



Sunset

Travel Guide

Napa Valley:
Wineries, Hotels, Dining, and More 2010



Sunset Travel Guide



Napa's Best Sips, Sleeps, Spas, and More

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COVER: SOLAGE CALISTOGA RESORT. CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: ANNABELLE BREAKEY, BERINGER VINEYARDS, THOMAS J. STORY

An idyllic scene at Beringer Vineyard **BELOW** Clos Pegase grapes



Grape escape

Taste the day away in California's ultimate wine region



Press the switch to open the curtains in your valley-view room at the Poetry Inn, and you're suspended with the primary-striped hot-air balloons of postcard fame. Pedal up the Silverado Trail to the Miner Family villa, climb the steps, look west over your shoulder, and a world-class view is yours too. The first might be a decade's splurge; the second, just a weekend getaway. There are many ways to enjoy this wine country.

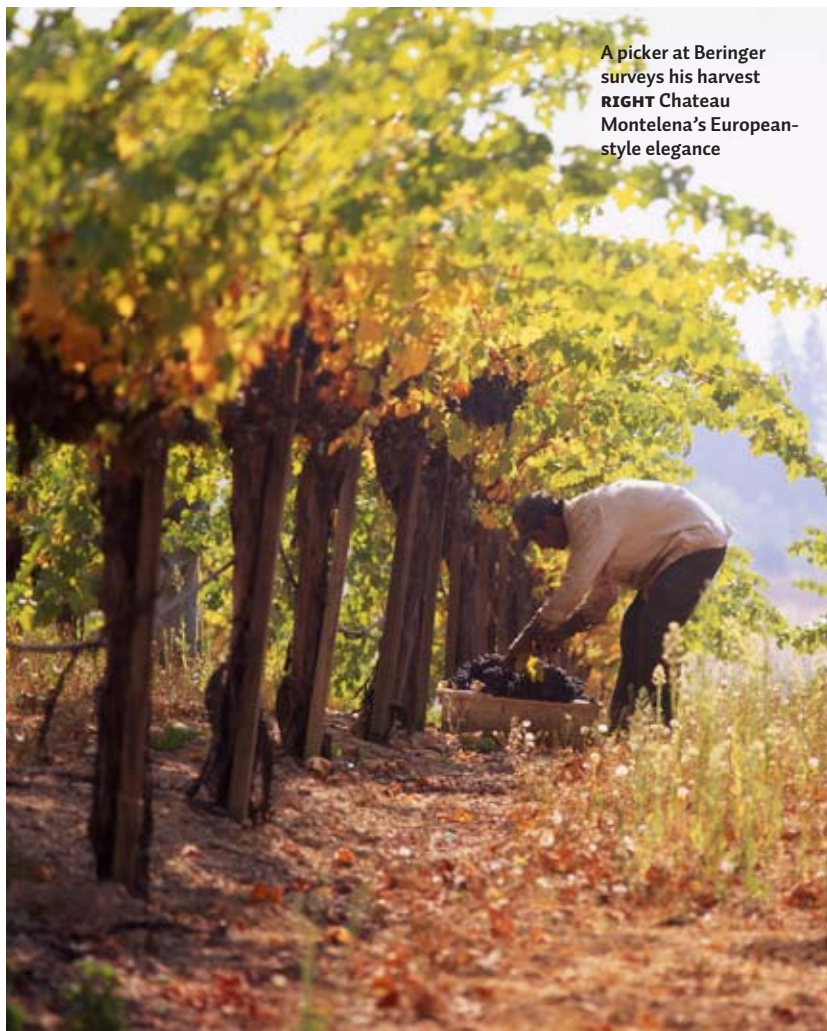
Several decades ago, Napa Valley—a

jewel of a strip roughly 35 miles long and up to 4 miles wide between the Vaca and the Mayacamas mountain ranges—was dotted with sedately grand wineries inherited by the offspring of Northern California's early wine pioneers, along with a few humbler wineries scabbled together by passionate new talents.

Deep pockets followed, hardscaping the valley with jaw-dropping showplaces—and with them, tales of instructions to check with the concierge for permission to picnic outside. It's a newer, wilder wine country.

But you can't stay away from Napa forever if you love good wine. To get your bearings, you can drop into Grgich Hills' rustic tasting room. The thirtysomething crowd will be happily swapping opinions with the equally young staff about Mike Grgich's legendary Chardonnay. No pretension there.

BERINGER VINEYARDS, CLOS PEGASE



A picker at Beringer surveys his harvest
RIGHT Chateau Montelena's European-style elegance



Venture farther, to Clos Pegase, a Greek temple as interpreted by architect Michael Graves; to the Persian palace known as Darioush; and to Quixote Winery, a Hundertwasser design that Gaudí might have come up with after a few too many tastings.

Sure, more wines in this valley cost \$100 than should. But comparing those phenomenal Cabernets—and Cab is king here—is open to all. Can you taste the proverbial Rutherford dust in wines from that area? The iron fist in the velvet glove attributed to Stags Leap District Cabs?

Given all the options, though, what's a visitor to do? Choose wineries according to your interests, and assume you'll be back. Go back to Napa's roots at Rubicon Estate. Their tour—rich in valley history—ends in the caves with a barrel tasting of, in the words of the guide, Rubicon's "pure Cabernet."

Here's to Napa Cab and to those who come in search of it.

Where to taste

All Napa wineries have tasting fees, most starting at \$10 or \$15 for a basic lineup. Some wineries offer reserve tastings for an additional fee, plus tours and/or food-and-wine pairings for a premium; Napa being Napa, fees are on the high side. Consider concentrating on just a few wineries in a day.

Chateau Montelena Winery. One of the most serene spots in the valley. Wander around spring-fed Jade Lake and taste lauded Chardonnays in the ivy-draped 1880s stone castle. 1429 Tubbs Lane, Calistoga; 707/942-5105 or www.montelena.com.

Clos Pegase. The striking "temple to wine and art," designed by architect Michael Graves, houses an art collection but is itself the real work of art worth stopping for. The Mitsuko's Vineyard wines are special. 1060 Dunawael Lane, Calistoga; 707/942-4981 or www.clospetegase.com.

Schramsberg Vineyards. Jack and Jamie Davies pioneered sparkling-winemaking in the valley. The tour here gives you a look at a mind-boggling 2 million bottles of bubbles in 2 miles of underground caves that were dug out in 1862. 1400 Schramsberg Rd., Calistoga; 707/942-2414 (call for appointment) or www.schramsberg.com.

Beringer Vineyards. The oldest continually operating winery in the valley, and a St. Helena landmark, Beringer offers a whole menu of tours; its Rhine House and wine caves are synonymous with Napa history. 2000 Main St., St. Helena; 707/963-7115 or www.beringer.com.

Louis M. Martini Winery. Though the terracotta-tiled monolith is owned by the Gallo family now, the legacy launched by Louis Martini in 1933 lives on in the remodeled tasting room. 254 S. St. Helena Hwy., St. Helena; 707/968-3361 or www.louismartini.com.

Corison Winery. Cathy Corison makes elegantly lean, almost Old World-style Cabs in her graceful barn of a winery. 987 St. Helena Hwy., St. Helena; 707/963-0826 (call for appointment) or www.corison.com.

Franciscan. One of the all-around-good tasting rooms on State 29—sleek and warm, with knowledgeable comments offered by the staff. Mount Veeder Winery (which has the same parent company) pours here too; it's worth the extra fee to taste the reserves. 1178 Galleron Rd., St. Helena; 800/529-9463 or www.franciscan.com.

Quintessa. There's only one wine here, and it's expensive—but worth an appointment for a sit-down wine-and-cheese tasting and a tour of the stone-and-concrete gravity-flow winery. 1601 Silverado Trail, Rutherford; 707/967-1601 (call for appointment) or www.quintessa.com.

Frog's Leap. The new hospitality center at the earth-friendly winery was built with highly renewable, low-impact materials; it hasn't lost its rustic farm feel. Closed Sun; 8815 Conn Creek Rd., Rutherford; 800/959-4704 (call



Lush vineyard views at Rubicon Estate **BELOW** Opus One's grand entrance **LEFT** Quixote's whimsical architecture



for appointment) or www.frogssleap.com.

Beaulieu Vineyard. The hospitable hexagonal tasting room is modest, though the history of Napa wine masters who've worked in the historic stone building next door—including the legendary Russian-born Andre Tchelistcheff—is not. 1960 *St. Helena Hwy., Rutherford*; 800/373-5896 or www.bvwines.com.

Grgich Hills Estate. No wine-gadget folderol in the redwood tasting room—just wine and a young crowd talking about it. Mike Grgich made the Chardonnay that beat out the white Burgundies in the landmark 1976 Paris tasting. 1829 *St. Helena Hwy., Rutherford*; 800/532-3057 or www.grgich.com.

Rubicon Estate. A must-visit if you're looking for Napa's roots. The château, built by sea

captain turned wine pioneer Gustave Niebaum, has watched over the valley since 1880. Movie director Francis Ford Coppola bought the estate in 1975 and reunited all the original vineyards. The \$25 entrance fee is steep, but the tour, tasting, and mini museum of winemaking are rich. 1991 *St. Helena Hwy., Rutherford*; 800/782-4266 or www.rubiconestate.com.

St. Supéry Vineyards & Winery. The large, airy visitor center offers as wide a range of experiences as any in the valley, from self-guided tours across the winery's catwalks to cheese pairings and grape stomps. The Sauvignon Blanc is one of our perennial favorites, but also try the red ("Élu") and white ("Virtú") meritage blends. 8440 *St.*

Helena Hwy., Rutherford; 800/942-0809 or www.stsupery.com.

Opus One. The busloads across the road at Robert Mondavi Winery might be getting a good wine education, but at this winery founded by Robert Mondavi and the Baroness Philippine de Rothschild, you can taste Napa's version of a grand cru. 7900 *St. Helena Hwy., Oakville*; 707/944-9442 (call for appointment) or www.opusonewinery.com.

PlumpJack Winery. Billionaire Gordon Getty and San Francisco mayor Gavin Newsom are behind the Jack Falstaff fun here (the winery is named for Shakespeare's stout funny man). The signature Cab was the first high-end red to go to market under screw caps. 620 *Oakville Cross Rd., Oakville*; 707/945-1220 or www.plumpjackwinery.com.

Rudd Vineyards & Winery. Leslie Rudd is a relative newcomer among Oakville Cross Road's royalty, but he's already producing first-class wines. Tasting here is an event for those who want a serious look: Take a full tour, which ends with food-and-wine pairings in the cave, or arrange to taste just the wines. Closed *Sun, Mon*; 500 *Oakville Cross Rd., Oakville*; 707/944-8577 (call for appointment) or www.ruddwines.com.

Miner Family Vineyards. Panoramic views from the terraces, as well as extensive caves, which you can make an appointment to tour. A wide range of top-notch wines is crafted here, from Viognier to a lovely dry rosé; the classic Oakville Cabernet is a standout. 7850 *Silverado Trail, Oakville*; 800/366-9463 or www.minerwines.com.

Robert Sinskey Vineyards. A tall redwood nave rising from low stone walls creates an earthy cathedral of sorts. Within, nibbles in hand, taste beautifully crafted biodynamic Pinot Noirs. 6320 *Silverado Trail, Napa*; 800/869-2030 or www.robertsinskey.com.

Cliff Lede Vineyards. The deceptively simple Craftsman tasting room gives way to a beautiful little art gallery and a courtyard that keeps its serenity in the busiest Napa seasons. 1473 *Yountville Cross Rd., Yountville*; 800/428-2259 or www.cliffledevineyards.com.

Quixote Winery. Quixote is the 20-year project of Carl Doumani. Designed by Viennese iconoclast Friedensreich Hundertwasser; wild splashes of tile, gold-leafed domes, and no straight lines or square angles. Closed *Mon, Tue*; 6126 *Silverado Trail, Napa*; 707/944-2659 (call for appointment) or www.quixotewinery.com.

Stag's Leap Wine Cellars. No bells and whis-



Signorello's stunning patio vista **RIGHT** Medieval magic at Castello di Amorosa



tles but serious pedigree. In the tasting room, which hugs the fermenting tanks, you can usually try “Cask 23” and “S.L.V.” sourced from the vineyard that produced the Cab that bested Bordeaux in the 1976 Judgment of Paris tasting. 5766 Silverado Trail, Napa; 866/422-7523 or www.cask23.com.

Domaine Chandon. A beautiful introduction to the valley and to sparkling-winemaking. Take a look at riddling and blending techniques before you order appetizers in the salon. 1 California Dr., Yountville; 707/944-2280 or www.chandon.com.

Signorello Vineyards. Maybe the only winery perch in the valley that looks out over an infinity pool, Signorello has become a stop for food mavens. And with no new oak in it, the Chardonnay here is food-friendly too. 4500 Silverado Trail, Napa; 800/982-4229 (call for appointment) or www.signorellovineyards.com.

Darioush. “Stunning” is usually an exaggeration; not here. You can spend quite a bit for cheese-and-wine “experiences” and tours, or share the hefty fee for a standard tasting and feel like royalty for an hour. 4240 Silverado Trail, Napa; 707/257-2345 or www.darioush.com.

Hess Collection Winery. “Collection” refers to the dramatic art pieces in the multilevel gallery that holds the winery. The wines here have been getting better and better—the best being from the Mt. Veeder vineyards just outside. 4411 Redwood Rd., Napa; 707/255-1144 or www.hesscollection.com.

Domaine Carneros by Taittinger. A replica of the French Taittinger family’s 17th-century stone chateau in Champagne, Domaine Carneros has a grand terrace for sipping the good bubbly it makes. Splurge on a bottle of “Le Rève.” 1240 Duhig Rd., Napa; 707/257-0101 or www.domainecarneros.com.

Sterling Vineyards. An aerial tram whisks you up a hill to a Mediterranean-style winery,

where you wend your way along balconies and terraces that look out over the Napa Valley, stopping here and there to taste wines—you might start with a Sauvignon Blanc and then build to a Cabernet Sauvignon. \$20 for tour and tasting. 1111 Dunawea Lane; 800/726-6136 option 1, 707/942-3345, or sterlingvineyards.com.

Castello di Amorosa. Some wineries look like châteaux. But Castello di Amorosa is the real deal. With five towers, a moat and draw-bridge, a frescoed chapel, a torture chamber, and gargoyles, the medieval monument is the stuff of Hollywood. You can get a gander on a 90-minute tour, which includes a five-wine tasting. \$30 tasting; by appointment only. 4045 St. Helena Hwy. N.; 707/967-6272 or castellodiamorosa.com

Vintner’s Collective. You’d need a personal invite from the winemakers to try most of the bottles uncorked daily at the Vintner’s Collective. The pre-eminent tasting room in downtown Napa, it’s stocked with small producers who have large followings; \$25 buys you six tastes. If you’re looking for quantity, though, plunk down \$20 for the Taste Napa Downtown pass and wander freely among 14 other tasting rooms. Purchase at napadowntown.com. Tastings from \$20. 1245 Main St.; 707/255-7150 or www.vintnerscollective.com.

Ceja Vineyards Wine Tasting Salon & Lounge. Tastings (\$15) are by appointment at its valley vineyard, but its downtown tasting salon offers a lower fee and even more fun. Try the black cherry-tinged 2006 Carneros Pinot Noir—and take a twirl on what becomes a dance floor Saturdays at 7:30 p.m., when Ariel, the owners’ son, gives free beginner salsa lessons. Locals keep the party going till midnight. \$10 tastings. 1248 Main St.; 707/226-6445 or www.cejavineyards.com.

Spy the sprawling valley from Spring Mountain Vineyard



Spring Mountain

Some of Napa's most complex wines lie off the beaten path

You might imagine that Steve Russon, a Napa Valley tour guide and self-professed wine geek, would get tired of taking groups around to wineries. And you would be right, at least when it comes to “the usual suspects, the no-brainers,” as he calls some of the larger wineries along State 29. But there's one appellation that continues to fascinate him no matter how many times he goes. “I like to bring people up to Spring

Mountain because it takes a little more effort, a little more study and knowledge,” Russon says.

Effort, because all the wineries here require appointments for tasting. Knowledge, because all “Spring Mountain is undeniably, incomparably beautiful; the wines have beautiful intensity; and you get to talk to people who are involved in what they're doing, have a stake in what they're doing,

and are actually doing it themselves.”

One of the Napa Valley's smallest appellations, with fewer than 20 wineries and 25 vineyards, Spring Mountain is in many respects the anti-Napa. Until 2004, when a Spring Mountain District Association finally formed, wineries here operated as lone rangers, with minimal signage and directions almost laughable in their folksiness: “Where the road turns to dirt, look for the cluster of mailboxes, turn right, and 500 yards down you'll see a gate with no sign. If you can't find it, try calling the winery. If you get lost, call us, though your cell phone might not work out here.”

But wine lovers know that Spring Mountain's remoteness, besides making it so refreshingly untrafficked, is a big part of what makes the wines so good. Tom Ferrell, executive director of the Spring Mountain District, explains that because Spring Mountain is not in fact a mountain but rather a ridge between two mountains, the area has its own weather patterns. It's the coolest, wettest place in the Napa Valley, with an average rainfall of 37 inches a year. Springs appear everywhere after a good rain, hence the area's name. And with all the trees, it feels more like the coast than like farmland. “We're about as far east as you'll find redwood trees,” Ferrell says.

Moisture and mountains don't always add up to great wine. Weak soils, which are the norm at these elevations, stress the grapes, forcing them to stay small, with a higher skin-to-grape ratio. As a result, mountain wines end to be more concentrated and intense—sometimes too much so.

But on Spring Mountain, this effect is softened by the more gradual temperature fluctuations that the surrounding, taller mountains provide. “As a result, our wines have the bright color and intensity that mountain wines are often known for, but also a softness and elegance that surprises wine critics,” Ferrell explains.

“A mountain vineyard is totally different than a valley vineyard,” says Paloma co-owner Barbara Richards. “Down there they can pick a 15-acre vineyard in one day because it all ripens evenly,” she says. “Here we pick by taste. We did 13 picks last year; it took a month. That makes a much more complex wine.”

“The whole area is full of surprises,” Steve Russon says. “As adults, we don't get enough surprises. That's why I love it here.”



Morning fog burns off the vines at Barnett Vineyards
BELOW A tasting at Spring Mountain Vineyard **RIGHT** Pride Mountain Vineyards



Spring Mountain wineries

Be sure to call for an appointment before you visit.

Barnett Vineyards. At the very top of the ridge, the pretty Tuscan-looking winery has perhaps the best views on Spring Mountain and a picnic table where you can take it all in. MacNeil's pick: The powerful 2002 Spring Mountain District Merlot, packed with cassis and cocoa flavors, makes Cabernet fans sit up and take notice. *Free tour and tastings.* 4070 Spring Mountain Rd.; 707/963-7075 or www.barnettvineyards.com.

Cain Vineyard and Winery. Tastings take place in the dining room of the home that serves as winery headquarters. MacNeil's

pick: Cain's 2001 Concept is a Bordeaux-style blend with a chocolate-raspberry character. *Free tour and tastings; closed Sun.* 3800 Langtry Rd.; 707/963-1616 or www.cainfive.com.

Paloma Vineyard. Tastings are done in Barbara and Jim Richards's own kitchen or on the back porch, where hummingbirds swarm around feeders that Barbara carefully tends. MacNeil's pick: The 2002 Merlot. If you love thick, opulent Merlots, this one's for you, with black-cherry pie, dark chocolate, and espresso flavors. Very saturated and concentrated. *Free tastings.* 4013 Spring Mountain Rd.; 707/963-7504 or www.palomavineyard.com.

Pride Mountain Vineyards. The Napa-Sonoma county line runs right through the grounds of this beautiful mountaintop property. MacNeil's pick: The 2007 Merlot, which opens

with a big, perfumey nose featuring red raspberry, plum preserves, black and maraschino cherries and brown sugar. *Tastings Mon-Sat from \$10.* 4026 Spring Mountain Rd.; 707/963-4949 or www.pridewines.com.

Ritchie Creek Vineyard. Since 1974, Pete Minor and his son Tad have been making fewer than 1,000 cases a year of traditional Bordeaux-style wines. MacNeil's pick: The 2003 Ritchie Creek Blaufränkisch. Made from an Austrian red grape, this wine is dense and exotic—loaded with black licorice and espresso flavors. *Free tour and tastings.* 4024 Spring Mountain Rd.; 707/963-4661 or www.ritchiecreek.com.

Smith-Madrone. Rave reviews of Rieslings from brothers Stuart and Charles Smith haven't gone to their heads: You might get a foldable picnic chair to sit on, and Stuart's likely to use his Swiss Army knife to open the wine. MacNeil's pick: The 2004 Riesling. Like its neighbors, Smith-Madrone makes excellent Cabernets, but its hauntingly dry Riesling is terrific—a fresh, pure burst of apricots and minerals. *Free tours and tastings Mon-Sat.* 4022 Spring Mountain Rd.; 707/963-2283 or www.smithmadrone.com.

Spring Mountain Vineyard. We recommend the Estate or Reserve Tasting at this beautifully maintained 1885 estate. MacNeil's pick: The big and full-bodied 2006 Cabernet Sauvignon. *Tours and tastings from \$35, applicable to minimum wine purchase.* 2805 Spring Mountain Rd.; 707/967-4188 or www.springmountainvineyard.com.

Stony Hill Vineyard. It's white wines only at the first Napa winery built post-Prohibition. MacNeil's pick: Stony Hill's Chardonnays were among the first "cult" wines in the Napa Valley. Pure, crisp, and precise, the 2002 Chardonnay is exactly the opposite of others' big butterball Chardonnays. *Tastings Mon-Fri, free;* 707/963-2636 or www.stonyhillvineyard.com.

Terra Valentine. Fascinating guided tours of this elaborate stone edifice end in an oak-paneled tasting room for a seated wine and cheese pairing. MacNeil's pick: Ripe cherries and dark chocolate come together in the velvety, medium-bodied 2007 Spring Mountain District Cabernet Sauvignon. *Tours and tastings \$30 (waived with wine purchase).* 3787 Spring Mountain Rd.; 707/967-8340 or www.terravallentine.com.



The charming Auberge du Soleil **BELOW** Poetry Inn's pool

Where to stay

Napa Valley accommodations for all budgets



Auberge du Soleil. The luxe resort has large rooms, stunning views, and a notable restaurant (\$\$\$\$). *From \$550. In Rutherford; 800/348-5406 or www.aubergedusoleil.com.*

Avia Hotel. Welcome the fashionable and fairly priced Avia Hotel, which opened in July 2009 on a downtown corner. Colorful throne-like velvet chairs dominate the lobby, and in some rooms, soaking tubs dress up the space. The rooftop deck has swinging benches and a firepit. Ask for something on the fifth floor if you want valley views. *From*

\$200. In Napa; 707/224-3900 or aviahotels.com
Blackbird Inn. The newly renovated California Arts and Crafts home has a front porch, huge stone fireplace, and lots of fine woodwork. The eight guest rooms are contemporary, with down comforters, four-poster beds, and gas fireplaces. *From \$185, breakfast included. In Napa; 888/567-9811 or www.blackbirdinnnapa.com.*

Calistoga Ranch. A sibling to Auberge du Soleil, the resort rests in a 157-acre canyon in the mountains east of Calistoga. Secluded and luxurious, it has its own spa along with 4 miles of hiking trails. *From \$735. In Calistoga; 800/942-4220 or www.calistogaranch.com.*

The Carneros Inn. The board-and-batten cottages hark back to Napa's agrarian past but offer contemporary luxury. *From \$395. In*



Pedal straight from your doorstep at Solage Calistoga Resort **RIGHT** Chic comfort at the Cottages of Napa Valley



Napa; 888/400-9000 or www.thecarnerosinn.com.

The Cottages of Napa Valley. Two rows of cheery Provençal-style cottages facing a shaded lawn and garden dotted with fountains outdo Napa’s famed luxury hotels on hospitality, throwing in complimentary wine, snacks, and a breakfast basket of Bouchon Bakery pastries delivered to your porch. They’re also affordable, as far as Napa prices go, providing the sort of privacy and personal touches you can’t find at larger resorts. *From \$350. In Napa; 707/252-7810 or www.napacottages.com.*

Dr. Wilkinson’s Hot Springs Resort. Go for “The Works,” a traditional mud bath with facial mask, aromatic mineral whirlpool bath, steam room, massage, and blanket wrap at the Calistoga classic. *Motel units from \$149,*

plus cottages and bungalows. In Calistoga; 707/942-4102 or www.drwilkinson.com.

El Bonita Motel. For years St. Helena’s motel with the neon sign and the retro road-trip vibe was a cherished Napa Valley secret. Now the word is out, which means you’ll need to book in advance. *From \$149. In St. Helena; 707/963-3216 or www.elbonita.com.*

Indian Springs Resort & Spa. The cabins are nice for an over-nighter, and the sprawling complex offers an unfussy approach to the spa experience, with mud baths, a thermal pool, and a Buddhist garden. *Cottages from \$225, lodge rooms from \$185. In Calistoga; 707/942-4913 or www.indianspringscalistoga.com.*

Milliken Creek Inn and Spa. Overlooking the Napa River, the 10 rooms hint at the exotic, with fresh flowers, burlwood-type flooring,

and sea grass lounges along with fireplaces and spa tubs, and beds mounded with Italian linen sheets and white comforters. You can stroll the tranquil gardens. *From \$550, breakfast included. In Napa; 888/622-5775, 707/255-1197, or www.millikencreekinn.com.*

Mount View Hotel & Spa. Small but nice rooms. *From \$189. In Calistoga; 800/816-6877 or www.mountviewhotel.com.*

Napa River Inn. The 1884 Hatt Building has been tastefully remodeled with 66 rooms and suites, each offering a fireplace or a view of the river. *From \$239. In Napa; 877/251-8500, 707/251-8500, or www.napariverinn.com.*

Poetry Inn. Comfort, style, and world-class views (and wine cellar) in the Stags Leap District. *From \$590. In Napa; 707/944-0646 or www.poetryinn.com.*

Solage Calistoga Resort. The sister property to Auberge du Soleil, Solage is designed for a younger crowd with (slightly) shallower pockets. The to-die-for spa offers 120-minute Mudslide experience for two (\$215), a sophisticated take on the century-old tradition of the Calistoga mud bath that includes a bake in a spacious sauna with a specially blended cocktail of mud and essential oils, a soak in the area’s famous thermal waters, and a swaddled rest in a “sound chair,” which pulses to the New Age music on your headphones. *From \$375. In Calistoga; 866/942-7442 or www.solagecalistoga.com.*



The French Laundry's inviting cottage-like charm **RIGHT** Their signature "Oysters and Pearls" dish

Yummy-ville

The dish on Yountville, the darling of Napa dining

To understand how Yountville is and isn't your typical small California town, visit its new Little League snack bar. Made of green cinder block, it looks like most Little League snack bars you've seen, until you peer inside and notice the array of high-end appliances, including a pizza oven.

"I played baseball in school for years," says Thomas Keller. "When the Little League

needed help building a new snack bar, I said yes."

Thomas Keller is, of course, the best chef in America. As for Keller's adopted Napa Valley hometown, when producer Brad Lewis wanted to observe a top-end kitchen for his movie *Ratatouille*, Yountville is where he came – specifically Keller's French Laundry. Four Yountville restaurants collectively



earned an unprecedented six stars in the 2008 Michelin guide. Given that Yountville has only 3,200 residents, it boasts more Michelin stars per capita than any place on Earth.

The odd thing is that for decades, Yountville was deemed *déclassé* by the rest of the Napa Valley. If it was famous for anything, it was for the big state Veterans Home on the hill above town, and for its 17 seedy bars.

By some accounts, the new Yountville was born June 6, 1977. "My own personal D-Day," says Philippe Jeanty of the morning he arrived from Epernay, France, to help open the restaurant at *Domaine Chandon*. The next year, Don and Sally Schmitt started the French Laundry, and in 1992, Keller bought it and launched it into the culinary stratosphere when he reopened it in 1994.

To stroll downtown Yountville today is to thumb through the pages of a Zagat guide. There's Richard Reddington's *Redd* and Philippe Jeanty's *Bistro Jeanty*, with one Michelin star apiece. Then come Keller's informal *Ad Hoc*, one-star *Bouchon*, and three-star French Laundry. You think that while other towns zone land "RH" for residential, Yountville must zone "PF" for *prix fixe* and "AB" for *amuse-bouche*.

Naturally, having your town go from rural crossroads to epicurean epicenter has brought some stresses. With an influx of out-of-town diners, parking is one. "Some locals put up their -- completely illegal -- NO PARKING signs in front of their houses," notes Yountville Sun editor Sharon Stensaas. As for the houses, Yountville cottages can now fetch more than \$1 million.

And yet there are benefits. Hotel occupancy taxes fund amenities – sidewalk plantings, underground utilities – that other small towns envy. And while locals may not regu-

Perfect poulet at Bouchon
BELOW Ad Hoc's decor pays playful homage to the other white meat
RIGHT The scene at Redd



larly sample the \$250, nine-course tasting menu at the French Laundry, mayor and Yountville Chamber of Commerce executive director Cindy Saucerman says you can often find locals at Bouchon or Ad Hoc. “Really,” she says, “we are so spoiled here.”

Yountville has been good to its chefs too. “I love Yountville,” says Thomas Keller. Once a year, Keller expresses that love by opening the French Laundry to 62 lucky Yountville residents, chosen by lottery, with prices scaled back to his 1994 opening day. Yountville, says Philippe Jeanty, “is the best of both worlds. It has the American drive, but a little bit of the French.”

The thing about Yountville is that it makes

great food seem like a regular pleasure. A joy you should experience every day, and one available not just to rich tourists but to Little Leaguers and Cecil in his beret too. Not every place can become a great food town, Anton Ego, the critic in *Ratatouille*, might have said. But a great food town can come from anywhere.

In Yountville, reservations can be notoriously hard to get. If you’re staying at one of the Napa Valley’s inns or resorts, ask the inn manager or the resort concierge to help you get a table—ideally, at the same time you book your room. But even at the last minute, they may be able to book you the meal of your dreams.

Our favorite Yountville restaurants

Ad Hoc THE MOOD Thomas Keller’s “temporary” restaurant is now a permanent fixture, and that’s a good thing. Ad Hoc raises family-style dining to a new level: no tater tots here, but four-course prix fixe meals that feature superbly done comfort foods.

DON’T MISS The artisanal-cheese third course. \$\$\$\$; 6476 Washington St., Yountville; 707/944-2487.

Bistro Jeanty THE MOOD Bistro perfection, jolly, Gallic, charming. We defy you to have a bad time here.

DON’T MISS Coq au vin, crème de tomate en croûte. \$\$\$; 6510 Washington St.; 707/944-0103.

Bouchon THE MOOD Lyon comes to Napa Valley, with “bouchon” connoting a style of bistro specific to the French city and the menu crowded with classic bistro fare. Great fun, especially late at night at the zinc bar.

DON’T MISS The boudin noir. \$\$\$\$; 6534 Washington St.; 707/944-8037.

Bouchon Bakery THE MOOD Next door to Bouchon is the world’s best bakery, with an adjoining patio ideal for your morning latte, pastry, and newspaper.

DON’T MISS The pistachio-citrus brioche. \$. 6528 Washington St.; 707/944-2253.

The French Laundry THE MOOD A rambling, chocolate brown home that did indeed house a laundry in a past life. Now the elegant yet unfussy setting pairs superbly with the food showcased in Thomas Keller’s nine-course tasting menu.

DON’T MISS Oysters and pearls (sabayon of pearl tapioca with Beau Soleil oysters and white sturgeon caviar). \$250; 6640 Washington St.; 707/944-2380.

Redd THE MOOD Sleek, midcentury modern – The Incredibles’ Edna Mode would dine here. As for Richard Reddington’s food, it walks a high-wire of adventure and ambition, and succeeds brilliantly.

DON’T MISS The glazed pork belly. Seriously. \$\$\$\$; 6480 Washington St., Yountville; 707/944-2222.



Finger-licking good ribs served with wine, natch, at BarBersQ **RIGHT** Hop aboard the Napa Valley Wine Train



An oh-so-Napa dining experience

Ride the **Napa Valley Wine Train**. This is as much a three-hour rolling culinary adventure as a train trip. Eat in a beautifully restored Pullman dining lounge; ride past wineries and vineyards that roll to the edge of forested mountains. Enjoy a meal, or relax in the wine-tasting car and sample any of 40 local vintages. The customized kitchen car has observation windows so you can watch chefs while they work.

HIGHLIGHTS Gourmet fare such as roasted Angus tenderloin or spinach salad with candied walnuts, smoked goat cheese, and honey-cider vinaigrette. **OPTIONS** Murder mysteries; moonlight runs; early lunches; Sunday dinner-and-concert series; family fun nights. *Dinner from \$49.50. In Napa; 800/427-4124 or www.winetrain.com.*

Napa Valley eats

More of our favorite plates and pairings

All Seasons Bistro. Excellent French- and California-inspired dishes, and a good wine list. \$\$\$; closed Mon. 1400 Lincoln Ave., Calistoga; 707/942-9111.

Azzurro Pizzeria e Enoteca. Beloved pizzeria where the Bianco pie—thin, blistered, and topped with sweet onions, gorgonzola, and rosemary—is a must-try. \$\$ 1260 Main St., Napa; 707/255-5552.

BarBersQ. Stephen Barber's 'cue—brisket,

ribs, pulled-pork sandwiches—is exemplary, as are the sides of mac 'n' cheese, cornbread and collard greens. Less traditional are some of the condiments (like serrano chile-spiced vinegar) and the wide-ranging wine list. You gotta try the Memphis-style pulled-pork sandwich, accompanied by, oh, a Frog's Leap Zin. \$\$ 3900 Bel Aire Plaza, Napa; 707/224-6600.

Bistro Don Giovanni. Authentic Italian fare in a setting that spectacularly shows off the valley.

\$\$-\$\$\$ 4110 Howard Ln., Napa; 707/224-3300.

Bottega. Napa Valley history meets authentic Italian cooking in the old stone walls of Yountville's 1870 V Marketplace. Festive stripes and lights turn the place into a party every night, with über-chef Michael Chiarello hosting locals and tourists alike. Late night brings the valleys winemakers and chefs around the fireplaces on the wraparound veranda. \$\$\$; 6525 Washington St., Ag; 707/945-1050.

Calistoga Inn Restaurant & Brewery. Enjoy an American menu, microbrews, and live music at this down-home establishment. \$\$\$ 1250 Lincoln Ave., Calistoga; 707/942-4101.

Celadon. This sleek restaurant serves superb Mediterranean cuisine. \$\$\$ 500 Main St., Napa; 707/254-9690.

Cindy's Backstreet Kitchen. In a charming two-story house in downtown St. Helena,



Ordering charcuterie at Oxbow Public Market

prominent Napa Valley restaurateur Cindy Pawlcyn serves California comfort (meat loaf, tamales) with a Southern twist. \$-\$\$\$. 1327 Railroad Ave., St. Helena; 707/963-1200.

Cole's Chop House. Rib-eye, porterhouse, New York: At the upscale steakhouse, all the important decisions revolve around beef. The sides are traditional (creamed spinach, onion rings) and the setting—especially the patio—attractively casual. \$\$\$\$. 1122 Main St., Napa; 707/224-6328.

Dean & DeLuca. Don't tell New Yorkers, but the St. Helena branch of Manhattan's foodie market mainstay may be even more alluring to palates (and wallets) than the SoHo original. \$-\$\$\$. 607 S. St. Helena Hwy., St. Helena; 707/967-9980.

Farmstead Restaurant. It doesn't get much closer to farm-to-fork cooking than in the beautifully restored barn at Longmeadow Ranch. Taste the Halls' vibrant wines and olive oils in the Gothic Revival Logan-Ives House next door; come have a cheeseburger with California cheddar and arugula at Farmstead (the beef and even the flour for the potato bun are from the ranch, and the chef thinks it's the best dish on the menu—although his Southern-inspired comfort food is stellar across the board); then buy some seeds or seedlings for the tomato and arugula you've just had at the nursery out the back door. \$\$\$; 738 Main St., St. Helena; 707/963-4555.

Go Fish. Cindy Pawlcyn has filled the long-time Napa Valley need for a good seafood restaurant. \$\$\$; 641 Main St., St. Helena; 707/963-0700.

Gott's Roadside. Come all the way to Napa Valley for a burger and a shake? Yes, when it's the Wisconsin sourdough burger and black-and-white shake at the valley institution formerly known as Taylor's Automatic Refresher (same everything except for the new name). \$-\$. 933 Main St., St. Helena; 707/963-3486. In Oxbow Public Market, 644 First St., Napa; 707/224-6900.

Martini House. From chef Todd Humphries and designer Pat Kuleto comes the best sort of wine-country restaurant, favoring foraged and organic ingredients. \$\$\$; 1245 Spring St., St. Helena; 707/963-2233.

Neela's. This relatively new Indian restaurant has already amassed a substantial local fan base. The khatai rolls—chicken, mango, and pickled onion wrapped in mini-rotis—are addictive. \$\$; 975 Clinton St., Napa; 707/226-9988.

Norman Rose Tavern. The folks behind beloved Azzurro (of Bianco pizza fame) opened this new venture in December 2009 and it's fast becoming as popular as their pizza place. Find a spot in the open-air courtyard for enhanced American classics such as a hefty burger, made with meat from Five Dot Ranch, one of Oxbow's neighbors, and accompanied by housemade pickles and fries

doused in toppings like truffle parmesan or sea salt and black pepper. \$\$\$; 1401 First St., Napa; 707/258-1516.

Oxbow Public Market. Opened in 2008, Oxbow is such a foodie paradise, you almost expect harps to play and angels to flutter as you enter the building. More than 25 local purveyors of all things organic, artisanal, and delicious have gathered in a 40,000-square-foot cathedral of sustainable yumminess. Need to pick up organic, handcrafted charcuterie? Look no further. In the mood for a piping-hot Venezuelan arepa? It's here. Seasonal produce? Local wine? Freshly baked bread? Check, check, and check. \$-\$\$\$. 610 and 644 First St., Napa; 707/226-6529.

Press. The finest ingredients to be had are cooked simply at the warm, stylish steakhouse. New York strip and rib-eye are stand-outs, and potato cake is always in season. And then there's the bar menu's hot dog—a full foot long, blistered with grill marks, set on a housemade bun, and made of Wagyu beef (the coddled, marbled kind that made Kobe beef famous). Order a glass of Napa Cab to complete the dog's transformation into a first-class meal. \$\$\$; closed Mon, Tue; 587 St. Helena Hwy. S., St. Helena; 707/967-0550.

Solbar. For a fantastic open-air lunch, soak in the sun on the patio, set between the pool and bocce-ball courts at the Solage Calistoga resort. The menu features seasonal cooking using local ingredients. \$\$; 755 Silverado Trail, Napa; 707/226-0850.

Terra. In an old stone building a block off Main Street, Hiro Sone—one of the pioneers of Asian fusion—combines California cuisine with Japanese ingredients. \$\$\$; closed Tue; 1345 Railroad Ave., St. Helena; 707/963-8931.

Ubuntu. Fitness and fine dining—two great concepts that work even better together. At Ubuntu blissed-out yogis practice sun salutations in the upstairs studio while chefs turn out amazing vegetarian fare in the gallery-like restaurant. Trust us, there's nothing ascetic about it. \$\$\$; 1140 Main St.; Napa; 707/251-5656.

Zuzu. The tapas and wine bar has drawn raves for its tasty menu and lively ambience. \$\$\$; 829 Main St., Napa; 707/224-8555.

Float away with Napa Valley Balloons



Adventures in the valley

The best things to do when you aren't tasting

Ballooning

Float over Napa with **Balloons Above the Valley** (from \$195; 800/464-6824 or www.balloonrides.com), **Napa Valley Balloons** (from \$220; 800/253-2224 or www.napavalleyballoons.com), or **Calistoga Hot Air Balloons** (\$225 per person for one-hour flight, including champagne breakfast; 888/995-7700 or www.calistogaballoons.com).

Biking

Napa Valley's backroads are ideal for cycling: quiet, mostly flat, and beautiful, albeit often clogged with traffic. **Napa Valley Bike Tours: Rentals** (from \$24) and guided tours (from \$115). 6488 Washington St., Yountville; 800/707-2453 or www.napavalleybiketours.com. **Calistoga Bike Shop:** Rentals (from \$20) and guided tours (from \$80). 1318 Lincoln Ave.; 707/942-9687 or calistogabikeshop.com.

Filling up on eye candy

DiRosa Preserve. Strolling the preserve's 53 acres filled with sculptures, wildflowers, and more tributes to art and nature makes for the ideal afternoon activity. 5200 Carneros Hwy., Napa; 707/226-5991 or www.dirosapreserve.org.

Old Faithful. Who knew Calistoga was home to a natural geyser that shoots 50 to 75 feet into the air every 40 minutes? As Snoopy says as he looks at the geyser in the framed Charles Schulz cartoon hanging on a nearby wall, "Wow." \$10. 1299 Tubbs Lane, Calistoga; 707/942-6463 or oldfaithfulgeyser.com

Hiking

Bale Grist Mill State Historic Park. Built in 1846, the mill processed flour and cornmeal back in the valley's early days. The park is also the site of the first church built in Napa

Sculptures dot the landscape at DiRosa Preserve
RIGHT Soaking it up at
Lavender Hill Spa



Valley. Take the two-mile round-trip hike linking this park and Bothe-Napa Valley State Park (see below). \$5 per vehicle. 3369 St. Helena Hwy., St. Helena; 707/942-4575.

Bothe-Napa Valley State Park. In most wine-country towns, it's hard to find a great hike. Bothe-Napa Valley State Park solves that problem with shaded trails through redwood and madrone forests and along Ritchey Creek. \$8 per vehicle. 3801 St. Helena Hwy. N., Calistoga; 707/942-4575.

Kayaking

The Amazon of Napa? Not quite, but that's what they call the lazy Napa River, which runs through town and attracts ospreys, great blue herons, and folks looking for a peaceful paddle far from the valley's overcrowded tasting rooms. Rent kayaks from **Napa Valley Adventure Tours**, at Oxbow

Public Market, steps from the put-in. From \$15 per hour; 707/259-1833.

Learning l'art de la cuisine

At the **Culinary Institute of America at Greystone**, the venerable cooking school housed in a 19th-century stone building, some of the country's best chefs perfect their techniques for béarnaise sauce and pain au chocolat. You can learn a little something yourself at the school's daily demonstration classes watching a white-capped student-chef prepare an apple crisp with brandy crème anglaise. You get the recipe and a tasty sample at the end of the hour-long class. \$15; demo reservations advised. 2555 Main St., St. Helena; 707/967-2320 or www.ciachef.edu.

Spa-ing & soaking

Calistoga Spa Hot Springs Resort. Here you

can soak in a series of spring-fed hot springs for less than half the usual fee. And unlike at Indian Springs down the road, you don't have to book a spa treatment to get access to the pool. The 104° water makes floating under a sky full of stars feel just right. \$10. 1006 Washington St.; 866/822-5772 or calistogaspaspa.com.

Lavender Hill Spa. At many bargain mud baths, everyone wallows in the same mud, but at the vaguely Balinese Lavender Hill Spa, in a prim little lavender cottage, you get a freshly drawn tub of hot water sprinkled with volcanic ash, sea salts, and lavender oil. Marinating in this mix is what swimming in a volcanic geyser might feel like. Afterward, cool down on a table while an attendant massages your feet. \$85 for bath and foot massage; reservations required. 1015 Foothill Blvd.; 800/528-4772, 707/942-4495, or lavenderhillspsa.com.

Stocking your cellar

The laid-back **Wine Garage** is a former gas station filled with small-production wines, many from less-famous regions like Lodi, Paso Robles, and Amador, all under \$25. The owner negotiates prices, so you can find some great deals. The best bargain of all: For \$30 or less, you get a half-gallon jug (equivalent to almost three bottles) filled from a "gas" pump that flows with various blends. Also in town, **Enoteca Wine Shop** has dozens of well-chosen wines, many impossible to find elsewhere. Check out the unusual sparkling choices. **Wine Garage:** 1020 Foothill Blvd., Calistoga; 707-942-5332 or winegarage.net. **Enoteca Wine Shop:** 1348 Lincoln Ave., Calistoga; 707/942-1117 or www.enotecawineshop.com.

Travel Resources

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The Year's Best Wines—and Recipes to Match

Entertaining at home? Sunset's wine editor presents the perfect recipe pairings for the year's best bottles. Try Spanish-style lamb stew with a steal of a syrah, crab cakes and champagne slaw with a select Schramsberg Chardonnay, and more.

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Top 10 Wine Country Escapes

Savor our editors' picks for the West's best wine country trips. Sip Oregon's famed pinot noirs in the Willamette Valley, taste Washington wines in Walla Walla, explore La Ruta del Vino in Baja, and more.

www.sunset.com/travel/wine-country



Top 20 Romantic Getaways

Napa Valley is undeniably romantic, but the West is full of other perfect places to escape with your special someone, from a Moroccan-themed inn set in Palm Springs to oceanview villas in Sayulita, Mexico.

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