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# SAN FRANCISCO

THE BAY AREA AND WINE COUNTRY





# IN Velo VERITAS

Exploring Napa and Sonoma by Bicycle

A photograph of two cyclists riding away from the camera on a paved path through a vineyard. The path is flanked by rows of grapevines. In the background, there are rolling green hills under a cloudy sky. The cyclist on the left is wearing a black tank top and patterned leggings. The cyclist on the right is wearing a black shirt and a wide-brimmed hat, and has a basket on their front wheel.

BY MICHELLE LAFRANCE  
PHOTOGRAPHY BY JENNIFER WHALEN



CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: CYCLING PAST SONOMA HISTORIC STATE PARK WITH SONOMA VALLEY CYCLERY; RUTHERFORD HILL WINERY'S OAK GROVE IS PERFECT FOR PICNIC LUNCHES; SONOMA'S BEST MARKET LOCATED IN THE TOWN OF SONOMA IS A CONVENIENT STOP FOR PICNIC PROVISIONS.

Similar to their Mediterranean counterparts, Napa Valley and Sonoma Valley benefit from an oceanic climate on account of their proximity to the San Francisco Bay. The temperate conditions of cooler summers and gentle winters work with the unique terrain of Napa and Sonoma to create microclimates that are optimal for growing a variety of wine grapes. Add to these favorable weather patterns the region's rich soil, and you start to understand why these long, narrow Northern California valleys are a treasure trove for wine enthusiasts seeking out Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, Zinfandel, Pinot Noir, Chardonnay, Sauvignon Blanc and more. Beyond being well suited for growing wine grapes, the exceptional topography and climes of Sonoma Valley and Napa Valley make them stunning places to explore by bike. Whether you're looking for a meandering cruise or challenging cycling

trip, both Sonoma and Napa offer winery-speckled routes with unforgettable views.

Sonoma Plaza in the city of Sonoma is filled with charm and history, anchored around the stunning City Hall building in the center of the plaza green. The city's slow pace is contagious, and you can rent bikes from a local shop, like Sonoma Valley Cyclery, then set off down the tree-lined streets of Sonoma at a leisurely pace. A short ride from Sonoma Plaza, Sonoma's Best historic market is a charming store where you can pack a gourmet picnic for your winery tour—wine-friendly fare abounds, including cheese, olives and charcuterie. Within a few miles of Sonoma's Best are a host of spectacular wineries, including Ravenswood, Homewood, the Sonoma House at Patz & Hall and Buena Vista. As you navigate the country roads, watch for quaint white street-signs that beckon you toward nearby wineries and reassure you that you're on track. Just a few miles from Sonoma Plaza,



Buena Vista Winery is a designated historic landmark that's not to be missed. You can enjoy a wine flight in the tasting room, or buy a bottle to enjoy on the winery's welcoming outdoor picnic tables. If you'd like to experience a barrel tasting at the winery, be sure to book a reservation.

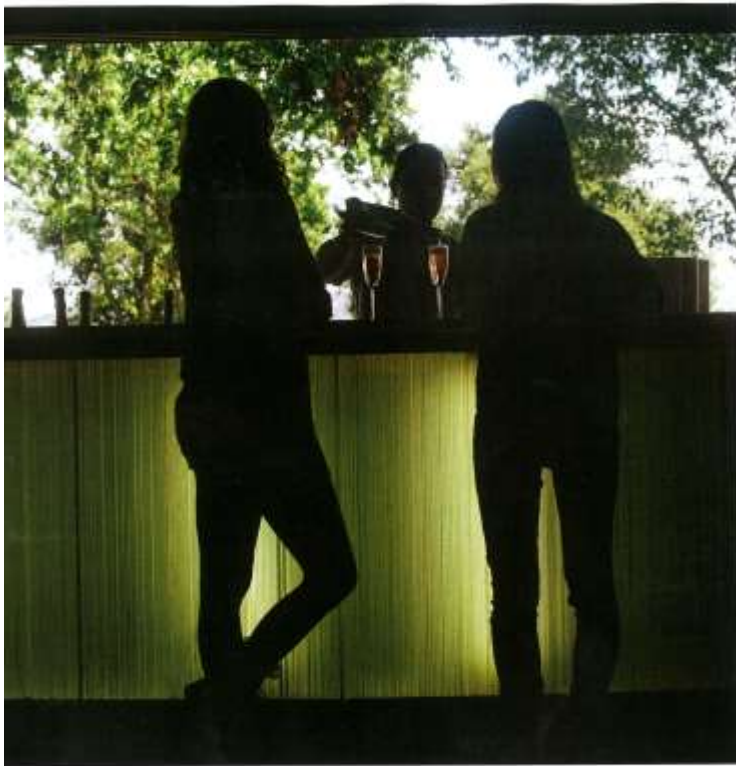
To experience a longer ride in the Sonoma Valley, head toward Gundlach Bundschu and Scribe Winery. Adding about six miles roundtrip, visiting these wineries will ensure you get up into the Sonoma Valley hillsides for territorial views. Gundlach Bundschu, California's oldest family-owned winery, has been run by six generations since 1858. Set on a small hill, the winery features a sprawling patio where you can sip and savor, overlooking the estate's ponds. You can also venture inside the ivy-covered tasting room to sample a variety of wines. Just under a mile away, Scribe Winery is accessed by a long, palm-tree lined dirt road. This wine producer sits on the hillside of a

250-acre estate, offers a sweeping view of Carneros and San Pablo Bay and has a perfectly bohemian aesthetic. The off-the-beaten-path property takes care to ensure each guest has a high-quality experience—and time to savor it. To wit, they offer a limited number of wine tastings each day by appointment only. Call one to two weeks in advance to reserve a tasting appointment, and sit back and cherish the moment once you're there.

While Sonoma Valley offers winding, tree-lined roads, Napa is nestled in a narrower valley, making the bike routes between the city of Napa and its neighboring Yountville, Oakville and Rutherford long (often 15-mile) routes that often include bustling roadways (with bike lanes or bike-friendly shoulders). It can be hard to find quick food during a bike ride in Napa, so you should arrange for a bike tour that includes a meal, or stop in Napa for picnic fixings. Napa's Oxbow Public Market is a lovely place to



FROM LEFT: BUENA VISTA WINERY, FOUNDED IN 1857; CYCLING PAST VINEYARDS; SIGNS POINT TO WINERIES.

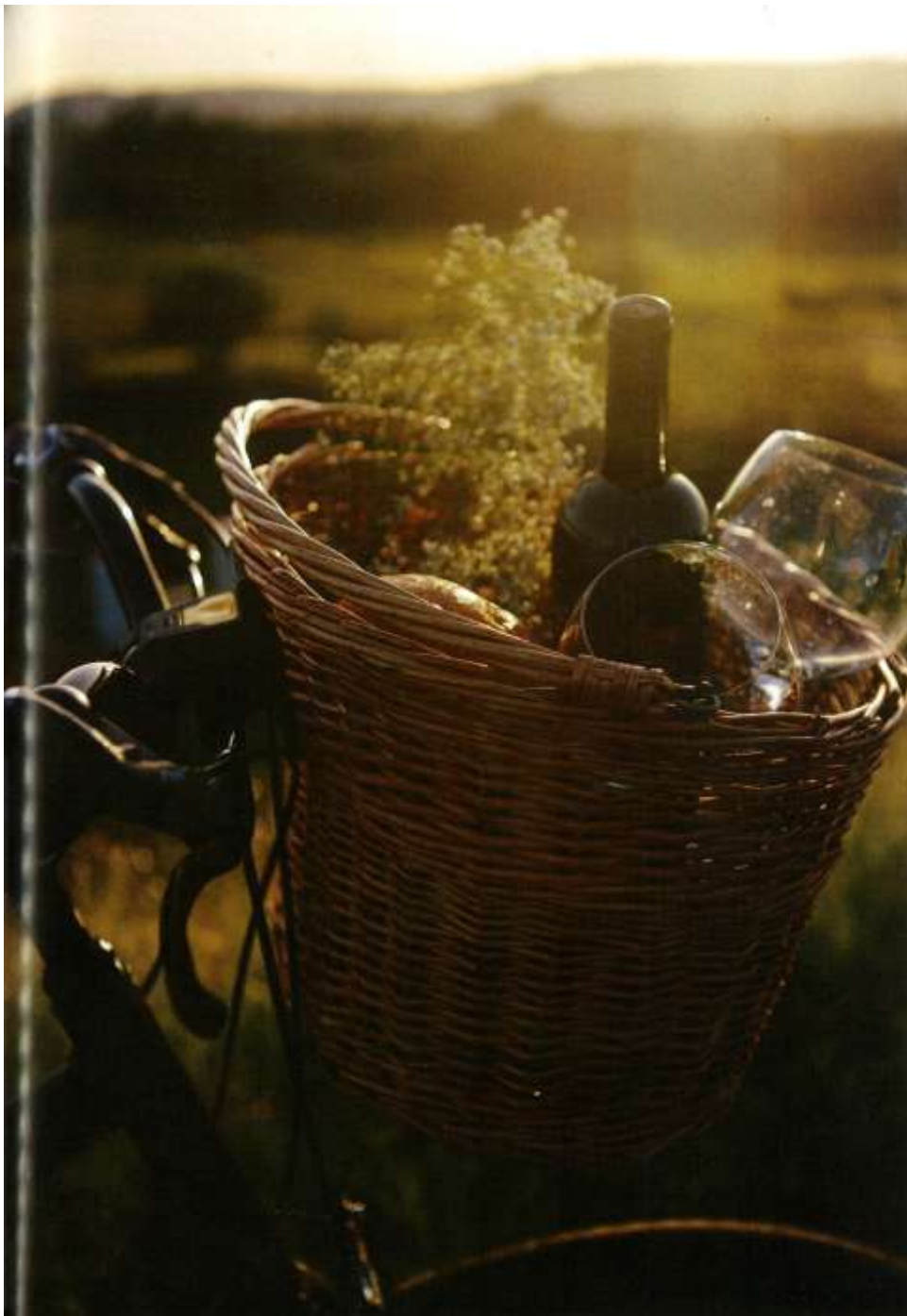


pick up food before you head out on a bike tour. Celebrating local food, drink and art, the bustling market is full of charm and character.

You can anchor your trip at Napa Valley Bike Tours, in the heart of charming Yountville. They offer bike rentals and a variety of resources, including route recommendations for those who want to explore on their own, and guided tours that include picnic lunches. One shorter Napa Valley route lets you ride along gentle rolling hills lined by vineyards and a variety of roadside wineries, including Domaine Chandon, Stag's Leap Wine Cellars and Clos du Val. Clos du Val is an intimate, ivy-covered winery with a laid-back vibe, where time slows down once you arrive. You can sip their varietals at a table on the patio while you soak up the sunshine and expansive view of the surrounding mountains. If you're game, you can even take a turn at the vineyard's petanque (bocce ball) court.

For a longer ride, you could choose a route that wraps east from Yountville, through Oakville and Rutherford. As you head out, you'll be surrounded by green rolling hills, spacious vineyards and verdant vistas during every mile. Along this route, you can explore well-known wineries, like Robert Mondavi, as well as smaller options, like Saddleback Cellars (which requires an appointment). Outside of Rutherford, Peju Province Winery greets guests with an exotic tree-lined entrance and manicured gardens filled with statuary that's worth exploring. Tastings range from ambassador-led introductions on four current releases to private tours, tastings and cheese-pairings that require reservations.

Whichever valley and route you choose, exploring the region by bike allows you to celebrate the culture of Sonoma Valley and Napa Valley, a region centered around viticulture, linked to its topography and dedicated on the art of savoring the moment.



As you navigate the country roads, watch for quaint white street-signs that beckon you toward nearby wineries.



CLOCKWISE FROM FAR LEFT: TASTING AT DOMAIN CHANDON; NAPA VALLEY BIKE TOURS; CYCLISTS TRANSPORTING THEIR PURCHASES; STAG'S LEAP WINE CELLARS ON THE SILVERADO TRAIL; PEJU PROVINCE WINERY NEAR RUTHERFORD; PICNIC ON THE CLOS DU VAL GROUNDS IN THE STAGS LEAP DISTRICT; NAPA AND SONOMA ARE BOTH EASILY ACCESSIBLE FROM SAN FRANCISCO.