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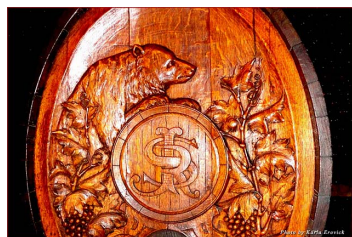
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Grapes into Gold: Exploring California's Historic Wine Country in Napa and Sonoma

Written by Karla Erovick
Thursday, 09 August 2012 14:28

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Everyone loves Napa Valley, but how much do we really know about it? My mission was to discover the origins of wine production in the Napa and Sonoma valleys. While much has been written about wineries founded 30 years ago, I planned to visit those that have celebrated at least their 100th anniversary. These are the pioneers

who brought winemaking to the New World. Without them, Napa Valley might never have achieved prominence on the global stage and become a highly sought-after travel destination. To which wineries do we owe a huge debt of gratitude? I was about to find out.

First on the itinerary was **Buena Vista Winery**, the oldest winery in Sonoma. It was founded by an entrepreneurial Hungarian count, and many of his farming and wine-making practices are still in use today. The beautiful stone building that houses the tasting room was built in 1857 as the original press room. I was greeted at the winery by Count Haraszthy, who regaled me with stories from his colorful history and that of the winery. Upstairs they have historical displays of their winery and its founder.



After the informative history lesson, I was ready to sample their wine. They had prepared a selection of their limited-production wine in a private tasting room, although they went off-script to let me taste many more of their favorites. They make Pinot Gris, Chardonnay, Rose of Pinot Noir, Sparkling Brut, Pinot Noir, Syrah, and Zinfandel. Most of

their wines are not distributed, so the only way to purchase them is through the wine club or in the tasting room. This is a place you will want to linger to take it all in, the architecture, history, and shaded picnic grounds.

As I arrived at **Beringer Vineyards**, which has been producing wine for 134 years, I noticed the beautiful grounds and collection of historic buildings. Most tastings are held in the beautiful Rhine House, a lovely example of Victorian-era architecture with gables, turrets, stained glass and

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