

Napa Valley Opens Its First Wine History Museum and Tasting Salon



Napa's first wine museum opened in May. **Alexander Rubin**

In the winemaking world, Napa Valley's roots are deep and storied. The region has long been one of the most fruitful wine destinations in the world. To honor the rich history and culture, Jean-Charles Boisset, proprietor of the [Boisset Collection](#), has created Napa's first wine history museum and tasting salon, [1881 Napa](#), which opened at the end of May.

"Since I was a child, I've admired the long history of California wine," Boisset says. "The unique and dynamic region that has always been at the center of the American winemaking world inspired us to create this destination."

Napa Valley was the first American Viticultural Area (AVA) designated in California in 1981, and within the region are 16 sub-AVAs that have more geological diversity than any other wine region, leading to dramatically different wines produced within Napa Valley.

"We believe the stories of those pioneering souls who first saw the potential of Napa Valley to be the center of the fine wine world of California have been lost, and we wanted to anchor Napa in its own history," Boisset says.

He wanted to create a story that was not about one producer, one founder, or one winemaker, but instead, to commemorate the history of the entire valley.

Located in Oakville, adjacent to the Oakville Grocery, the oldest continually operating grocery in California, and the famous Opus One winery, 1881 Napa is housed in one of the oldest Victorian homes in Napa Valley, constructed in 1874. It focuses on the 19th-century history of Napa Valley wine, as well as the tools and relics used in winemaking and growing in California and Europe during this time period.

Inside, beneath a dramatic 48-light Baccarat crystal Zenith chandelier and a reproduction of an 1895 map of Napa County on canvas hanging from the ceiling, guests can embark on a self-guided tour. They'll learn about the 16 sub-appellations of Napa Valley through displays on the walls that introduce the founders and influential early pioneers of the region.



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On the second-floor landing is a display curated and organized by the Early California Wine Trade Museum featuring local historic wine artifacts. The mezzanine level features a collection of historic winemaking, vineyard, nursery, and cooperage tools. The ground floor houses antique decanters from Boisset's personal collection (he also donated historic winemaking, viticulture, and cooperage tools to the exhibit), as well as alcoves with soil samples from the various sub-appellations, 1881 Napa wines, and descriptions of key characteristics of the regions.

There's also a gallery of historical photos and stories of Napa's founding, which was created with the help of local historians, historical societies, and wine experts.

Visitors can also enjoy a sampling of regional wines in the tasting room on the ground floor. These include Cabernet Sauvignons from 12 of Napa Valley's sub-appellations, a blend of Napa Valley grapes, including an estate sparkling wine, Sauvignon Blanc, rosé, Chardonnay, a red blend, and a Merlot.

"Napa Valley is a place of tremendous spirit and energy and truly the heart of winemaking in the U.S. and California," Boisset says. "People travel from all over the world to visit the vineyards and wineries of this region and we want them to have a place where they can explore what has made Napa Valley such a world-class region for wine."

The museum is open to the public daily from 11 a.m. to 6 p.m. and admission is free. [Reservations](#) are recommended.