

— THE GRAND — WINE TOUR





The world's best wines,
irresistible food,
and some amazing
surprises. Join *Sunset*
on a mile-by-mile
journey through three
of the West's most
exciting wine regions:
Napa, Santa Barbara, and
Southern Oregon.



NAPA VALLEY

Here's where you'll fall in love with wine.

BY SARA SCHNEIDER, SUNSET WINE EDITOR

THE TIME: a hot summer day in the 1960s. The place: a hilltop overlooking a Northern California valley. My family lived on that mountain, and my sister and I had grabbed baskets and were about to harvest an enormous patch of blackberries. I reached too far, slipped, and toppled into the warm, thorny thicket. Just before the pain hit—those thorns were sharp—I got a distinct whiff of ripe berries, mixed with the wild mint that was laced through the bushes.

My life was shaped by that tumble. The valley was Napa. The hilltop was Howell Mountain. The aroma—the berries, the mint—is what I smell, even now, when I pour a glass of Howell Mountain Cabernet Sauvignon.

Today, Napa Valley is in a class by itself among America's wine regions. There are some 500 wineries in the 16 subappellations that make up the 30-mile-long, 5-mile-wide valley. They include the historic, such as Stag's Leap Wine Cellars, whose Cabernet Sauvignon demolished an array of French Bordeaux in the 1976 Judgment of Paris, thereby putting Napa firmly on the world wine map. They include the very luxe: Prime Napa vineyard land can run as much as \$300,000 per acre, and a few of the wines produced here can go for \$1,500 a bottle.

Napa's popularity and those prices can make the valley seem intimidating to people who just want to spend a fun day tasting wine. The crowds are real—try turning left onto Highway 29 on a busy weekend. And at times, the pretensions have been too. (I've heard the occasional admonition to check in with the concierge before grabbing a picnic table on a winery lawn.) But my recent forays have revealed a new Napa—still serious about wine but willing to cut loose a little. Take an evening spent in Raymond Vineyards' luxury-exuding "crystal" tasting room, for instance. I looked up from a glass of owner Jean-Charles Boisset's lush red wine to see a masked, nearly naked acrobat staring down at me from her trapeze. Napa, stuffy? Hell, no.

Another sign of the valley's changing mood: The hottest new restaurant in St. Helena is Cliff Family's bruschetta truck, parked beside their bicycle-themed Velo Vino tasting room. And formerly unassuming downtown Napa has emerged as a destination in its own right, with terrific restaurants and tasting rooms, and a top-notch music scene.

After all, Napa knows that wine is about romance. Certainly it was for me. After my mountaintop tumble, I moved away, then returned for college, back on Howell Mountain as it happened. A conservative college, it forbade drinking. But the valley and its wines called. One Saturday afternoon, not long after I had turned 21, I decided an illicit wine-tasting trip was in order, to celebrate senior year and my arrival at adulthood. Sipping in Napa tasting rooms, I began to understand that I wanted wine in my life.

That's the big Napa secret. Learn to navigate the valley, and you'll realize that it's still the best place in the world to fall in love—deeply, lastingly in love—with wine. Visit, sip, savor. You'll make your own wine memories, as potent and pleasurable as mine, but without the thorns.

Previous pages, clockwise from top left: Stagecoach Vineyard; Raymond Vineyards; B Cellars tasting room and wine caves; Raymond's Frenchie Winery for dogs; Andaz Napa; La Taberna.

PHOTOGRAPHS BY EVA KOLENKO



ST. HELENA | Bruschetteria Food Truck

NAPA | Odette Estate





ST. HELENA | Bruschetteria



NAPA

1 STARMONT WINERY & VINEYARDS

In the Carneros region south of Napa, Starmont offers just what the valley needed: accessibly priced wines and a younger vibe. The general Carneros wines are deals; the single-vineyard Pinots and Chardonnays, compelling. And the handsome, reclaimed-wood and concrete tasting room has a bar that can roll right out to the patio firepit. *Tasting from \$20; 1451 Stanly Lane; starmontwinery.com.*

WE RECOMMEND: Starmont 2013 Stanly Ranch Pinot Noir (Los Carneros; \$55).

2 ANDAZ NAPA

Recovering quickly from the battering it took in the 2014

earthquake, downtown Napa has become a place to land and linger, with excellent restaurants and an increasingly vibrant music scene (see page 52). Andaz fits the new setting, with its walkable location and small but elegantly modern rooms. *From \$329; andaznapa.com.*

3 TORC

Downtown Napa had already become dining heaven—with big city-caliber restaurants like Morimoto and La Toque—when Sean O'Toole introduced another stellar round. The menu at O'Toole's Torc harmoniously roams the world, with dishes like Indian sweet-potato *pakora*, Japanese hamachi crudo, and heritage porchetta with Mexican *huitlacoche* (a mushroomlike fungus). All this and a



MAPS: WALTER BAUMANN

terrific Negroni too. \$\$\$; 1140 Main St.; torcnapa.com.

4 LA TABERNA

New from the owner of ZuZu, a beloved Spanish restaurant down the street, this tapas bar would be at home in San Sebastián. Scan the printed menu for your drinks, including sherries, beers, and an eclectic list of international wines. Food options are chalked on a board above the bar: *pintxos* like *jamón ibérico de bellota*, smoked trout, and *pato* (duck) empanadas... you can't go wrong. \$\$\$; 815 Main; lataberna.napa.com.

5 SENZA

Craig and Kathryn Walt Hall of Hall St. Helena reworked an existing B&B into a luxurious boutique hotel and spa. At the property's core is the restored 1870s Parker Mansion, where rooms off-season can be a stealth deal (as low as \$219) if there's a late-breaking vacancy. From \$379 otherwise; senzahotel.com.

6 STAG'S LEAP WINE CELLARS

A new visitor center lends sheen to this Napa institution. Seemingly built from the stones and earth it sits on, the center—a treasure trove of wine info—looks out onto the venerable Fay Vineyard, adjoining the vines that produced the S.L.V. Cabernet that won the famous Judgment of Paris. Today, winemaker Marcus Notaro crafts wines that do Leap's legacy proud. *Tasting from \$25; 5766 Silverado*

Trail; cask23.com. WE RECOMMEND: Stag's Leap 2012 S.L.V. Cabernet Sauvignon (Stags Leap District; \$125).

7 ODETTE ESTATE

The first winery in the Stags Leap District in 15 years comes from the PlumpJack Group, owned by billionaire philanthropist Gordon Getty and California Lieutenant Governor Gavin Newsom. Winemaker Jeff Owens's first vintage of Odette Estate Reserve, the 2012, shot straight to the top with a perfect 100-point rating from wine critic Robert Parker. That wine's character—the Stags Leap “iron fist in a velvet glove”—is reflected in the elegantly feminine new tasting lounge. *Tasting from \$15; 5998 Silverado Trail; odetteestate.com. WE RECOMMEND:* Odette 2012 Odette Estate Cabernet Sauvignon (Stags Leap District; \$98).

YOUNTVILLE

8 CICCIO

It's not easy breaking into the gourmet fiefdom that is Yountville. But with its colorfully tiled wood oven, little Ciccio has quickly become a local fave. A rotating lineup of crusty pizzas from that oven anchors dinner here. You'll also want to try the wood-fired baby artichokes with a delicious walnut *bagna cauda*, and Ciccio's assured renditions of old Italian mainstays like chicken *piccata* and pork chop Milanese. \$\$; 6770 Washington St.; ciccio.napavalley.com.

DON'T MISS THESE CLASSICS

AD HOC + ADDENDUM
In Yountville, the Thomas Keller restaurant you can actually get into. adhocrestaurant.com.

AUBERGE DU SOLEIL
Still one of the valley's most glamorous places to stay, with the best views. aubergedusoleil.com.

CHARLES KRUG
Napa's first commercial winery, started in 1861. charleskrug.com.

INGLENOOK
Historic château and vineyards restored by director Francis Ford Coppola. inglenook.com.

ROBERT MONDAVI WINERY
Heritage of groundbreaking wines; stunning Cliff May-designed winery. robertmondaviwinery.com.

OAKVILLE

9 B CELLARS VINEYARDS AND WINERY

B is the newest addition to Napa's Golden Mile—the stretch of Oakville Cross Road between Highway 29 and Silverado Trail that's home to some of the valley's most revered labels, among them Groth, Silver Oak, and Rudd. It makes the most of the tony address with rich red blends that you taste in sleek new wine caves or in the winery garden. But it's about food too. A demonstration kitchen gives you a barside view of what the chef is cooking for your wine pairing—dishes that capitalize on the produce from B's kitchen garden and the fresh eggs from its well-heeled chickens. *Tasting from \$35; 703 Oakville Cross Rd.; bcellars.com. WE RECOMMEND:* B Cellars 2011 Blend 25 (Napa Valley; \$64).

ST. HELENA

10 RAYMOND VINEYARDS

Talk about a makeover. Much loved but styled along the lines of a '70s dentist office, Raymond has been reinvented by Jean-Charles Boisset, scion of one of France's prominent winemaking families and husband to California wine aristocrat Gina Gallo-Boisset. “We don't just make wine... we create dreams!” Boisset says. At Raymond, the dreams now include a Champagne lounge with a gold-flecked resin floor and karaoke, and Louis XIV-style furniture under the trees. But there's also a serious appellation-education room, a lab for blending your own wine, and a demonstration biodynamic garden with an app to guide you through it. And you can even bring your pooch to the doggie winery run by Boisset's French bulldog,

NAPA | La Taberna



OAKVILLE | B Cellars



ST. HELENA
—
Jean-Charles
Boisset of
Raymond Vineyards



Frenchie. Tasting from \$25; 849 Zinfandel Lane; raymondvineyards.com. **WE RECOMMEND:** Raymond 2012 District Collection Cabernet Sauvignon (Rutherford; \$85).

11 HALL ST. HELENA

Bunny Foo Foo—the local nickname for a 35-foot-tall stainless steel rabbit—towers over the entrance of Hall St. Helena. It's one of a series of eclectic modern art installations around and in this contemporary winery. But, says Kathryn Walt Hall, former U.S. ambassador to Austria and owner with her husband, Craig, "We aren't a museum. Art is just a context for wine here." That wine includes beautifully crafted Napa Cabs (and some Pinot Noirs from Anderson Valley) you sample in an upstairs tasting room with terrific views from valley-floor vineyards up into the Mayacamas Mountains. Back downstairs, you can take in food and wine workshops by local chefs in Hall's demonstration kitchen. \$30 tasting; 401 St. Helena Hwy. S.; hallwines.com.

WE RECOMMEND: Hall 2012 "Kathryn Hall" Cabernet Sauvignon (Napa Valley; \$150).

12 HARVEST TABLE

Celebrity chef Charlie Palmer makes his Napa Valley debut with this new restaurant at Harvest Inn. Casual dark-wood tables in front of a massive stone fireplace provide an autumnal setting for the seasonal produce (much of it grown in

Harvest's culinary gardens) and local meats Palmer employs in his version of wine-country cooking. We go for the roasted baby carrots in a buttermilk sauce seasoned with Indian vadouvan spices; the grilled octopus with fingerlings and charred lemon; and shrimp and grits. And don't shy away from what the menu calls "crispy pork head": The little fritters in tangy gribiche sauce are addictive. \$\$\$; 1 Main St.; harvesttablenapa.com.

13 ARCHETYPE AND GOOSE & GANDER

Restaurant Archetype was launched by winery architect Howard Backen, and its light-filled, rustic design matches the comfort of the menu. Lunch is a treat; it's tough to choose between the Reuben—with corned beef made from short ribs—or the baby-back-rib sandwich (boneless with hoisin on a steamed bun, pork-belly fried rice on the side). At dinnertime, go for the butter-rich eye-of-rib bone marrow, with sweet charred onions and grilled-bread salad. Then, for your nightcap, head to the basement bar at Goose & Gander and Scott Beatie's rosemary pear shrub. **Archetype:** \$\$\$; 1429 Main; archetypenapa.com. **Goose & Gander:** \$\$\$; 1245 Spring St.; goossegander.com.

14 CLIF FAMILY WINERY

Velo Vino, the tasting room for Clif Family, has a twofold mission: to introduce you to their wines (some

of the best of which are from Howell Mountain) and to get you on a bicycle. Have the staff customize your ride, then grab some snacks to go (these are the folks who brought us Clif Bars, after all). On your return, taste a little, buy a bottle, and head out to the wildly popular bruschetta truck. \$20 tasting, bruschetta \$; 709 Main; clifffamilywinery.com.

WE RECOMMEND: Clif Family 2012 "Gary's Improv" Zinfandel (Howell Mountain; \$38).

15 JOSEPH PHELPS VINEYARDS

It's worth making an appointment to experience this renewed Napa classic. A

ST. HELENA

Raymond Vineyards



ADD
TO YOUR
LIST

CUE THE MUSIC

THERE MUST BE some affinity between wine and music, evidenced by how many winemakers play in a band on the side. Napa Valley has long been a setting for exciting acts, especially during its multiple summer concert series: This year, Lyle Lovett, The Wallflowers, and Melissa Etheridge played the 46-year-old Robert Mondavi series; Herb Alpert and Kevin Spacey performed at nine-year-old Festival del Sole; and Snoop Dogg and Imagine Dragons pulled in crowds at the newest festival, BottleRock.

But the town of Napa itself now has a corner on great tunes year-round, with an astonishing ratio of quality to population. Boz Scaggs appears this month in the cool 1937 art deco Uptown Theatre (uptownbeatrenapa.com), painstakingly restored with the help of Francis Ford Coppola and opened five years ago. At the tiny club Silo's (silosnapa.com), on Main Street's waterfront, you may find American songbook legend Wesla Whitfield riffing with her husband, arranger, and pianist, Mike Greensill.

A fair number of local restaurants add to the music-club scene as well. In Napa, local Italian favorite Uva hosts a regular schedule of live music most nights. Old-time hangout Downtown Joe's does too. Farther up the valley in St. Helena, you can catch performers at Goose & Gander (at left) on summer Sundays.

And for both well-known national acts and local talent, check the schedule at Yountville's Lincoln Theater (lincolntheater.com).



CALISTOGA
—
Calistoga Inn



ST. HELENA | Harvest Table

complete remodel has produced one of the loveliest tasting rooms in the valley, soaring and open but with surprisingly cozy tasting spaces carved out inside. In the 1970s, founder Joseph Phelps was the first to produce a Cabernet-based, Bordeaux-style blend in California. Phelps, who died this year, named the wine "Insignia," and it came to be regarded as one of Napa's groundbreaking reds. His son, Bill, hasn't let anything slip: Insignia is still the prototype. *Tasting from \$75; by appointment only; 200 Taplin Rd.; josephphelps.com.*
WE RECOMMEND: Joseph Phelps 2012 "Insignia" (Napa Valley; \$240).

16 THE RESTAURANT AT MEADOWOOD BAR

Napa Valley has two chefs who've been awarded three Michelin stars. Thomas Keller is one, of course, for The French Laundry. The other is Christopher Kostow, presiding over The Restaurant at Meadowood. If you don't want to drop multiple hundreds in one evening, settle in fireside at the bar and order his three-course menu. For less than \$100 (okay, very little less), you'll taste how celestial seasonal food—with a focus on the garden—can be in three-star hands. \$\$\$\$; 900 Meadowood Lane; meadowood.com.

17 CAIRDEAN ESTATE

If you visited the valley in the past decade, you probably passed a defunct outlet mall north of St. Helena. Now Stacia and Edwin Williams have transformed it into something unusual: a complex of winery, room, bakery and deli (Butterscots), restaurant (The Farmer & The Fox), and retail and gallery space. The range of wines is broad, the views from the tasting room are exceptional, and the cave you tour is one of the valley's longest. \$25 tasting; 3111 St. Helena Hwy. N.; cairdeanestate.com.
WE RECOMMEND: Cairdean 2011 Atlas Peak Syrah (Atlas Peak; \$40).

CALISTOGA

18 CALISTOGA INN, RESTAURANT & BREWERY

Restored after a fire, the 1887 Calistoga Inn is a good value for the valley. Rooms are spare (no phones or TVs) but sweet. Bathrooms are shared but as private as anything you'd find in a spa. Downstairs at the restaurant and brewery, you can even skip wine for a while: Brewmaster Brad Smisloff produces delicious wheat ales, pilsners, red ales, and porters. From \$129, restaurant \$\$\$; calistogainn.com.

19 TAMBER BEY VINEYARDS

A former executive at AOL and Apple,

Barry Waitte likes wine. He also likes horses—in fact, he competes in a grueling event known as "endurance horse racing." When he decided to retire from Silicon Valley, it was only natural that he start a winery in a prestigious horse-training center, Calistoga's Sundance Ranch. Step into Tamber Bey and you'll taste wines in a courtyard surrounded by some pretty classy stables. And the wines that Waitte and his wife, Jennifer, produce are dark, earthy thoroughbreds too. \$25 tasting; 1251 Tubbs Lane; tamberbey.com.
WE RECOMMEND: Tamber Bey 2013 Deux Chevaux Vineyard Merlot (Yountville; \$75).

20 EVANGELINE

From chefs Brandon Sharp and Gustavo Rios of Solage's Solbar, this neighborhood bistro is for those with a Creole soul. It might be the right place to break your foie gras fast (in California, at least) with a mouth-watering version accompanied by seasonal fruit and toasted brioche. Satisfying mains include expert versions of *poulet grand-mère* (that would be Grandma's chicken) or braised pork shoulder. But to taste the true South, follow the rotating specials: shrimp étouffée, gumbo ya-ya—any of them even better with a side of fried pickles. \$\$\$; 1226 Washington St.; evangelinenapa.com.