

HiFi + Listening Bars

Southern California Sound Guide

Curated for Colin + Nicole | SoCal Road Trip March 29 - April 5, 2026

Your Must-Visit

TOP PICK

Sound by the Sea

Listening Bar + Mediterranean Restaurant | Wed-Thu 5-11pm | Fri 5pm-12am | Sat 1pm-12am | Sun 1pm-11pm | Mon-Tue closed
325 S Coast Hwy, Oceanside, CA 92054 | (760) 547-5441

Franco-Belgian founder Dominique Vanhecke built this Oceanside gem as a proper listening room with world-class vintage JBLs and a rotating cast of selectors spinning everything from Balearic to deep jazz. Mediterranean small plates, natural wines, and craft cocktails round out the experience. Family-friendly, dog-friendly, zero pretension.

Sound system: 1975 JBL 4350A studio monitors paired with modern digital routing. Curated by selector Emma Hirai (Standard Hotels, Radio Nova).

Drinks/food: Seasonal Mediterranean small plates, natural wines, signature cocktails, gourmet coffee, organic teas

Your match: The JBL 4350As are studio monitors you know from the control room → hearing them in a social setting is special. Emma Hirai's programming skews eclectic/international, similar to what you'd spin.

Tip: Reserve via Tock. Sat afternoon sessions start at 1pm → perfect stopover on the drive between SD and home.

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How it fits your route

Oceanside sits right on the I-5 corridor between San Diego and Orange County. Options: • Hit it Wed 4/1 en route Newport → SD (it's on the way). • Or catch a Sat afternoon session 4/4 heading north toward Ojai. Either way it's a 30-min detour max.

San Diego Listening Bars

Your SD days: Wed 4/1 - Fri 4/3

TOP PICK

Part Time Lover

Japanese-inspired listening bar + record shop | Daily 4pm-2am
3829 30th St, San Diego (North Park)

Named one of Esquire's Best Bars in America. Walk-in only, no requests, no cassettes → the selector controls the room. Partnership with Folk Arts Rare Records for the vinyl wall. Intimate, dark, serious about sound without being stuffy.

Sound system: Bespoke Uncanned Music analog chain: Klipschorn speakers in all four corners, McIntosh tube amps, Technics SL1200 turntables into a Condesa rotary mixer, Otari reel-to-reel tape machines recording every set live.

Drinks/food: Craft cocktails, Japanese whiskey focus, beer, wine

Your match: Klipschorns + McIntosh tubes + Condesa rotary + live-to-tape Otari recording = the most audiophile-grade signal chain of any bar on this list. As an Emmy-winning audio engineer, you'll appreciate the craft.

Tip: Go early on a weeknight (Thu 4/2 after Padres game?) for a quieter room. Gets packed Fri/Sat.

→ [Apple Maps](#)

Convoy Music Bar

Japanese speakeasy listening bar | Sun-Mon, Wed-Thu 6pm-12am | Fri-Sat 5pm-12am | Tue closed
4646 Convoy St #112, San Diego (Kearny Mesa) | (858) 251-6340

Hidden behind an alley entrance → look for the 'On Air' sign behind O'Brien's. Japanese-inspired cocktails and small bites in an intimate setting. Dress code enforced (smart casual). No photos/video allowed. This is Convoy District, so pair it with dinner at one of the great Asian spots nearby.

Sound system: Custom-built sound system imported from Japan. Vinyl-only playback.

Drinks/food: Japanese whiskey, craft cocktails, beer, wine, small bites

Your match: You know Convoy from your Oakland Chinatown saves → same energy. The Japanese import system is legit and the speakeasy format keeps the room respectful.

Tip: Convoy District dinner + CMB nightcap = perfect Thu or Fri evening.

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Longplay HiFi

Audiophile cafe + bar + record shop | Mon 10am-6pm | Fri-Sun 10am-6pm | Tue-Thu closed
2547 Imperial Ave Suite B, San Diego (Logan Heights)

Daytime listening room and record shop in Logan Heights. Coffee, low-intervention wines, and bites in a beautifully designed space. Reservations required. More cafe than bar → perfect for a mellow afternoon vinyl session before dinner.

Sound system: 1980 Klipsch Heresy speakers, McIntosh MA-352 vacuum tube preamp. 100% analog chain.

Drinks/food: Coffee, low-intervention wines, unique bites

Your match: McIntosh tube preamp + Klipsch Heresys = warm, detailed midrange. Great for afternoon listening.

Tip: Fri 4/3 afternoon before your A L'Ouest dinner would be ideal timing.

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Kiku Room

Dance-forward listening bar + cocktail lounge | Check RA/Instagram for current hours
2812 Kettner Blvd, San Diego (Little Italy)

Opened in the original Casbah space (legendary SD indie venue). 'Kiku' means 'to listen' in Japanese, but the vibe skews darker and more energetic than most listening bars: dark disco, Balearic house, international dance music. Cocktails at neighborly prices (the owners were tired of \$18 drinks).

Sound system: Purpose-built DJ sound system. Vinyl and digital.

Drinks/food: Classic cocktails (Negronis, martinis, Midori sours) at reasonable prices

Your match: If Part Time Lover is the audiophile room, Kiku Room is the dance floor → more DJ energy, less purist. Good for a later-night session.

→ [Apple Maps](#)

Orange County + North County

Your OC days: Mon 3/30 - Tue 3/31

Blind Dog HiFi and Records

HiFi listening room + record shop | Wed-Fri 11am-5pm | Sat-Sun 11am-6pm | Mon-Tue closed
2750 Harbor Blvd, Ste B3, Costa Mesa, CA 92626 | (657) 346-7785

Not a bar → a proper hi-fi shop with listening rooms where you can audition gear and dig through vinyl. Costa Mesa is 10 min from your Lido House hotel in Newport Beach. If you want to geek out on equipment, this is the spot.

Sound system: Two dedicated listening rooms with vintage and new audiophile-grade equipment. Turntable demos available.

Your match: As someone who lives in the studio, you'll appreciate being able to A/B gear in a quiet room. Good vinyl selection skewing rock, jazz, electronic.

Tip: Quick Tue 3/31 morning visit before HB family day. Costa Mesa is right there.

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Port of Sound Record Shoppe

Record shop + listening station | Daily 11am-7pm
1568 Placentia Ave, Costa Mesa, CA 92627

Long-running Costa Mesa record shop with deep crates across genres. Listening stations let you preview before you buy. Walking distance from The Lab and The Camp (anti-malls worth exploring).

Sound system: In-store listening stations with quality playback.

Drinks/food: No food/drinks (but Portola Coffee is next door)

Tip: Pair with Blind Dog for a Costa Mesa audio crawl.

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LA Detour (If You Have Time)

Not on your route, but worth knowing

Gold Line

Vinyl bar + cocktail lounge | Mon-Thu 5pm-12am | Fri-Sat 3pm-2am | Sun 3pm-12am
5607 N Figueroa St, Los Angeles (Highland Park)

Stones Throw Records' own bar, sitting below their HQ in Highland Park. Peanut Butter Wolf's personal collection lines the walls. Classic cocktails, rare spirits, natural wines, Japanese highballs. The gold standard for LA listening bars.

Sound system: 7,500+ vinyl records curated by Peanut Butter Wolf (Stones Throw Records). High-fidelity playback system.

Drinks/food: Craft cocktails, rare spirits, natural wines, highballs

Your match: *Stones Throw* is one of the most important independent labels (Madlib, J Dilla, Madvillain). If you know the catalog, this room is a pilgrimage.

Tip: Highland Park is a 15-min detour off the 110 if you're passing through LA. Worth it.

→ [Apple Maps](#)

Quick Comparison

Venue	Type	Sound System	Vibe	Best For
Sound by the Sea Oceanside	Listening + Restaurant	JBL 4350A studio monitors	Relaxed, family-friendly	Sat afternoon stopover
Part Time Lover North Park	Listening bar + record shop	Klipschorn + McIntosh tubes	Dark, serious, no-requests	Thu or Fri nightcap
Convoy Music Bar Kearny Mesa	Speakeasy listening bar	Japanese import custom build	Hidden, intimate, dress code	Post-dinner session
Longplay HiFi Logan Heights	Cafe + bar + record shop	Klipsch Heresy + McIntosh tube pre	Mellow, daytime, curated	Fri afternoon before dinner
Kiku Room Little Italy	Dance-forward listening bar	DJ system vinyl + digital	Dark disco, energetic	Late night Fri/Sat
Blind Dog HiFi Costa Mesa	HiFi shop + listening rooms	Audiophile gear demos	Geeky, quiet, serious	Tue morning audio crawl
Gold Line Highland Park	Vinyl bar + cocktails	7,500 records Stones Throw	Cool, curated, HIP	LA detour if time allows

Suggested Listening Itinerary

Day	Venue	When	Notes
Tue 3/31	Blind Dog HiFi, Costa Mesa	11am-12pm	Quick gear geek-out near Newport
Wed 4/1	Sound by the Sea, Oceanside	5-8pm	Stopover en route Newport → SD
Thu 4/2	Part Time Lover, North Park	9pm-12am	Post-Padres game nightcap
Fri 4/3	Longplay HiFi, Logan Heights	1-3pm	Afternoon session before A L'Ouest
Fri 4/3	Kiku Room, Little Italy	10pm+	Late-night dark disco if energy allows
Sat 4/4	Sound by the Sea, Oceanside	1-4pm	Sat session on the drive north to Ojai

Signal Chain Breakdown

For the audio nerds (that's you)

Part Time Lover

Technics SL1200 → Condesa rotary mixer → McIntosh tube amps → Klipschorn speakers (x4) | Live recording: Otari reel-to-reel 1/4" tape

Sound by the Sea

Digital + analog hybrid routing → 1975 JBL 4350A studio monitors | Curated by Emma Hirai (Radio Nova, Standard Hotels)

Convoy Music Bar

Custom Japanese import system (full specs undisclosed) → vinyl-only playback | Hidden speakeasy format

Longplay HiFi

Turntable → McIntosh MA-352 vacuum tube preamp → 1980 Klipsch Heresy speakers | 100% analog, no digital

Gold Line

Technics turntables → hi-fi playback chain → custom speakers | 7,500+ records from Stones Throw/PB Wolf collection

