

play

winery tasting rooms

Warm Up Sipping Wines

Winter is no time to stop wine tasting and can often be the best season, when tasting room crowds thin and winemakers have more time to mingle. Wineries with caves are a particular kind of hideout in cold weather, often candlelit and made to be joyful through music and food. Wine writer Virginie Boone recommends these wineries for late-fall visits; they're open to the public, typically from around 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. Contact the individual tasting room to confirm.

Bella Vineyards and Wine Caves, 9711 West Dry Creek Road, Healdsburg, 866-572-3552, bellawinery.com. In winter, Bella makes a fine place to while away the day, with the warmth of its cozy and often music-filled wine caves (where Santa is known to visit come Christmas). The star of the show here is Zinfandel, produced in many forms from many vineyards, all of them great. Syrah and Petite Sirah are notable, too. On weekends, come in for chef's bites to pair with the wines (\$10/person) or take a cave and vineyard tour by appointment.

Benziger Family Winery, 1883 London Ranch Road, Glen Ellen, 707-935-4527, benziger.com. The folks at Benziger now offer a seated Pinot Noir Experience, the chance for visitors to enjoy a guided flight of five of the winery's top-notch, cool-climate de Coelo and Signaterra Pinot Noirs with paired bites. \$40, with advance reservations.

Beringer Vineyards, 2000 Main St., St. Helena, 707-302-7592, beringer.com. Around for more than 100 years, Beringer is so vast and historic that it operates as a small village of its own, with nooks and crannies throughout its tree-filled property. There are wine and food opportunities of all

stripes, as well as live music and other special events. The first tour to take is the Taste of Beringer, a chance to learn both about the early history of Napa Valley as well as Beringer itself, offered three times a day for \$40. The winery's coolest feature is its tunnels, built for aging barrels in the late 1870s and 1880s by Chinese laborers; tastings sometime happen within.

Cairdean Vineyards and Winery, 3111 St. Helena Highway, St. Helena, 707-968-5434, cairdeanestate.com. New on the northern Napa Valley scene, Cairdean makes a variety of wines from Napa and Sonoma, and adds an empire of deliciousness with its The Farmer and the Fox gourmet gastropub, open for dinner nightly, and its Butterscots Bakery. The tasting room is open daily until 8 p.m., making it easy for visitors to segue to dinner next door.

Charles Krug-Peter Mondavi Sr. Family Vineyards, 2800 Main St., St. Helena, 707-967-2200, charleskrug.com. Where Peter and Robert Mondavi got their winemaking start, Charles Krug remains a blend of old and new, with its historic Redwood Cellar, an airy place to taste. A producer of crisp Sauvignon Blanc and elegant Cabernet Sauvignons, Krug provides visitors multiple options for tastings and tours. Its new Cucina di Rosa offers paninis, antipasti, salads and sweets to pair with the wines on weekends.

Chimney Rock, 5350 Silverado Trail, Napa, 800-257-2641, chimneyrock.com. Take a 90-minute Tomahawk Vineyard tour and sip winemaker Elizabeth Vianna's Cabernet Sauvignon, along with discussions on viticulture and winemaking. Gourmet cheeses are provided for nourishment (\$125). Tours start daily at 10 a.m.; reserve early.

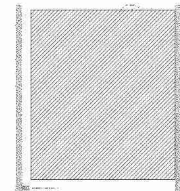
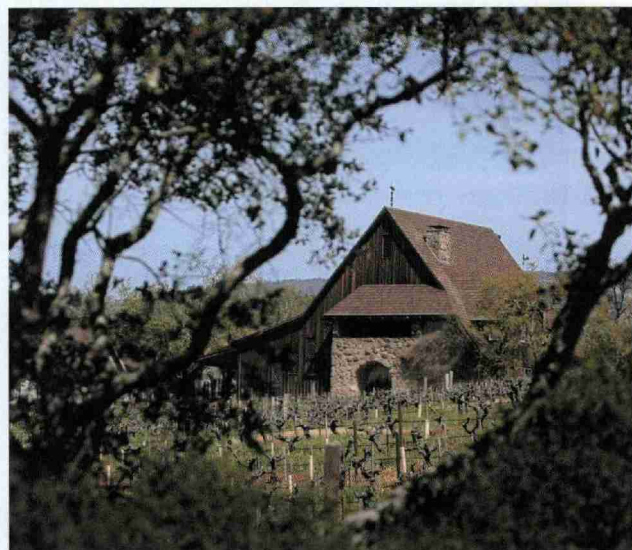
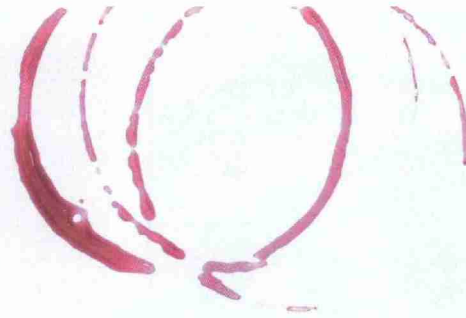
The heritage winery at Hanzell Vineyards now is used for tastings and tours.

Deerfield Ranch Winery, 10200 Sonoma Highway, Kenwood, 707-833-5215, deerfieldranch.com. This is another good place to taste in a cave. Deerfield offers 23,000 square feet of space to sample its wines in its wine-glass-shaped cave. Couches and chairs soften the chill and make it easy to enjoy the various flights of wines on offer, from Sauvignon Blanc and Pinot Grigio to hearty red blends, Pinot Noir and Syrah.

DeLoach Vineyards, 1791 Olivet Road, Santa Rosa, 707-755-3309, deloachvineyards.com. The visitor experience at DeLoach is always a good one, yet owner Jean-Charles Boisset can't help but continue to up the ante, accentuating here the celebration of nature and the bounty of biodynamics, as he did at his sister property, Raymond Vineyards in Napa Valley. Take part in the MFS Blending Experience, playing with Pinot Noir, available daily, by appointment.

Emeritus Vineyards, 2500 Gravenstein Highway N., Sebastopol, 707-823-4464, emeritusvineyards.com. Focused on estate-bottled Pinot Noir, Emeritus invites tasters, by appointment, to its Hallberg Ranch for a 90-minute tour of the winery (\$20) and tasting of current-release wines. Alternatively, visitors can sample the Pinots in a 45-minute tasting (\$10).

Etude Wines, 1250 Cuttings Wharf Road, Napa, 707-257-5300, etudewines.com. This great name in Carneros Pinot Noir (and many other wines) has an added twist. Winemaker Jon Priest takes on the world, offering wine lovers the chance to come to one place and taste not only his Carneros Pinot Noir, but also those from Santa Barbara County (where Priest grew up), the Sonoma Coast, Oregon's Willamette Valley and New Zealand's Central Otago region. Tasting these wines is a pointed and seductive study of the world of Pinot Noir.



Fort Ross Vineyard & Winery, 15725 Meyers Grade Road, Jenner, 707-847-3460, fortrossvineyard.com. Up for a drive? The one to Fort Ross winery, the shining beacon of the Fort Ross-Seaview AVA, and its regularly open tasting room is well worth the traversing of winding roads. It's a great place to take in the beauty and power of the Pacific Ocean and understand its influence on growing and making Pinot Noir, Chardonnay and the winery's unique offering of Pinotage.

Frank Family Vineyards, 1091 Larkmead Lane, Calistoga, 800-574-9463, frankfamilyvineyards.com. Frank Family is a popular Napa Valley stop because of its engaging gardens and picnic spots, as well as affordable tasting fees — \$20 for four wines, which might include sparkling wine, Chardonnay, Zinfandel and Cabernet Sauvignon, and an age-worthy Petite Sirah. It inhabits the former Larkmead Winery, the third-oldest in the valley.

Grgich Hills Estate, 1829 St. Helena Highway, Rutherford, 800-532-3057, grgich.com. The mighty Grgich Hills, a wonderful producer of Chardon-

nay and Cabernet Sauvignon, offers a slew of fine visitor experiences, from barrel tastings every Friday (2 to 4 p.m.) to seated wine tastings with cheese (\$40). The staff will also order box lunches to be enjoyed on-site.

Hall Wines, 401 St. Helena Highway, St. Helena, 707-967-2626, hallwines.com. Home to a gigantic silver bunny sculpture, Hall celebrates wine and art. Visitors can breeze through the winery, viewing modern art and sculptures while sampling exceptionally high-quality wines. Hall also has a winery in Rutherford that's more off the beaten track and can be visited too, for tours and tastings, by appointment.

Hamel Family Wines, 15401 Sonoma Highway, Sonoma, 707-996-5800, hamelfamilywines.com. New to the Sonoma Valley, Hamel makes Bordeaux-style wines from four regional estate vineyards. Martha McClellan of Levy & McClellan and Checkerboard Vineyards — a former associate winemaker at Napa's vaunted Harlan Estate — crafts the wines.

Hanzell Vineyards, 18596 Lomita Ave., Sonoma, 707-996-3860, hanzell.com. Situated above the town of Sonoma, Hanzell is an important part of Sonoma winemaking history and a producer of exquisite, age-worthy Pinot Noir and Chardonnay. Visits are by appointment only, but well worth making a reservation. The Heritage Winery and Estate Vineyards tasting will take you through both older and younger vineyards, the winery and barrel-aging cave, followed by a seated tasting (\$45). The Wine Library tasting is truly spectacular, a two-plus-hour tasting of four older wines from selected vintages (\$150). It's a rare opportunity.

Imagery Estate Winery, 14335 Highway 12, Glen Ellen, 707-935-4515, imagerywinery.com. Run by Joe Benziger of the Benziger family, Imagery is as devoted to cool artwork as it is to making great wines. It offers unusual varietals that can be hard to find elsewhere, from Tempranillo to Lagrein; its wine labels reflect its dual sensibilities. Check out the label gallery online and be sure to take time to peruse the on-site art gallery as well.

Iron Horse Vineyards, 9786 Ross Station Road, Sebastopol, 707-887-1507, ironhorsevineyards.com. The flagship sparkling wine producer of Green Valley of Russian River Valley, Iron Horse makes a wide range of bubbly to suit all tastes, as well as stellar Pinot Noirs and Chardonnays. The view from the outdoor tasting bar is gorgeous. A tour and tasting with winemaker David Munksgard happens every Monday at 10 a.m. (limit 4 people; \$50 per person) and should not be missed.

J Vineyards & Winery, 11447 Old Redwood Highway, Healdsburg, 707-431-5400, jwine.com. A glass of bubbly is always a good thing, and this is a well-appointed spot at which to have one, as well as taste J's growing lineup of single-vineyard Pinot Noirs and Chardonnays. The J Bubble Room pairs wines with exquisite dishes by chef Erik Johnson, an avid proponent of sourcing locally.

MacLaren Tasting Lounge, 27 East Napa St., Suite E, Sonoma, 707-939-9372, maclarewine.com. This small-production operation is friendly and casual, its wines stunning, focused



Visitors to the Iron Horse Vineyards open-air tasting bar are treated to a great view.

Christopher Chung

on cool-climate Syrah from around Sonoma County, in addition to small amounts of Sauvignon Blanc and Pinot Noir. It's a winery to watch, and its wines are ideal for fall and winter chill.

Marimar Estate, 11400 Graton Road, Sebastopol, 707-823-4365, marimarestate.com. A leader in cool-climate winemaking and viticulture, as well as organic and biodynamic farming, Marimar Estate is a beautiful place to experience the diurnal temperature shifts along the western Sonoma Coast and taste what it means in the glass. A tasting of five wines is offered daily for \$10; reserve ahead to take part in a tapas and wine pairing for \$45. Tours are available weekdays at 11 a.m. and 2 p.m., by appointment.

Markham Vineyards, 2812 St. Helena Highway, St. Helena, 707-963-5292, markhamvineyards.com. Situated in one of the oldest stone buildings in Napa Valley, Markham makes a wide range of wines and offers a taste of four (Sauvignon Blanc, Chardonnay, Merlot and Cabernet Sauvignon) in its daily Rock & Roll Tasting (\$15). The art gallery hosts the work of music photographer Baron Wolman, with shots of Woodstock and rock performers taken during his time shooting for Rolling Stone magazine.

Monticello Vineyards, 4242 Big Ranch Road, Napa, 707-253-2802, corleyfamilynapavalley.com. Take advantage of the Corley family's Jefferson House Reserve Tasting (\$30), held in the Jefferson House Reserve Room, or head to the terrace to dig deep into the single-vineyard Cabernet Sauvignon. Another option: Sign up to be winemaker for a day (\$90), a two-hour blending session, walk through the vineyards and tasting of more wines.

Odette Estate, 5998 Silverado Trail, Napa, 707-224-7533, odettewinery.com. PlumpJack's latest endeavor, Odette is open daily by appointment for tasting, including exploration of its 45 acres in the mighty Stags Leap District AVA, and the provenance of silky, mouth-filling Cabernet Sauvignons.

Patz & Hall Sonoma House, 21200 Eighth St. E., Sonoma, 877-265-6700, patzhall.com. In a well-appointed house in Carneros, this chic tasting spot highlights Patz & Hall's expertise in single-vineyard Chardonnay and Pinot Noir. Taste four wines for \$25 with truffle nuts, or go for the sit-down discussion and tasting of six wines with meticulously prepared mini-meals (\$50). Chances are the day will start off with a glass of bubbly. Recently added is the Terrace Tasting, an intimate sit-down with single-vineyard wines and local cheese (\$40).

Quintessa, 1601 Silverado Trail, Rutherford, 707-286-2730, quintessa.com. Quintessa this year built three lovely pavilions overlooking its Dragon's Hill vineyard block, where visitors (by appointment) can enjoy an immersion into the winery's Cabernet Sauvignon, from barrel samples highlighting the estate's 26 distinct blocks to rare library wines, all paired with local cheeses. The experience lasts 90 minutes and costs \$125.

Red Car Wine, 8400 Graton Road, Sebastopol, 707-829-8500, redcarwine.com. Red Car makes some of Sonoma's most exciting cool-climate wines, from crisp Chardonnays to nicely rendered Pinot Noirs and Syrahs. The whimsical labels alone are worth the visit.

Robert Biale Vineyards, 4038 Big Ranch Road, Napa, 707-257-7555, biale.com. A producer of elegant single-vineyard Zinfandel and Petite Sirah, Biale works with a wide range of historic vineyards throughout Napa and Sonoma. Enjoy the cozy tasting room while pondering the views of the surrounding vineyards and sampling Biale's fine wines, which include its signature Black Chicken Zin, an ode to bootlegging in Prohibition days.


Rodney Strong Vineyards, 11455 Old Redwood Highway, Healdsburg, 800-678-4763, rodneystrong.com. For a comprehensive taste of Sonoma County and with expansive views of vines, look no further than Rodney Strong, which offers an estate wines

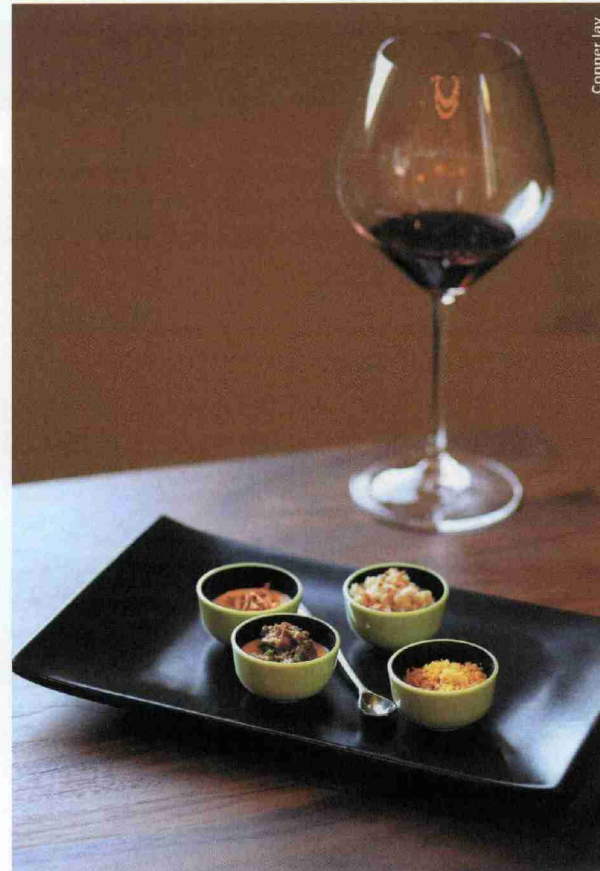
tasting daily, with options to try single-vineyard and reserve wines. From its Alexander Valley Cabernet Sauvignons to Davis Bynum Pinot Noirs and Chardonnays, there's a lot to like.

Roederer Estate, 4501 Highway 128, Philo, 707-895-2288, roedererestate.com. Take a tour (\$6) of the Anderson Valley home to Roederer Estate and see how some of America's best sparkling wines are made. Picnics for two can be ordered ahead of time for \$25.

Schramsberg Vineyards, 1400 Schramsberg Road, Calistoga, 800-877-3623, schramsberg.com. Among the first in California to specialize in sparkling wine, Schramsberg occupies hallowed, historic ground, home to the oldest hillside vineyards

in Napa Valley and some of the first caves dug for storing and aging wine. Take a tour by appointment, and don't miss the Mirabelle Brut Rosé and other gorgeous sparklers before moving on to taste the J. Davies Estate Cabernet Sauvignon and Pinot Noir.

Sojourn Tasting Salon, 141 East Napa St., Sonoma, 707-938-7212, sojourncellars.com. Located just off the plaza, Sojourn offers comparative tastings, by appointment, of its highly regarded wines. They include Pinot Noir and Chardonnay from mostly Sonoma Coast grapes, and Cabernet Sauvignon grown in Rutherford and the winery's Home Ranch Vineyard in Sonoma Valley. Book online. 



Wine and small bites are paired at Sonoma House, the Patz & Hall tasting room in Sonoma.