



InFocus

Fodor's | TRAVEL INTELLIGENCE

NAPA & SONOMA

WINERIES | FABULOUS FOOD | SPAS | COOL TOWNS

EXPLORING

TOP ATTRACTIONS

★ **Fodor's Choice Bartholomew Park Winery.** Although this certified organic winery was founded in 1994, grapes were grown in some of its vineyards as early as the 1830s. The emphasis here is on handcrafted, single-varietal wines—Cabernet, Merlot, Zinfandel, Syrah, Chardonnay, and Sauvignon Blanc. The wines alone make this a worthwhile stop, but another reason to visit is the small museum, with vivid exhibits about the history of the winery and the Sonoma region. Yet another plus is the beautiful, slightly off-the-beaten-path location in a 375-acre private park about 2 miles from downtown Sonoma (head east on East Napa Street and follow the signs). Pack a lunch to enjoy on the woody grounds, one of the prettier picnic spots in Sonoma, or hike 3 miles on the property's marked trails. ☎ 1000 Vineyard La., off Castle Rd. ☎ 707/935-9511 🌐 www.bartpark.com 🍷 Tasting \$10, tour \$20 ☺ June–Oct., daily 11–5:30; Nov.–May, daily 11–4:30; tour Fri. and Sat. at 11:30 and 2, Sun. at 2, by reservation.

Buena Vista Winery. The ebullient Jean-Charles Boisset, whose family owns wineries in France and elsewhere, purchased Buena Vista in 2011 and quickly set about transforming the site where modern California wine making got its start into an entertaining homage to the accomplishments of 19th-century wine pioneer Count Agoston Haraszthy. Tours, sometimes conducted by the count himself—as channeled by actor George Webber and others—pass through the original aging caves dug deep into the hillside by Chinese laborers. Tastings take place in the former press house (used for pressing grapes into wine), which was built in 1862 and stylishly renovated in 2012. The best wines here are the Chardonnays and Pinot Noirs from Los Carneros AVA. ■ **TIP** → On the mezzanine above the tasting room you can view reproductions of period photographs and prints of the winery. ☎ 18000 Old Winery Rd., off Napa Rd. ☎ 800/926-1266 🌐 www.buenavistawinery.com 🍷 Tasting \$10; tours \$10–\$30 ☺ Daily 10–5; tours by appointment 1–2 days in advance.

QUICK BITES. **Crisp Bake Shop.** Only in the Wine Country would your local pastry chef, in this case Andrea Koweek, have honed her skills at the French Laundry. Much of what she bakes—croissants, cupcakes, mini-Bundt cakes, brioche sweet buns with ricotta

CLOSE UP

Wine-making Pioneer



Count Agoston Haraszthy arrived in Sonoma in 1857 and set out to make fine wine commercially. He planted European vinifera varieties rather than mission grapes (the varieties Spanish missionaries brought to the Americas) and founded Buena Vista Winery the year he arrived.

Haraszthy deserves credit for two breakthroughs. At Buena Vista, he grew grapes on dry hillsides, instead of in the wetter lowlands, as had been customary in the Mission and Rancho periods. His success demonstrated that Sonoma's climate was moist enough to sustain grapes without irrigation. The innovative count was also the first to try aging his wine in redwood barrels, which were much less expensive than oak barrels. More affordable barrels made it feasible to ratchet up wine production. For almost 100 years, redwood barrels would be the California wine industry's most popular storage method (even

though redwood can impart an odd flavor).

Despite producing inferior wines, the prolific mission grapes were preferred by California growers over better varieties of French, German, and Italian vinifera grapes through the 1860s and into the 1870s. But Haraszthy's success had begun to make an impression. A new red-wine grape, the Zinfandel, was becoming popular, both because it made excellent Claret (as good red wine was then called) and because it had adapted to the area's climate.

By this time, however, Haraszthy had disappeared, literally, from the scene. After a business setback during the 1860s, the count lost control of Buena Vista and ventured to Nicaragua to restore his fortune in the sugar and rum industries. While crossing a stream infested with alligators, the count lost his balance and plunged into water below. The body of modern California wine making's first promoter and pioneer was never recovered.

Buena Vista Winery and the nearby Bartholomew Park Winery now occupy Haraszthy's former land, and both have small museums with exhibits celebrating the count's legacy. At Buena Vista, an actor portraying the count gives tours of "his" winery and caves.

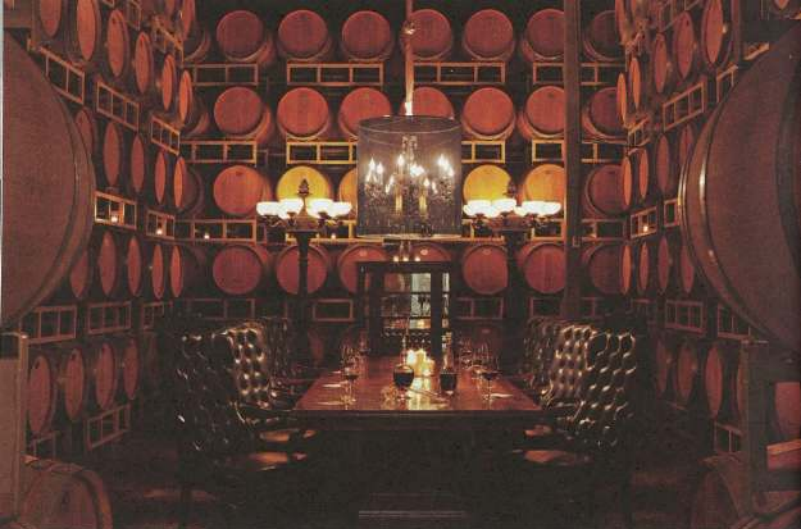


Matanzas Creek Winery is the star of the tiny Bennett Valley AVA.

WORTH NOTING

FAMILY Charles M. Schulz Museum. Fans of Snoopy and Charlie Brown will love the Charles M. Schulz Museum, dedicated to the cartoonist who lived in Santa Rosa for the last 30 years of his life, until his death in 2000. Permanent installations like a re-creation of the artist's studio share space with temporary exhibits that often focus on a particular theme in Schulz's work. Children and adults can take a stab at creating cartoons in the Education Room or wander through the labyrinth in the form of Snoopy's head. ☎ 2301 Hardies La., at W. Steele La. ☎ 707/579-4452 🌐 www.schulzmuseum.org 💰 \$10 ☺ Labor Day–Memorial Day, Wed.–Fri. and Mon. 11–5, weekends 10–5; Memorial Day–Labor Day, weekdays 11–5, weekends 10–5.

DeLoach Vineyards. Slightly off the beaten track in western Santa Rosa, DeLoach is best known for its Russian River Valley Pinot Noirs, among them the much-lauded Pennacchio Vineyard edition and the Estate Collection Pinot Noir. The winery also produces old-vine Zinfandels, Chardonnays, and a handful of other varietals. Some of the reds are made using open-top wood fermentation vats that are uncommon in Sonoma but have been used in France for centuries to intensify a wine's flavor. The history-rich tour focuses on the estate vineyards outside the tasting-room door, where you can learn about the winery's labor-intensive biodynamic and organic farming methods. ☎ 1791 Olivet



Tastings in Raymond's atmospheric Barrel Cellar include wines that are still aging.

appointment. ☎2950 Sage Canyon Rd./Hwy. 128, 8 miles east of Silverado Trail ☎707/963-0717 🌐www.nicheliniwinery.com ☎Tasting \$10 ☺ Weekdays by appointment, weekends 11-5.

Raymond Vineyards. All the world's a stage to Jean-Charles Boisset, Raymond's charismatic owner—even his vineyards, where his five-act Theater of Nature includes a well-executed series of gardens and displays that explain biodynamic agriculture. The theatrics continue indoors in the disco-dazzling Crystal Cellar tasting room (chandelier and other accoutrements by Baccarat), along with several other spaces, some sedate and others equally expressive. Despite goosing up the glamour—gal pals out for a fun afternoon love this place—Boisset and winemaker Stephanie Putnam, formerly of Hess and Far Niente, have continued the winery's tradition of producing reasonably priced premium wines. The Cabernet Sauvignons and Merlots often surprise. ■ **TIP**→ Concerned about dogs being left in hot cars during tasting, Boisset established the on-site Frenchie Winery, where canines lounge in comfort while their guardians sip wine. ☎849 Zinfandel La., off Hwy. 29 ☎707/963-3141 🌐www.raymondvineyards.com ☎Tastings \$20-\$40; tour and tasting \$45 ☺ Daily 10-4.

Robert Louis Stevenson Museum. If you have a soft spot for author Robert Louis Stevenson (*Treasure Island*, *Kidnapped*), drop by this small museum housing an impressive