

Napa Valley, Sonoma, Central Coast: Your Guide to California Wine

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The master winemakers of the Old World once viewed California as an agricultural backwater. Then came the 1976 Judgment of Paris, a blind tasting organized by the [late wine merchant and journalist Steven Spurrier](#) in which French critics crowned two Napa wines, a cabernet sauvignon from Stag's Leap Cellars and a sauvignon blanc from Chateau Montelena, as winners over their competitors from Bordeaux and Burgundy.

In the 45 years since, Napa has become recognized as not only one of the world's great wine regions, but also a [vacation destination](#) bursting with five-star resorts and Michelin-rated restaurants. Other areas have boomed, as well, with hundreds of wineries opening in Napa's laid-back neighbor Sonoma, in and around [Santa Barbara](#) (as seen in [Sideways](#)), and elsewhere. A comprehensive guide would be impossible, so consider this a mere first taste. (Note: Be sure to check if an appointment is necessary when planning your visit.)



Napa Valley

Ashes & Diamonds

Design enthusiasts will appreciate this Napa tasting room, which boasts a bright, mid-century modern aesthetic. The wines, meanwhile, hark back to the lower-alcohol cabernets that Napa producers were putting out before the region became world-famous.

Cakebread Cellars

One of the valley's most venerable producers—the chardonnays in particular are legendary—Cakebread opened a beautiful new tasting room and visitors' center in Rutherford in 2019.

Hess Persson Estates

Found up a winding road on the side of Mount Veeder, this winery has a premium art collection, including works by Francis Bacon and Andy Goldsworthy. The recently renamed producer just released its first new estate cab in 20 years, the 2019 Hess Collection Iron Corral Cabernet Sauvignon.



Photo: Courtesy of Aperture Cellars

Sonoma

Aperture

Jesse Katz, the first winemaker to be named to the *Forbes* 30 Under 30 list, produces Bordeaux-style wines, many of them naturally fermented, at his jaw-dropping Healdsburg winery, the design of which is inspired by a camera shutter.

Benovia Winery

This small, family-owned winery makes sustainably farmed pinot noir and chardonnay, which visitors can try at the Ranch House tasting room, northeast of Santa Rosa in the bucolic Russian River Valley.

Buena Vista Winery

Founded in 1857, the first premium winery in California is now owned by celebrated vintner Jean-Charles Boisset. The stone building that houses the production facility and tasting room is a California Historic Landmark.

Fort Ross Vineyard & Winery

One of the most scenic vineyards in the U.S., this property in Jenner looks out over the Pacific Ocean. The coastal fog lends itself perfectly to pinot noir and chardonnay, which you can try along with locally sourced food in the tasting room.