

WHITE



CAPS



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In the Funk Zone, a cherry red 1956 Jeep Willys Wagon has towed in a vignette of East Coast summer. String lights stretch above a posse of navy umbrellas, whose cream-colored fringe playfully sways in the sea breeze. At White Caps Beach Club, lobster rolls, backgammon, and fireside drinks invite a buttoned-down, *come as you are* ethos.

With its downtown outpost, a flagship club under renovation in Summerland, and a full-scale Bistro in Goleta, White Caps feels on the cusp of a cultural epicenter. Each location's seaside charm has the unmistakable touch of an image architect—local photographer Michael Haber, the native New Yorker bringing Montauk's beach-shack charm to Santa Barbara shores. With a mantra of “eat, play, stay,” Michael has a high-touch, low-key lifestyle brand in the making.

“While it now has its \$30 million mansions, I’ve always loved and appreciated Montauk’s eclectic, beachy groundedness,” he smiles as he scrolls through a Pinterest vision board teeming with stacked surfboards, wooden shacks, and ocean dives. “As a photographer, I’m all about moments. My heroes were always Helmut Newton, Irving Penn, Richard Avedon—[who shot] moments that were sexy and playful and raw.”

Michael's knack for escapism and enduring moments stems in his creation of some of the most iconic images of the nineties and early 2000s. Few can say they've captured brand-building campaigns like Target's original Bullseye advertisements or the revitalization of Tommy Bahama. Michael's fine art collection, encased in his published book *The Elements*, further elevates a portfolio spanning both big-name corporate billboards and refined lenswork.





CAPTION

“Tommy Bahama was actually the White Caps inspiration source from day one. Here’s a company that was in the red by \$1 million, and [an agency and] I took them to over \$2 billion with the concept ‘Life is One Long Weekend.’ I can relate to that,” he laughs. “It was simply based on a couple, a male and a female, no kids—they would just travel, and I would capture moments of them.” Don’t fret: White Caps’s laid-back luxury caters to all ages, what Michael’s dubbed a “three to 93” demographic.

As we chat on a picnic table in the Funk Zone’s patio, I’m served a trio of East Coast summer staples: a lobster and shrimp roll, with seafood flown in fresh from Maine. The coral-colored lobster meat is endlessly tender and tastefully buttered, practically melting into its toasted brioche bun. While it may be the West Coast in me, I favor the spicy tiger shrimp roll. Aptly dressed in habanero aioli, parsley, and lemon, the peppered prawns are sandwiched in that same pillowy bun (sourced from L.A.’s lauded Röckenwagner Bakery), bringing brightness to an indulgent dish. The intermittent tater tot serves up a side of crispy, golden nostalgia.

Michael tells me the newer Bistro in Goleta—where a white Willys Wagon greets customers—expands culinary offerings with an extensive menu of breakfast bowls, chilaquiles, and egg dishes, alongside hearty lunch options like spicy salmon, brisket sandwiches, and Mexican-style protein bowls. White Caps has also excelled in elevated catering, serving over 300 patrons at last September’s One805Live soirée for first responders at Kevin Costner’s oceanfront estate, among other private events at vineyards and individual homes.

Evidently, Michael’s a multihyphenate, and his hospitality ventures beyond food—embodying the “stay” part of his vision. When the pandemic brought unexpected success to a rental property he owns on Rincon, the suddenly unoccupied photographer leaned into immersive experience-building. Today, three surf bungalows line the upper terrace of the Summerland location, and a number of lodges sprinkled across Carpinteria have joined the White Caps collection, all accented by sleek white paint and design-forward elements for discerning coast-goers.

The Summerland flagship, with its half-acre expanse overlooking the Pacific, is set to reopen in April after a full-scale renovation, unveiling new attractions including an oyster bar, an al fresco movie screen, and private banquet spaces. The initial, more casual concept, which debuted last summer on a terraced gravel lot next to The Nugget, already drew its fair share of star power. “Harry and Meghan ate at White Caps all the time, and Steve Martin was right next to me [one day]—my idol,” Michael shares. “Cameron Diaz has stopped by...there’s a lot of buzz that’s really fun.”

Membership tiers are also in the works, including perks such as curated wine clubs and exclusive rates for his art collections. Until then, the Funk Zone’s patio will be in full swing throughout spring and summer, with live tunes swirling from 5:30 to 7:30 on Saturday evenings. Poised to become a cornerstone of bicoastal summer, White Caps captures the season as it should be.*