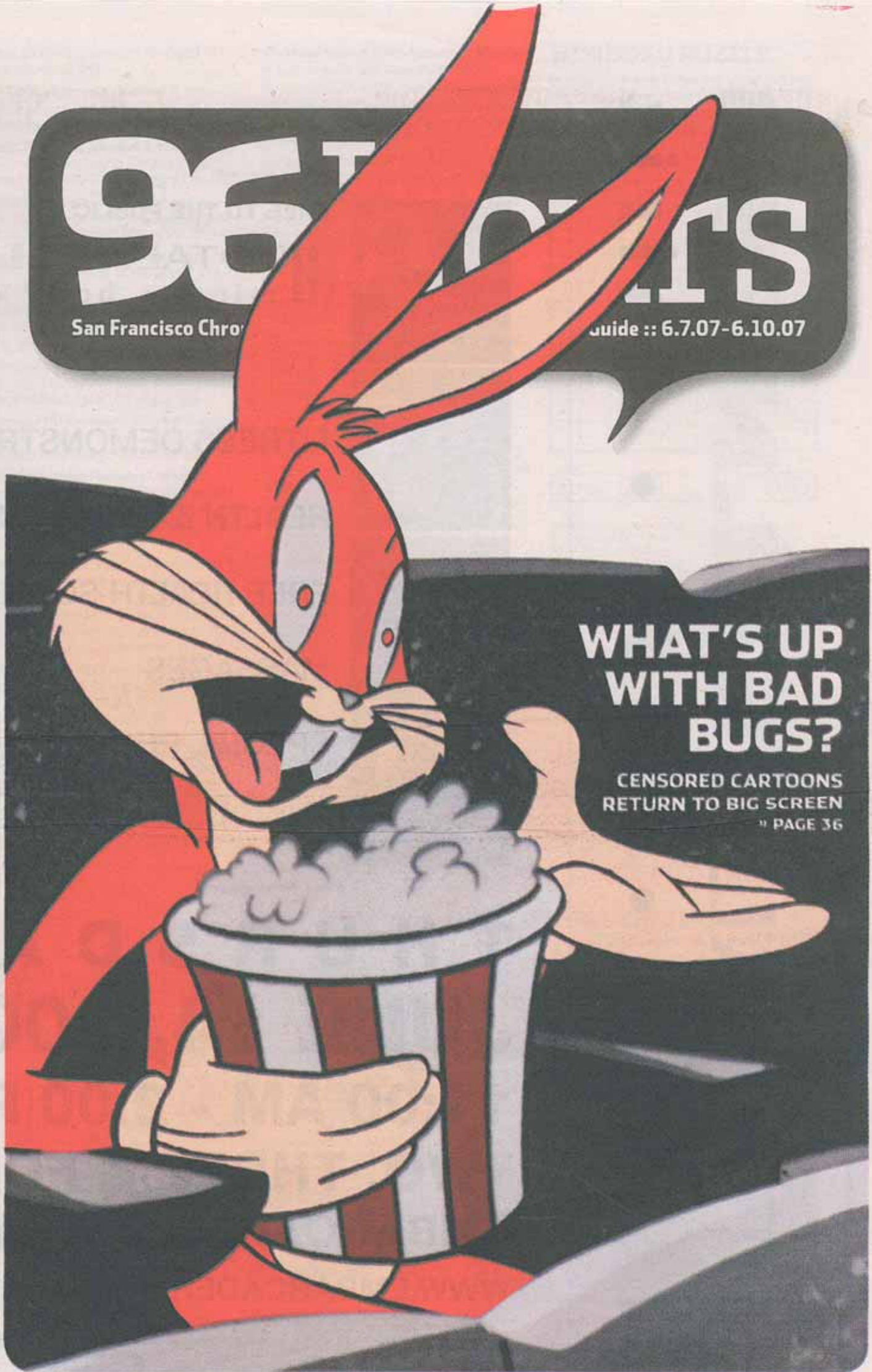


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96 HOURS

San Francisco Chronicle

Guide :: 6.7.07-6.10.07



WHAT'S UP WITH BAD BUGS?

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Under covers



The El Dorado Hotel in Sonoma, above, is on the quaint downtown square and offers lovely outdoor spaces to enjoy, below left, plus rooms with private terraces featuring views of the pool and countryside.

SIMPLE SOPHISTICATION

:: El Dorado Hotel :: The moment you walk into this revamped inn on the picturesque square in downtown Sonoma, you feel like you're on vacation. From the plushy contemporary furnishings to the dark hardwood floors, the El Dorado embraces casual Wine Country with a crisp, sophisticated flair. The 1800s hotel was recently refurbished with modern appointments, giving it a light and airy feel. Restaurants, shopping, and hiking and bike trails are just steps away.

— Stacy Finz, 96hours@sfgchronicle.com

Vitals: 405 First St. W., Sonoma. (800) 289-3031 (hotel) or (707) 996-3030 (restaurant); www.hotel.eldorado.com. 23 rooms with private baths inside the main building and four separate bungalows (two of which are wheelchair accessible). Rooms \$175-\$195, bungalows \$195-\$225 through October; rooms \$155-\$175 and bungalows \$175-\$195 November through April. Two-night minimum stay on holidays and on high-season weekends.



Comfort zone

The rooms in the main building are snug, but luxuriously furnished with metal canopy beds, downy white duvet covers, rich chocolate brown nightstands, wool rugs and rattan accents. French doors open on to private terraces with views of the pool and the Sonoma countryside. Terra cotta floors and walls of olive green and mustard yellow add an earthy feel.

Bath and beyond

Although the bathrooms are roomy, they only come equipped with shower stalls. So if it's a good relaxing soak in the tub you're after, you're out of luck. Soap, cotton balls and swabs, hand and body lotion and shampoo are provided as well as a blow-dryer.

Grounds for approval

The inviting lobby with its cozy seating and fireplace is a good place to relax while sipping a glass of wine from the full-service bar. Outdoor spaces include a swimming pool and dining area; heaters provide warmth on nippy nights. The hotel's El Dorado Kitchen, which specializes in dishes that emphasize California's seasonal produce, serves lunch and dinner. There's no room service, but guests can order from the restaurant menu and carry it up to their rooms. Drinks and food may also be enjoyed poolside.

Geared up

Large, flat-screen televisions are in all the guest rooms, which also come equipped with DVD players. Clock-radio compact disc players, cordless telephones, compact refrigerators and wireless Internet are also part of the package.

In the vicinity

Restaurants and boutiques are within walking distance. The Girl and the Fig, a brasserie with patio seating, and Cafe La Haye, a small cafe and gallery, are local favorites. On Tuesday nights, April through October, there's a farmers' market on the plaza. There are 200 wineries in Sonoma County and a number of historical sites. On the square just a short walk from the hotel is San Francisco Solano de Sonoma, a mission founded by Padre José Altimira in 1823, which is now part of Sonoma Historic State Park and open daily for touring. There's also a bike trail that winds through downtown, passing the Depot Park Museum, a gallery of railroad and history exhibits and the former home of Gen. Mariano Vallejo.

Good to know

Check-in is at 3 p.m., checkout 11 a.m. Guest rooms are on the second floor of the building and there is no elevator; if stairs are a problem, opt for one of the four bungalows. Most of the valley's wineries are miles away, so plan to spend time in the car or enjoy the complimentary tasting of Sonoma wines from 5:30 to 7:30 p.m. Mondays in the hotel. A limited number of parking spaces are available to guests on a first-come, first-served basis in a lot off the street; there's also street parking. No pets allowed.

Highs and lows

This is a charming inn with simple amenities — no room service, spa, exercise room or breakfast — but it's conveniently located for soaking up the pleasures on the square.