

WINE & MORE

Try new Sonoma food, wine spots

Looking for things to do?
Tastings, tours and
summertime-only events

By **VIRGINIE BOONE**

FOR THE PRESS DEMOCRAT

Jack London came up here to write; others used to journey this way to enjoy healing hot waters. If you're looking for new ways to enjoy the town of Sonoma and surrounding Sonoma Valley this summer, wait no more. New establishments have opened their doors and await your visit, while it might also be time to refresh your memory at long-established places offering summertime-only events, new wine tastings and tours.

Annex Wine Bar: A wine bar, tasting room and live music venue, the Annex is next door to the Community Café on the way out of the town of Sonoma traveling north into Sonoma Valley. Together they offer a four-course pairing menu pouring the wines of both resident wineries (Coturri, David Noyes, Hughes Family, Schug and Trecini) and a monthly guest winery. The patio wine bar is a nice place to sit by the fire and enjoy the bar's \$5 dinners Wednesday through Saturday, or come by on Sunday for the popular dinner series. Daytime tasting is by appointment only.

865 West Napa St., Sonoma, 938-7779, annexwinebar.com

Benziger Family Winery: The always reliable Benziger has a new pizza menu Fridays, Saturdays and Sundays, with hand-tossed

10-inch pizzas for \$13 with a selection of toppings paired with several wines by the glass, including the family's deliciously crisp sauvignon blanc or delightfully fresh rosé. The winery is also doing a

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new pinot noir and cheese pairing held at times in its newly remodeled winery house room.

1883 London Ranch Road, Glen Ellen, (888) 490-2739, benziger.com

Buena Vista Winery: The re-imagined Buena Vista plays host this summer to Shakespeare Under the Stars, presenting "Romeo and Juliet" Thursday through Sunday during most of August, and inviting guests to bring a picnic and take in one of the world's most beloved tales of star-crossed love. When not visiting for a performance, the winery nicely offers picnic hampers (\$75) to visitors every day from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m., with The Count's Hamper including a sandwich, salad and assorted sweets for two; the JCB French Hamper, as implied, a more continental assortment of cheese, charcuterie, salad, bread and sweets, also for two. Each includes a bottle of Buena Vista wine.

18000 Old Winery Road, Sonoma, (800) 926-1266, buonavistawinery.com

The Epicurean Connection: Right off the Sonoma plaza, Epicurean hosts a meet-your-farmer dinner every month and live music on various nights, in between winemaker dinners and weekend wine tastings. Heaven for cheese-heads, it also teaches all manner of cheese-making and cheese-tasting classes while its café makes soups, sandwiches, artisan cheese plates, fresh salads and more. There

are pairings of cheeses with beer or wine, too.

122 West Napa St., Sonoma, 935-7960, theepicureanconnection.com

Glen Ellen Star: Opened last year by French Laundry alum Ari Weiswasser and wife Erinn, the daughter of winemaker Mike Benziger, the Star is a welcome culinary gem in the heart of town, featuring an inspired menu built around wood-fired vegetables, pizzas and meat and an innovative selection of house-made ice creams. Sit inside or out for dinner nightly or lunch Saturday and Sunday.

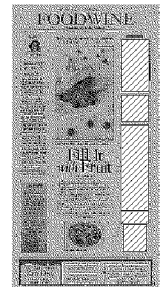
13648 Arnold Drive, 343-1384, glenellenstar.com

Jack London's Winery

Ruin: The damaged building in Jack London State Park was originally used as a winery under the name Kohler and Frohling, but after being damaged in the 1906 earthquake, London himself used it in a variety of ways, including as an office. The ruins will be used this summer for "Broadway Under the Stars" performances, a gorgeous outdoor setting with lawn seating for picnics that can accommodate 800 guests. Sonoma Valley wineries are on hand during performances to quench showtime thirsts.

2400 London Ranch Road, Glen Ellen, 938-5216, jacklondonpark.com

The Lodge at Sonoma: The Lodge is a swanky enclave in Sonoma and a great getaway, whether you're staying overnight, unwinding for the day at the Raindance Spa or coming in for a drink or dinner. For locals, the Carneros Bistro and



Wine Bar offers gourmet meals throughout the day as well as an inspired wine list, the paired vision of chef Andrew Wilson and sommelier Christopher Sawyer, while the Bean & Bottle wine and coffee bar inside the hotel is good for a glass or two or a bottle to take home. A poolside menu is on offer at lunch.

1325 Broadway, Sonoma, 935-6600, marriott.com

Naked Wine Studio: Despite the name, clothing is not optional at Naked Wines. The name means to convey a new concept in the sometimes staid wine world whereby Naked finds "angels" (i.e., you, the visitor) to come by, taste wines from around the world that Naked has invested in, then buy the wines at the tasting room or sign up to get them on an ongoing basis for \$40/month. Naked then invests in additional small-scale winemakers and you, the angel, are able to follow the ones you like, knowing you've done your part to help them make their wines. Recent selections included a Napa Valley cabernet sauvignon and Sonoma Valley zinfandel. Even Bonny Doon's famed winemaker Randall Grahm has had wines in the Naked mix.

8450 Sonoma Highway, Kenwood, 408-0011, us.nakedwines.com

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KENT PORTER / The Press Democrat

Stuart Graham of England at the new wine bar, Bean & Bottle Marketplace at The Lodge at Sonoma Renaissance Resort & Spa in Sonoma. In back is bartender Jason Phung.



ALVIN JORNADA / For The Press Democrat

The Glen Ellen Star features veggie dishes cooked in a wood-fired oven.