



Forbes Travel Guide

DISCOVER THE MOST OUTSTANDING PLACES

FORBES TRAVEL GUIDE | 10/17/2012 @ 11:01AM | 1,488 views

7 California Wine Experiences You Can't Get Anywhere Else

by [Startle.com](#), Contributor

A visit to [California's Wine Country](#) is enthralling [any time of year](#). But during harvest season (typically late August to early October), there's something magical about seeing vines with purple fringes of grapes and smelling the aroma of freshly pressed juice lingering in the air. Each winery has its own unique charm, but our [Startle.com](#) editors whittled down the list to seven that offer unforgettable experiences. Read on to find out which ones caught our attention.

[Want to take a peek at some top-notch wine cellars? Check out our travel blog on Startle.com for all the details.](#)

Robert Sinskey Vineyards, Napa

There's an inviting warmth to the Robert Sinskey experience, even before you taste your first glass of pinot noir from the organic grapes —perhaps it's the hearth-style oven that anchors the tasting room.

Gardeners and chefs will enjoy the Farm to Table Tour (\$75), which has you ducking under fig branches and stepping through a pumpkin

patch as you walk along the organic garden. Wind through the volcanic rock caves before you stop on the cozy patio, where you'll find bountiful plates of salumi, housemade jam, Marcona almonds and plenty of stellar wines.



Robert Sinskey Vineyards, photo courtesy Robert Sinskey Vineyards

Schramsberg Vineyards, Calistoga

Reservations are essential if you want to explore this pioneering sparkling-wine house with the oldest wine caves in [Napa Valley](#). These spooky caverns built next to a quaint Victorian house were hand-dug into the mountain by Chinese laborers in the mid-1800s. Along the tour (\$45), you might see winery workers placing the 2.7 million individual bottles of sparkling wine

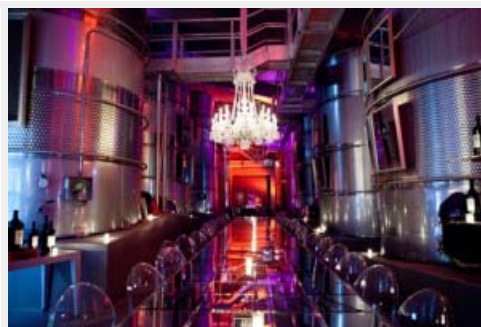
into the caves by hand as they have for nearly 150 years. Bubbly lovers will be in heaven sipping the Blanc de Noirs that's often mistaken for French Champagne; others will be impressed by Schramsberg's balanced J. Davies Cabernet Sauvignon.

Darioush, Napa

You know there has to be something magnificent on the inside when you're greeted with a brazier full of flames and soaring sandstone columns topped with horses. Owner Darioush Khaledi's magnificent winery is inspired by the architecture and culture of the ancient Persian city of Persepolis. It's an artful marriage of ancient and modern inside—not to mention a boutique filled with Fornasetti and Missoni Home. The newest experience takes you into Khaledi's private cellar gardens for vino, lunch and a chat with a raconteuse who happens to be one of world's leading wine historians.

Raymond Vineyards, Saint Helena

Take a walk on the wild side in this historic winery that's been transformed by new owners Jean-Charles Boisset and his wife, Gina Gallo. The first tasting room looks straight out of a luxury home catalog. But stroll into the Crystal Cellar and prepare yourself for



The Crystal Cellar at Raymond Vineyards, photo courtesy Tina Wong, The Wandering Eater

[Parisian](#) chic—this room is glammed up with Baccarat chandeliers, gleaming stainless tanks and mannequins hanging from the ceiling on trapeze swings. For the ultimate experience, don a modern jumpsuit and be a winemaker for a day (\$100). You'll take home a bottle of your own red wine blend with a custom label. Dog lovers will want to stop into Frenchie, the über-canine-friendly winery on the same site, with a "doggie wine bar" (it's just water) and portraits of Gallo's French bulldogs dressed as Marie Antoinette and George Washington.

Castello di Amorosa, Calistoga

Imagine a 13th-century Tuscan castle—from tower to dungeon—and you'll have a good idea of what Castello di Amorosa is all about. Dario Sattui (of V. Sattui Winery fame) spent about \$36 million and 14 years planting Italian varietals and importing every stone, nail and furnishing to complete his dream winery, which was featured in the movie *Bedtime Stories*. You'll feel as if you're touring a vineyard in the rolling hills of [Tuscany](#), yet you're in the heart of California's Wine Country. Trying to expand your cellar? Spring for the Wine Aficionado tour, where you'll taste high-end reserve wines and, of course, check out the castle.

Medlock Ames, Healdsburg

This is as delightfully granola as it gets with farm tours, all-organic vineyards and sustainable practices at this mostly solar-powered winery. After all, getting back to the land is what a trip to [Sonoma](#) is all about. The