

Napa, Sonoma wineries are pouring as California wildfire memories fade

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(Photo: Johnathan L. Wright/USA Today Network)



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Blazing yellow mustard flowers that herald spring have returned to garnish the hillsides and flatlands of Napa Valley and Sonoma County, the heart of California's wine country and American wine culture in general.

The blooms flourish in contrast to the perception "that the wine country was destroyed, the wineries were all destroyed, the vineyards were all destroyed" in wildfires that began last Oct. 8, says Tom Blackwood, general manager of Buena Vista Winery in the Carneros region of Sonoma County.

"In reality, that's far from true. When people actually visit, I keep hearing, 'Wow, it's not even close to what I thought.' "

As the wine country's busy season, April through October, begins, folks in the wine and hospitality business say they're optimistic.

They stress that damage to the wine industry overall was relatively small, that the Northern California wine country is uncorked and ready to pour.

"You'll find the community is even more open and gracious to tourists coming," says Rob Mondavi Jr. of Michael Mondavi Family Estate. "They're profoundly important to the sharing of our wine culture and our economy."