

Redd Wood restaurant
in Yountville

TRUCHARD

2009 Merlot
Carneros, Napa Valley (\$30)
truchardvineyards.com

A hint of mint plus a soupçon of blackberry mingle together in this standout merlot; the hefty dose of cabernet franc adds a subtle floral tone to its final arrangement. It should be quite a great wine to pair with braised lamb, grilled steak, and pork spare ribs. This is very drinkable—and delicious—right now, but for those bottles destined for the cellar, I have a feeling that a couple years down the line the '09 is going to rank in the "remarkable" category.

DOMAINE CARNEROS

2010 Estate Pinot Noir
Carneros (\$35)
domainecarneros.com

Although Domaine Carneros is one of California's premier sparkling wine producers, that's no excuse for overlooking its still wines—especially this pinot noir. The 2010 is 100-percent estate-grown and radiant with red fruit and earthy-spice aromas. Black cherry, licorice, and, to a lesser degree, ripe blueberry flavors are lush and full-bodied. A great pairing for mushroom risotto, pork chops, and duck.

FRANK FAMILY VINEYARDS

2010 Zinfandel
Napa Valley (\$37)
frankfamilyvineyards.com

Despite my adoration of Central Coast zinfandels, Napa Valley has for a very long time produced top-shelf zins that I love as well. At 15 percent alcohol, Frank Family's zin is both bold and full-bodied with distinct peppery under-notes; a tiny bit of added petite sirah rounds out the mouthfeel. It is clearly produced with the same craftsmanship that distinguishes the area's cabernets.

VINEYARD 29

2010 Cru Cabernet Sauvignon
Napa Valley (\$54)
vineyard29.com

Although initially this drinks like a firm, powerhouse cab, time becomes its best friend. As it continuously evolves and ever so slightly loosens its tannic grip, the vibrancy of the additional varietals (merlot, malbec, petit verdot, cabernet franc) takes over. It never loses its sophisticated nature, though.

CLIFF LEDE VINEYARDS

2009 Cabernet Sauvignon
Stags Leap District (\$60)
cliffledevineyards.com

This estate-grown cab is supported by dashes of petit verdot, malbec, merlot, and cabernet franc. It is full-bodied yet silky with raspberry, black cherry, and cocoa flavors. There's also a distinct lace of flintiness running through, which should heighten the flavors of many dark-chocolate-based desserts.

LADERA VINEYARDS

2008 Cabernet Sauvignon
Howell Mountain (\$75)
laderavineyards.com

I picked up on lovely licorice notes right away while tasting this 100-percent cabernet sauvignon and then found myself obsessing over the silky tannins holding together layers of rich black fruits. Just after admiring the juicy acidity, I decided to pay more attention to the finish, which I believe was long and lush. However, my glass was empty by then, so I had to start all over again.

BELLO FAMILY VINEYARDS

2009 Reserve Cabernet Sauvignon
Rutherford (\$250)
bellofamilyvineyards.com

Bello's '09 Reserve Cab is almost beyond description, but I'll try: stunning, exquisite, damn-near perfect. It's balanced. It's variably expressive. It's liquid emotion (and that emotion is *happiness*). If you're in Napa Valley, check out Bello's new tasting room (see listing under "Taste," opposite) for this and other gems from talented winemaker Aaron Pott.

TO NAPA VALLEY BY CAB

Real or virtual, any trip to California's most famous wine country should begin with cabernet sauvignon. But that's just the jumping-off point.

BY ANTHONY HEAD

Napa Valley still reigns supreme as California's premier wine country because, long ago, the environment was endowed with the perfect soils, climates, and other geographic conditions for cultivating many of the world's finest grapes.

Napa Valley cab is a well-known and (to say the least) very well-regarded commodity, but as the following selections show, there are also other varietals from the region to pay attention to. Take a tasting trip through the Napa Valley with these seven bottles. Enjoying them is practically as good as being there.



If you're actually making the trip to the Napa Valley

... there are several recently opened tasting rooms, restaurants, and hotels that have added to the excitement of visiting this world-class wine country. Here are a few noteworthy suggestions to add to the itinerary.

TASTE

Napa Valley has gone to the dogs: Last year, St. Helena's **Frenchie Winery** (frenchiewinery.com) debuted its tasting room, which is designed almost exclusively for canine companions of traveling oenophiles. Inside, there are kennel spaces with wine-barrel dog beds; outside is a play area with views of the vineyard. For humans, there are Frenchie wines to try.

Or perhaps Napa Valley has gone to the horses: Thoroughbreds aren't allowed inside the newly opened **Bello Family Vineyards** (bellofamilyvineyards.com) tasting room in downtown St. Helena, but this Main Street destination shows live, televised horse racing and displays memorabilia from Megahertz, owner Michael Bello's beloved and successful racehorse. The tasting room's indoor-outdoor terrace is a great spot for guests to people-watch while sampling Bello's world-class wines.

STAY

Although still a bed-and-breakfast-lover's paradise, Napa Valley's lodging options are expanding. Located in downtown Napa, the **Andaz Napa** (andaznapa.com), a Hyatt property, features 141 contemporary rooms and suites, Andaz Farmers Table for breakfast and dinner, coffee and pastry service throughout the day, the Mercantile Social wine bar, and a second-floor terrace with a cozy fire pit.

The **Bardessono** (bardessono.com) in Yountville is a 62-room boutique hotel and spa, which emphasizes modern, sustainable

lodging concepts through state-of-the-art, energy-efficient heating, cooling, and lighting technology, water conservation techniques, and other environmentally committed approaches. On several days throughout the week, guests can take part in complimentary yoga sessions.

DINE

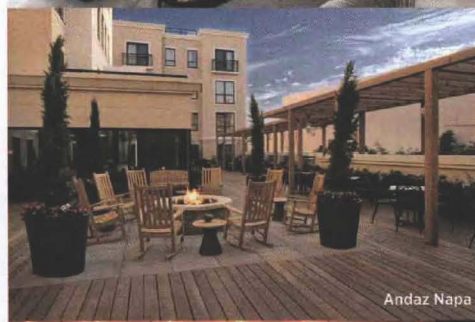
Opened in mid-2010 by Iron Chef Masaharu Morimoto, **Morimoto Napa** (morimotonapa.com) adds polish and playfulness to downtown Napa's dining scene. Morimoto features pan-Asian and modern American dinner and lunch menus, sushi, and a raw bar. It also has some of the prettiest views of the Napa River.

Napa Valley Biscuits (facebook.com/pages/Napa-Valley-Biscuits) in Napa serves from-scratch Southern cooking. The namesake dish is the basis for just about everything on the menu, like buttermilk biscuits and gravy as well as biscuit sandwiches made with fried chicken, pulled pork, and chicken-fried steak. Southern-style sides include black-eyed peas, braised greens, and potato salad.

Redd Wood (redd-wood.com) is executive chef Richard Reddington's casual companion to his acclaimed Redd fine-dining restaurant in Yountville. Within walking distance of each other, Redd Wood trades Redd's wine-country elegance for Italian chic, serving pasta, wood-fired oven pizza, wood-cured meats, and artisanal cheeses. Entrées include beef short ribs and roasted half chicken.



Bello Family Vineyards tasting room



Andaz Napa



Lucy restaurant at Bardessono



Morimoto Napa

HEAD'S UP

CLOSER TO HOME

Santa Margarita's **Ancient Peaks Winery** (ancientpeaks.com) now offers Saturday ground-to-glass guided tours of its winemaking process. Departing from the tasting room, guests are transported to the estate Margarita Vineyard for interactive lessons on the vines, soils, and viticultural practices of the southern Paso Robles region. The 90-minute tour includes a return trip to the tasting room's new annex for a pairing of small bites with Ancient Peaks wines (\$30 per person, \$15 for wine club members; reservations are required). For information contact the winery at 805-365-7045. ♦