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## Insider's Guide: **NAPA VALLEY**

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And Winery Tasting Rooms

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# A Tasting to Remember

*Eighteen of the best venues for  
exciting visits and flavorful wines*

**BY MARYANN WOROBIEC**

**PHOTOGRAPHS BY ALANNA HALE**

**T**asting rooms were once places for guests simply to sample a winery's latest releases and purchase a few bottles as souvenirs. But times have changed. As Napa Valley tourism has evolved, many tasting rooms are offering something beyond wine: memorable experiences.

The best of these increasingly personalized visits tell the story of the winery in compelling detail, often in beautiful settings that showcase impressive artwork and architecture. Tours are in-depth and custom-designed. Tastings typically last an hour or more, and they are often guided, seated and relaxed.

Don't be intimidated by the fact that most wineries require appointments: As Napa Valley's popularity has grown, so have the crowds, and reservations help wineries maintain a comfortable ebb and flow of customers.

Set appointments also give visitors the chance to make the most of their time. When you call to book a visit, you may get quizzed on what kinds of wines you like or what your expectations are, all in an effort to further personalize your visit. Even if a winery doesn't require reservations, it's always best to phone ahead. Hours of operation can change with the season, and wineries are always adjusting their offerings to improve customers' experiences.

The listings below describe 18 of the most exceptional wineries to visit in Napa Valley today. Some are new destinations we're excited about, others original pioneers that have been refreshed or reimaged. But all go deep on education and hospitality.



## Atelier by JCB Tasting Salon

6505 Washington St., Yountville **Telephone** (707) 967-7600 **Website** [www.jbcollection.com](http://www.jbcollection.com) **Cost** Tastings \$30–\$50

From the outside, Atelier by JCB Tasting Salon is an unassuming edifice in downtown Yountville. But inside you'll find a sensualist's delight, replete with crystal, red velvet, gold and leopard-print accents. Its vintner-owner, Jean-Charles Boisset, spared no expense in the design, offering gilded mirrors on the ceilings, interactive digital tables that give information about the wines available for tasting, and display cases of Baccarat glassware for sale.

Flights from the JCB collection are served four or five wines at a time, including pours from bottlings such as the JCB Cabernet Sauvignon Napa Valley No. 1 (\$200) and The Surrealist Napa Valley (\$350), a blend of Cabernet Sauvignon and Petit Verdot.

Alongside the Tasting Salon, beyond glass doors with handles that look as if they came from the Palace of Versailles, is an equally ambitious epicurean boutique. There's an expansive cheese and charcuterie selection, as well as hundreds of items imported from around the world, including mustard, caviar, confections and teas.

—M.W.

## Castello di Amorosa

4045 St. Helena Highway, Calistoga **Telephone** (707) 967-6272 **Website** [www.castellodiamorosa.com](http://www.castellodiamorosa.com) **Cost** Tours and tastings by appointment, \$25–\$20,000

Castello di Amorosa is an unlikely spectacle: a replica of a Tuscan castle rising from a hillside in Napa Valley. Nevertheless, the guest experience here is far from hokey. Founder Dario Sattui's fascination with medieval Italy means that the 100,000-square-foot, 13th century-style building is full of authentic details, from the handwrought ironwork to the imported bricks. There are more than 100 rooms on eight levels, and the grounds are complete with a moat, guard towers, courtyard drawbridge, "torture chamber" and chapel.

The wines can be outstanding, particularly the Cabernet Sauvignons and Cabernet-based blends, such as Il Barone and the super Tuscan-inspired La Castellana, a mix of Cabernet, Merlot and Sangiovese. There is plenty to see with the basic admission fee, which comes with a tasting of five wines. But guided tours (starting at \$40) will give you access to rooms otherwise off-limits and a sampling of some of the more premium wines. You can upgrade all the way to the "Ultimate" \$20,000 (per couple) full-day package that includes a theatrical welcome, a key to the castle, a photographer to follow you around and document your visit and an overnight stay at the nearby Solage Resort.

—M.W.

## Covert Estate

15 Chateau Lane, Napa **Telephone** (707) 224-1959 **Website** [www.covertestate.com](http://www.covertestate.com) **Cost** Tastings by appointment, \$35–\$75

Covert Estate is aptly named. Invisible from the road and nestled into a Coombsville hillside, the entire facility is underground. The tasting room decor pays homage to the region's farmland history, blending pastoral touches, including buffalo hides and barn wood, with industrial and elemental features such as walls embossed with zinc and glass caissons holding sample soils. A twisting metal chandelier with a large chunk of obsidian as its centerpiece provides dramatic contrast to the bucolic backdrop.

Covert is also a good reason to check out Napa Valley's newest AVA, Coombsville. Just a few minutes from downtown Napa, this rural neighborhood is home to impressive talent such as Favia



Elan and Julien Fayard of Covert Estate

### IF YOU GO

- ▶ Always call ahead; hours and offerings can change seasonally.
- ▶ Don't be discouraged by "appointment-only" policies. Appointments ensure that staff will be ready and available to take care of you, and by-appointment tours are often less crowded.
- ▶ Don't overdo it; visiting three or four wineries is a full day, especially if you're taking tours.
- ▶ Leave enough time to drive from location to location. Consider that it takes about 45 minutes (longer with traffic) to drive from downtown Napa at the southern end of the valley to Calistoga in the north. Ask winery personnel how long to allow for a visit and how long it might take to get to your next appointment.
- ▶ To avoid the traffic on Highway 29, use the other north-south artery, Silverado

Trail, which is less congested because it avoids towns and stoplights. There are plenty of streets that cross over between the two. Also be aware that left turns out of a winery's driveway onto the highway can be difficult when it's busy.

- ▶ To avoid crowds, get an early start. Another strategy is to visit on weekdays rather than weekends, and to avoid harvesttime.
- ▶ Be sure to pack water and provisions. Some attractions are many miles from a restaurant or deli, and you never know when you'll find a picnic spot to take advantage of. (But make sure to ask permission before you picnic.)
- ▶ Use the spit bucket, and ask if you can share a tasting in order to consume less wine (or try more options).
- ▶ If you're planning to purchase wine, bring a cooler and a bag of ice.