

THE COUNTER CULTURE

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WINERIES WELL WORTH A VISIT



Wine Country's chilly winter months call for warm and cozy surroundings in which to enjoy your favorite wines – and, with Valentine's Day just around the corner, sparkling selections are certainly on the menu. **JULIE FADDA POWERS** shares her suggestions for exploring Sonoma County's best tasting rooms offering sparklers, fireplaces and caves. Call ahead or check websites for hours and reservations.

Alexander Valley Vineyards, 8644 Highway 128, Healdsburg, 707-433-7209, avwine.com. Alexander Valley Vineyards offers a wide array of wines grown both on the estate and sourced from select vineyards. Visitors can enjoy complimentary tastings as well as winery and cave tours for groups of less than 10, or you can book a private tour and reserve wine tasting (\$15) or a wine and cheese pairing (\$25) with advance notice.

Bella Vineyards and Wine Caves, 9711 West Dry Creek Road, Healdsburg, 707-473-9171, bellawinery.com. Best known for its Zinfandels, Bella also offers Chardonnay, Pinot Noir and Petite Sirah. Wine tasting in the cave is offered daily (\$10) without reservations, or you can reserve a personal blending experience (\$55) or "Unleash the Beast" cave tour featuring vineyard-designate wines — including Bella's monster Zin, The Beast.

Benovia, 3339 Hartman Road, Santa Rosa, 707-921-1040, benovianew.com. Co-founders Joe Anderson and Mary Dewane and winemaker/co-owner Mike Sullivan opened their visitor's center, a former Russian River Valley ranch house, in 2011. The winery specializes in Pinot Noir and Chardonnay and also offers Zinfandel and Grenache. It's open daily by appointment (\$20) for intimate current-release tastings.

DeLoach Vineyards, 1791 Olivet Road, Santa Rosa, 707-755-3300, deloachvineyards.com. A multitude of experiences are offered at Jean-Charles Boisset's Russian River Valley winery,

which specializes in Pinot Noir and Chardonnay. The Pinot by the Fire experience (\$50) features wines grown in the estate's biodynamic vineyard paired with select cheeses. It's available by appointment on weekends until the end of February and takes place in the estate's private guesthouse.

Dutcher Crossing Winery, 8533 Dry Creek Road, Healdsburg, 707-431-2700, dutchercrossingwinery.com. Relax next to the large outdoor fireplace while taking in the views and enjoying a picnic at Debra Mathy's warm and welcoming winery featuring winemaker Kerry Damsky's selection of vineyard-designate and

blended offerings. Leashed dogs are welcome, and you might even get to meet Dutchess — Mathy's golden Lab and the winery's official greeter. Don't forget to check out the penny-farthing bicycle in the tasting room.

Fog Crest Vineyard, 7606 Occidental Road, Sebastopol, 707 829-2006, fogcrestvineyard.com. From its perch atop Laguna de Santa Rosa, Fog Crest offers Pinot Noir, Chardonnay and rosé wines crafted by winemaker Jérôme Chéry. Open daily for wine tasting (\$15), the intimate room features leather seating next to the fireplace as well as a patio where you can take in the view. Cheese plates (\$25) are available, as are gourmet wine and food pairing lunches (\$45) by appointment.

Fort Ross Vineyard & Winery, 15725 Meyers Grade Road, Jenner, 707-847-3460, fortrossvineyard.com. Overlooking the Pacific and miles of redwood forests, Fort Ross Vineyard

& Winery offers estate-grown, single-vineyard Pinot Noir, Chardonnay and Pinotage (a South African grape planted by owners Linda and Lester Schwartz, who moved here from South Africa in the 1970s). It's the closest winery to the coast in California — and well worth the drive.

Fritz Underground Winery, 24691 Dutcher Creek Road, Cloverdale, 707-894-3389, fritzwinery.com. Built into a hillside at the northern edge of Dry Creek Valley, Fritz Underground Winery offers a wide array of wines crafted by winemaker Brad Longton. All wines are estate-grown or sourced from Sonoma County vineyards. Sample current releases (\$15) and reserve wines (\$20), or reserve an underground winery tour to see where the magic happens (\$30; by appointment on weekends).

Gloria Ferrer Caves & Vineyards, 23555 Highway 121, Sonoma, 707-933-1917, gloriaferrer.com. Nestled



A roaring fire warms a seating area at Benovia Winery in rural northwest Santa Rosa.

courtesy Benovia