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NAPA VALLEY
VINEYARDS



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NAPA VALLEY

Back + Better than EVER!

by MCLEAN ROBBINS

LESS THAN TWO YEARS AGO, FIRES DEVASTATED MUCH OF THE NAPA VALLEY REGION. NOW THE AREA IS BACK AND BETTER THAN EVER THANKS TO STRONG HARVESTS, BUZZY NEW HOSPITALITY PROJECTS AND AN ADDED EMPHASIS ON CREATING MEMORABLE EXPERIENCES FOR GUESTS.

From top: Calistoga Ranch entrance, Lunch and entrance at Lovina.



WELCOME TO WINE COUNTRY

Just a little over a year ago, more than 170,000 acres of land in and around Napa County were impacted by devastating wildfires. Today, most visitors would be hard-pressed to see remaining damage, and the impact on ongoing wine production has been low.

To an outsider, Napa is often thought of as a singular destination — a city where wine is plentiful and vineyards stretch as far as the eye can see. It is, technically. But what many don't understand is that the Napa Valley itself is not just one place, but simultaneously a sprawling and densely-packed area, more than 30 miles long and five miles wide, and part of an even larger 700 square mile Napa County. The area includes over 475 vineyards and more than 1,000 distinct wine brands. Despite all the hype, the Napa region still produces just 4% of the state's total wine, the majority in small-batch, high-quality production of grapes like Cabernet Sauvignon and Chardonnay, many of which are reserved just for those visiting the vineyard and/or wine club members. Moral of the story: if you're looking for something special, you'll almost certainly want to make the trip in person.

In order to divide the valley into more navigable areas, visitors tend to call Napa by wine-focused sub-sets: the foodie Yountville, the small towns with big wines of Cab-heavy Oakville and Rutherford, posh St. Helena, boho-chic Calistoga, and the up-and-coming Napa proper. To plan the ideal visit, it's important to plot out not only what you want to drink, but the overall feeling of the visit — is it a tasting menu extravaganza, a wine buying spree, a girls' weekend of wine and spa, romantic reconnection? Whether it's your first trip or you're a seasoned collector, Napa's diverse mix of hotels, restaurants, and wine-focused experiences offer something for almost everyone.

Calistoga

Romantic getaways + wellness escapes

For a leisurely visit of three days or more, begin in Calistoga at the north end of the Valley, where the mountainous scenery instantly puts one in vacation mode.

Romance seekers should look to **Calistoga Ranch**, an Auberge resort. The 50-room,

157-acre hotel is creatively nestled into the mountainside, with each spacious lodge-style room styled as its own private cabin. Each room offers ample privacy, and most feature outdoor hot tubs and/or indoor-outdoor fire features. The vibe is almost that of a glamping resort, although with decidedly more wine and fewer cowboys. Debuting early this summer, updated rooms will reflect the property's luxe ranch feel but in a more sophisticated color palette of blues and greys. It's one of the few resorts in the area offering multi-bedroom lodges with full kitchens, perfect for families. It would be easy to check into this resort and never leave — hiking trails, two sparkling pools and onsite vineyard are perfect for those seeking a little R&R. The five-room hilltop spa is also a delight, where one can bathe in mineral-rich whirlpools or lounge in front of an outdoor fireplace post-treatment.

Sister property **Solage**, also an Auberge resort, feels like the Ranch's chic younger sibling with whitewashed buildings and a fresh, youthful spirit. We'd definitely recommend to book for a girls' weekend or a spa-focused escape here. Every bit as modern as the Ranch is rustic, the signature restaurant, **Solbar**, is a must-visit, dishing out fresh and flavorful California cuisine in a contemporary setting. The menu is even divided into "hearty" and "healthy" categories so you can decide how much you want to indulge.

Just up the road, we're eagerly awaiting the Summer 2019 opening of the area's first **Four Seasons**, which promises 80 rooms and 20 residences, all of which will feature fireplaces and private terraces, an eight-room spa, general store and a small private vineyard.

Calistoga proper is just a ten-minute hop away. While the shopping isn't grand, it's still easy to spend an afternoon exploring the city's small local bookstore, home and apparel boutiques, or indulging in a signature soak in the area's many mineral springs or mud baths.

Standout dining spots include **Lovina**, offering New American fare in a historic Craftsman home. When featured on the menu, definitely order the chef's play on chicken tikka topped with homemade lentil chips. If you're in the mood for a tasting, end your stroll

VISITORS TEND TO CALL NAPA BY WINE-FOCUSED SUB-SETS TO DIVIDE THE VALLEY: THE FOODIE YOUNTVILLE, THE SMALL TOWNS WITH BIG WINES OAKVILLE AND RUTHERFORD, POSH ST. HELENA, BOHO-CHIC CALISTOGA, AND THE UP-AND-COMING NAPA PROPER.



Clockwise: RH Yountville restaurant.
Aerial view of Meadowood. Shaved vegetable
salad at RH Yountville. Lodge-style
rooms at Calistoga Ranch.



From top: Beef ribs and beets at The Charter Oak, Outdoor firepits and pool at Las Alcobas, Meadowood Spa Reception.



WALKABLE ST. HELENA IS ONE OF OUR FAVORITE TOWNS FOR ITS BUZZY MAIN STREET, CONVENIENT PROXIMITY TO TOP WINERIES AND VARIETY OF LUXURY HOTELS.

downtown at **Tank Garage**, which makes its home in a chic vintage service station. We also love the **Callistoga Wine Stop**, located in the town's old train depot. Owner Tom Pelter specializes in local offerings and has been selling and talking about wine for more than 30 years. Ask him to make you up a case of local favorites, select the best bottles for cellaring, or even help decide the pairings for your next dinner party. We think of him like a one-man wine club without the recurring subscription.

It's always best to make wine tasting appointments in advance, particularly if you're looking to hit the big names like **Schramsberg**, known for its bubbly, or **Chateau Montelena**, designed to look like an authentic castle. Montelena is a name you likely recognize – it's the winery known for putting California grapes on the world's stage in the 1976 famed "Judgement of Paris" wine competition, as well as the setting for the 2008 comedy *Bottle Shock*. Don't want to wait in line? In-the-know guests head to **Davies Vineyards**, the parent company behind Schramsberg, where you can also sip the sparkling stuff out of its St. Helena tasting room, as well as their red offerings under the name J. Davies.

However, one of the best ways to experience the area is to enjoy a small producer that offers that only-in-Napa experience. We love **Frank Family Vineyards**, owned by former Disney president Richard Frank. This vineyard is one of the few in Napa to offer an impressive collection of bubbly, white and red wines, many of which are named after Frank's beloved dogs. Many days, you'll even find Frank himself greeting guests.

St. Helena *In the center of it all*

Those looking for a more walkable retreat should try **St. Helena** as their home base. Thoroughly central, St. Helena offers no shortage of places to stay, from the country-club chic **Meadowood**, with its eponymous 3 Michelin-starred tasting menu hotspot, the **Restaurant at Meadowood**, to the sleekly modern **Las Alcobas Napa Valley**, a Luxury Collection Hotel, which offers walk-to-town positioning and expansive balconies with firepits overlooking the Beringer Vineyards, the intimate **Ink House**, or the quietly charming **Harvest Inn**.

We find St. Helena to be the truest "town" in the valley. Its popular Main Street is a de-

light, where you'll find everything from the 90-year-old **Model Bakery**, a Napa institution boasting English muffins so delicious they'll make you rethink giving up carbs, to the quirky **Martin Showroom**, which, on a recent visit, boasted a \$3.9 million T-Rex skeleton named Roosevelt amidst modern sofas and the latest chic coffee table books.

Throw a stone and you'll hit some of the valley's best wineries. The new and darkly sexy tasting room for **The Prisoner** is a must visit, offering reds and whites at more affordable price points than many in the valley. We'll return again and again to **Hall**, which offers excellent Cabernet Sauvignon, as well as more than 33 acres of gardens with an impressive collection of over 35 pieces of sculpture and modern art. Appointments aren't required, a rarity in Napa, so you'll also be able to come and go as you please. Actually, some of the best experiences you'll have here are the ones you won't even have to book ahead or online. We turn to experts, like Karen Rowley of **Many More Travels**, who curates custom gastro tours with invite-only wineries and chefs as well as several small group weekends each year. If you like to cook as much as eat, consider a trip with **Hugh Carpenter**, who runs the well-regarded Camp Napa Culinary, classes held several times each year which combine cooking with visits to top local restaurants and high-end wineries.

For dinner, pass on at least one tasting menu evening for the rotating selection of gourmet chicken wings or the burger at **The Charter Oak** from Christopher Kostow of Meadowood fame, or skip the wine for a night and try a craft cocktail from speakeasy-style local favorite **Goose & Gander**.

Oakville & Rutherford *Where the serious wine drinkers come to play*

Just a few minutes down the road, Oakville and Rutherford offer up some of the area's top vineyards and one standout hotel property. **Auberge du Soleil**, sister hotel to Callistoga Ranch and Solage, dominates with its hilltop restaurant, another Michelin-starred spot, offering one of the most romantic experiences available in the entire valley. For atmosphere without the \$1,000-plus-per-night and up price tag, snag an outdoor table for lunch or a late afternoon drink at the no-reservation-required bistro on property.

These towns have no shortage of hard-hitting

travel + food



Clockwise: Deluxe Vineyard View Room at Las Alcobas, Palmaz wine flight, Entrance at The Charter Oak, Solbar dining room at Solage.



THESE TOWNS HAVE NO SHORTAGE OF HARD-HITTING WINERY EXPERIENCES AND CABERNET SAUVIGNONS THAT COST AS MUCH AS YOUR PLANE TICKETS FROM NEW YORK.

winery experiences and Cabernet Sauvignons that cost as much as your plane tickets from New York. Interested in the art of winemaking? A must-see is **Palmaz Vineyards**, one of the most high-tech in the valley, built into an 18-story cavern at the base of Mount George. For bragging rights, book into the newly-open-to-the-public **Newton**, part of the LVMH portfolio, which name drops Dom Pérignon, Krug, Veuve Clicquot, and Ruinart in their book of booze. To truly inspire jealousy amongst your wine-loving friends, grab a hard-to-get visit to only-available-with-the-right-strings-pulled **Harlan** or **BOND**, both of which boast lengthy waiting lists for their wine clubs. Hint: **BOND** is on this year's Camp Napa visit list.

Yountville

Foodie focused

The **French Laundry** is a restaurant that has put — and kept — Napa dining on the map

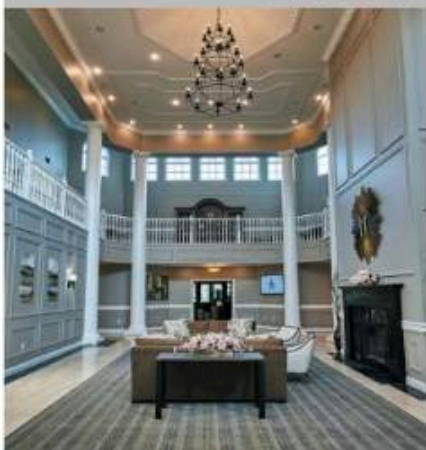
for decades, and if you're coming to worship at the altar of Thomas Keller, there's no better place to do it than in **Yountville**. This is where he boasts four distinct dining ventures: the prix fixe French **Laundry**, which books exactly two months in advance; his signature **Bouchon Bakery**, where we encourage you to get both bread and a homemade Oreo; the decidedly less pricey \$58-per-person prix fixe **Ad Hoc + Addendum**, where we recently tried the best fried chicken on the planet; or his newest venture, a Mexican/Oaxacan hot joint, **La Calenda**.

There's no better place to stay than the sleek **Bardessono**, built from salvaged stone and reclaimed wood, boasting LEED Platinum certification. It feels modern without veering at all into crunchy California territory. While you're there, wander across the street to the new **RH Yountville**, a Restoration Hardware concept store offering a sleek restaurant perfect for brunch or lunch. Finish with an elevated tasting experience in

From top: Winemaking at Palmaz, Bardessono Magnolia Courtyard.



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Clockwise: View from Auberge du Soleil, CIA at Copia Cooking School Bootcamp, Wine Vault at the Historic Ma(i)sonry Building at RH Yountville, Scallops at The Restaurant at Auberge du Soleil.



FOR YEARS, DOWNTOWN NAPA
OFFERED LITTLE MORE THAN A STOP ON THE
WAY TO "REAL" WINE COUNTRY, BUT
RECENTLY, IT'S BECOME A SEE-AND-BE-SEEN
DESTINATION UNTO ITSELF.

Ma(i)sonry, a two-story wine vault in a more than century-old stone home. You'll experience unique flights from hand-selected area producers, many of which don't offer tasting experiences elsewhere. Weather permitting, lounge on comfortable sofas and enjoy your drinks in the trellised outdoor garden surrounded by olive trees and chandeliers.

Napa
Buzzy + youthful

For years, downtown Napa offered little more than a stop on the way to "real" wine country, but recently, it's become a see-and-be-seen destination unto itself, full of new boutique (and well-priced) hotels like the **Andaz** by Hyatt as well as the **Archer**, which boasts the city's only rooftop bar (**Sky & Vine**) as well as a **Charlie Palmer Steak** restaurant. Wineries like the new **Ashes + Diamonds** offer stylish midcentury modern décor, and in Napa proper, you'll find actual

nightlife beyond 10pm.

Pop in and out of tasting rooms and shops as well as spots like **Bounty Hunter**, a popular wine shop, barbecue restaurant and tasting room that offers a standout selection of more than 400 top bottles. We could easily spend a day here in Napa – starting with a cooking class at the **Culinary Institute of America's (CIA)** at **Copia** campus, browsing local shops at **First Street Napa** like the collection of artisan makers at **Maker's Market** and the food-focused **Napastāk Napa Valley** – or the **Oxbow Public Market**, a unique collection of food stalls and farm-to-table vendors offering everything from oysters to fresh-pressed juices and one of the area's only distillers.

As you head out of town, don't worry, a return visit is a must, not just because you've likely joined at least one wine club, but because there's more than enough to see to justify a second, third or fourth trip.

From top: Bardessono pool. Dining at The Restaurant at Auberge du Soleil.



CIA Cooking School photo by Victor Samuel Photography.

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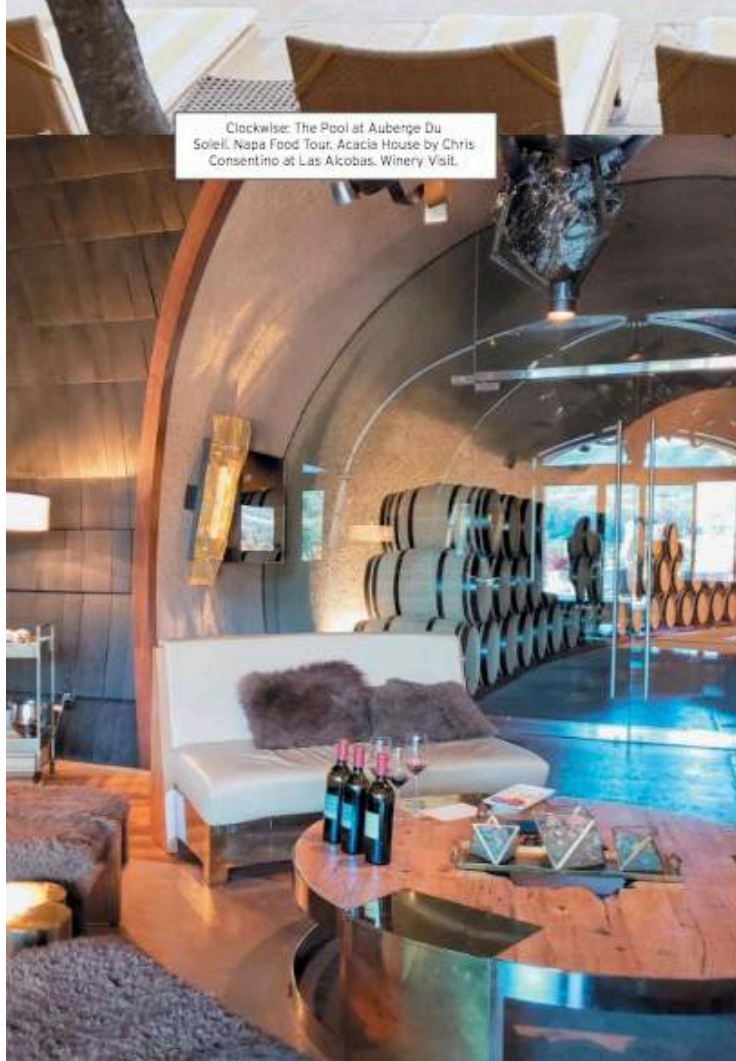
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Clockwise: The Pool at Auberge Du Soleil, Napa Food Tour, Acacia House by Chris Consentino at Las Alcobas, Winery Visit.



WHILE HARVEST FROM AUGUST THROUGH OCTOBER IS TECHNICALLY "HIGH" SEASON FOR NAPA, THERE'S TRULY NO BAD TIME TO DRINK WINE.

THE LOGISTICS

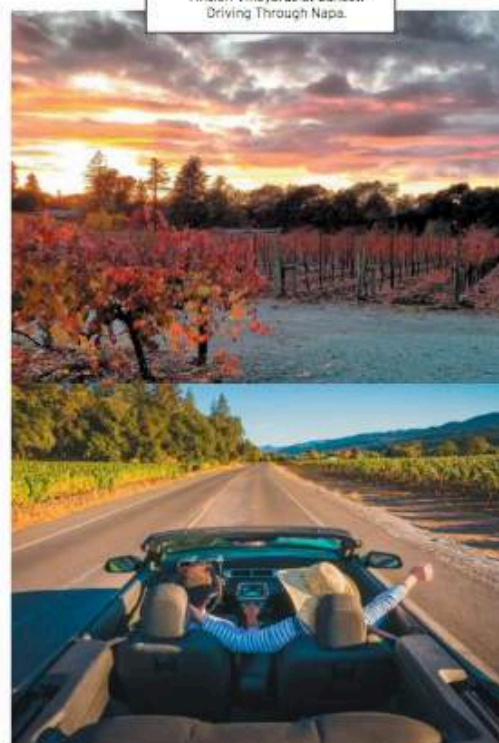
While harvest from August through October is technically "high" season for Napa, there's truly no bad time to drink wine. Temperatures are mild year-round and rarely go below 50 degrees during the day. In fact, we prefer spring, where the area's already lushly green hillsides become even more vibrant with blooming flowers and plants coming into their own, as well as the quieter periods during the late fall and winter when you can avoid crowds at many of the larger wineries and feel almost as if you have the place to yourself.

We'd suggest spending a night or two on the front or back end of your visit in San Francisco. The newly-renovated **Four Seasons San Francisco** is a great choice for an easy and modern downtown location. It's about a 90 minute drive out to Napa proper, longer if you're headed up to areas like Calistoga, or hit weekend or rush hour traffic. While wine plus driving never mixes, we suggest renting

a car for the duration of your visit, as having a car is useful to prowl between towns during the day. We love **Silvercar**, easily accessible from downtown San Francisco or the airport, as they rent only three fully-loaded Audi options: the A4, Q5 or Cabriolet, each equipped with navigation, fast passes for tolls and Wi-Fi to ensure a smooth trip. Oakland, Sacramento, Sonoma and San Jose airports are all options for easy connections within the state of California. Note that Napa County has a small airstrip reserved for private and charter flights.

When you're in town, drivers are a must for full-day wine touring. Many hotels offer a house car option or their own recommended driver services. Just be sure to book in advance, as wineries and drivers alike book up weeks — if not months — in advance for weekend peak season experiences. While **Uber** is readily available, we found the wait for rides to be long and fares high compared to city prices. ■

Ancien Vineyards at Sunset.
Driving Through Napa.



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