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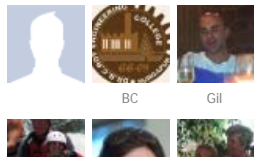
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Aug 03 2012

## Eleven Napa and Sonoma Vacation Experiences Guaranteed to Leave You Wanting More

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Roger and Whitney at Jordan Vineyards

Wine country vacations, especially to Napa Valley and Sonoma County can be overwhelming to the novice and the experienced wine traveler alike. With over 400 wineries in Napa Valley alone and hundreds more in Sonoma, how do you choose which wineries to visit? Some offer small quaint tastings and tours while others have almost a Las Vegas feel.

Recently I traveled with my daughter, Whitney, to Napa and Sonoma for her 21<sup>st</sup> birthday celebration. She certainly enjoys wine and grew up around great wines but to date, Whitney has not inherited her dad's wine geek gene. Like many novice wine drinkers, Whitney has a discerning though still developing palate.

Whitney's fist trip to Napa/Sonoma needed to be fun yet educational with enough glitz and glamor to spark her 21 year-old soul with a splash of wine geekiness for Dad. This wine country travel itinerary certainly fit the bill.

### Day 1



in the vineyard with John Anthony Truchard

On a warm sunny July morning we arrived at [Caymus Vineyards](#), in the heart of Napa Valley. This is where I fell in love with Napa Cabernet in 1983, during a rainy afternoon with founder, Charlie Wagner, learning about vineyards and winemaking. Whitney had heard this story all her life, so I wanted to share the magic. Joseph Wagner, Charlie's grandson, served as our tour and tasting guide. We visited all the same vineyards and the farmhouse kitchen table where I shared the afternoon with Charlie drinking Cabernet. Of course we sampled some of the great Caymus, Belle Glos, Mer Soleil wines from the Wagner family...It was magical. Caymus offers

an intimate tasting, limited to 10 people by appointment.

Our second stop was the Salon Tasting ([Full Review](#)) at [Swanson Vineyards](#). I had experienced this a few years ago and often recommend it to friends. A casual and intimate seating, limited to 10, in a recreated Paris Salon straight from the 1700's. We were greeted at the door with a smile and a glass of crisp white wine, joined new wine friends around a

We Are All Mortal... Until the First Kiss...or the Second Glass of Wine... Eduardo Galeano

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beautiful antique Moroccan table and discuss the issues (wines) of the day, like Parisian aristocrats, sans the powdered wig.

What better way to end the day than with a vineyard tour? We stopped into the [John Anthony Vineyards Tasting Salon](#) to meet up with our good Napa friend and owner John Anthony Truchard for a personal tour of the nearby Church Vineyard. In addition to salon tastings, John offers a wonderful tour of Church Vineyard and a few others. The small vineyard includes a restored and modified turn-of-the-century wooden church, now the vineyard owner's home. We strolled amongst the vines, pregnant with fruit, enjoying a glass of delicious John Anthony Church Vineyard Sauvignon Blanc.

#### Day 2



Whitney has a real flare for culinary, especially baking ([Whitney's baking blog](#)), and so a tour of the [Culinary Institute of America – Greystone](#) was a must-do. The chocolate laboratory where culinary students let their chocolate imaginations run wild and the [Rudd Center for Professional Wine Studies](#) were highlights. The CIA Culinary Shop is stocked with all sorts of wonderful cooking goodies for the kitchen novice and expert alike. We stayed for a scrumptious lunch at the [Wine Spectator Restaurant](#), where the pastry chef created a special 21st birthday dessert

sampler.

That afternoon was spent at two of my favorite spots for leisurely tastings, [Mumm Napa Valley](#) and [Duckhorn Vineyards](#). What birthday trip would be complete without relaxing on the patio, overlooking the vineyards, with six flutes of delicious bubbly in front of you? While the wines at Duckhorn and their sister properties are superb, they taste even better when seated on the veranda of this old-style plantation house gazing out over the vineyards to one side and lush gardens on the other.

#### Day 3



*Learning her Pinot chops from James MacPhail*

Up early and on the scenic trail from Calistoga in the north of Napa Valley to the quaint wine-centric Sonoma town of Healdsburg. Keeping with the theme of first wine loves, our initial stop was [Jordan Vineyards](#) where Whitney's Mom, on that same trip in 1983, first fell in love with Cabernet. Jordan is a elegant chateau-style property with hospitality second to none. By appointment, they offer [two styles of tours](#) with tastings. We chose the more intimate Library Tasting. In honor of Whitney's 21<sup>st</sup>, Sean, our fun and knowledgeable wine guide, opened a bottle of her birth-year 1991 Cabernet for us and the other guests to share. Then it was though the "secret door" to the stately library for a tasting of three Cabernet vintages paired with artisan cheeses and estate olive oil. *Tip: Jordan's tours book up early so*

*make your reservations.*

For Pinot Noir lovers, [MacPhail Family Vineyards](#) is a must (appt. only). We were greeted at the winery door by Zuni, a sweet Burmese Mountain Dog who spent the tasting at Whitney's feet. James MacPhail, his wife, daughters and Zuni live on the property. The tasting of MacPhail single-vineyard Pinots is enjoyed amongst the barrels and fermentation tanks in the winery. In this personal setting we were able ask many questions of a barefoot James and learn much about the uniqueness of Pinot Noir and single-vineyard wines. MacPhail wines are consistently some of the highest rated Pinot Noirs I review each year... and frankly the folks at MacPhail are just fun to hang with.

- Texas Wine (10)
- Viognier (11)
- White Wine (112)
- Zinfandel (32)

#### Pick Your (Wine) Poison

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Sticking with the Pinot Noir theme, but adding Chardonnay and Zinfandel to the mix...next stop was [Deloach Vineyards](#). Not only were we able to taste some outstanding wines, but we also recieved a lesson in biodynamic winegrowing while touring their extensive biodynamic gardens. The winery was recently acquired by Jean-Charles Boisset of [Boisset Family Estates](#). Jean-Charles is a leader in the biodynamic farming movement.

At the suggestion of Lisa, our guide at Deloach, we made a quick stop into the [JCB Tasting Room](#) on the square in Healdsburg. Glitz, glam, mirrors, crystal chandeliers and bubbles, Whitney was in heaven wishing her college girlfriends were in tow. The place was packed full of girls drinking wine and having a blast amongst the chic French decor. All JCB wines are named with numbers. On the sparkling wine side, Whitney loved the 21, a Brut, though I preferred the 69, a Brut Rose'.

Day 4



*Raymond Winemaker for the Day*

Our final day was filled with fun and memories. With all her newly developed wine knowledge, it was time for Whitney to take on the challenge of a blending session. While blending sessions can be intimidating and technical, the one offered by [Raymond Vineyards](#) is just plain fun with serious wine. After a quick tour of the biodynamic gardens (another JCB winery) and the opulent winery, we donned silver and red sparkling lab smocks. Tyson, our enthusiastic "Blending Master," anointed us both, [Winemaker for a Day](#). What blending lab is complete

without a disco ball and music of your choice? We even designed our own professional labels for our proprietary Cabernet blends. Whitney named her's "21 & CO" while I chose "BII's Big Blend". At Thanksgiving we will have a family blind tasting. I hope Whitney's 21 & CO doesn't outshine the Big Blend too much.

Our afternoon was spent among friends at the [Ceja Vineyards](#) 11<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Fiesta. A special family-run winery, we were greeted by Amelia Ceja and her daughter Dalia. Dalia, in her mid 20's, offered Whitney sound advice about living and working in Napa Valley, leaving her dreaming about "someday..." Whitney and I spent the afternoon sipping Ceja wines, mingling with friends, listening to the live mariachi band and eating some of the most amazing grilled paella I've ever had. We hated to leave knowing our flight back to reality was mere hours away. *Tip: Check out the Ceja Vineyards tasting room in downtown Napa...a short walk from the John Anthony Tasting Salon.*



*with Amelia Ceja at the Ceja Fiesta...empty glasses – not for long!*

In four days, we covered a lot of wine-soaked ground, though some might prefer a more leisurely wine country pace. If so, try cherry picking from our wine country vacation itinerary to plan your perfect wine country excursion. All these experiences are guaranteed to leave you wanting more.

Sharing is sexy!

Posted by Roger Beery on August 3, 2012



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