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TRAVEL

Napa and Sonoma Open Up

From the vineyards to the city streets, new tasting rooms, resorts and restaurants refresh wine country



The terrace at Faust Haus Wines in St. Helena offers views of the valley. (Adrian Gaut)



By Kim Marcus, Tim Fish, MaryAnn Worobiec, Aaron Romano

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Wine lovers ready to get out and about have a lot to look forward to in the heartland of California wine country. Napa and Sonoma counties are

mostly open for business as summer arrives, and several new tasting rooms, hotels and restaurant projects have just launched or are in the offing. All are eager to welcome visitors as the easing of pandemic protocols allows. The city of Napa continues to cement its status as a major wine tourism hub on its own, while Healdsburg, in northern Sonoma, beckons travelers with the region's largest luxury resort, the Montage. And one of the most-awaited developments in the northern Napa Valley, the new Four Seasons lodging and dining complex, is on the verge of opening its doors.

To help you more easily discover the best of what's new, the listings below are divided geographically into three sections: Napa Valley proper; the city of Napa; and Sonoma County. Each offers distinctive destinations and plenty of room to explore as the days grow longer and warmer.

Napa Valley

Four Seasons Resort and Residences Napa Valley

400 Silverado Trail, Calistoga; (707) 709-2100; fourseasons.com/napavalley

Calistoga was Napa Valley's first resort, when its hot springs drew wealthy San Franciscans to partake of the waters. Today, wine vies with geothermal pleasures in the laid-back hamlet, and both traditions are amplified at the latest and most ambitious resort yet in northern Napa Valley: the newest address of the Four Seasons luxury hotel group.

The complex takes wine country enjoyment to the next level by being home not only to refined accommodations but also its own winery, complete with vineyard and winemaker. And not just any winemaker, but one of the best: Thomas Rivers Brown (who has just opened his own Rivers Marie tasting room on the other side of town). The new winery is envisioned to give guests an intimate look at the winemaking process from the vineyard to the barrel room, as well as offering bespoke tasting experiences.

The property is located at the base of the rugged volcanic slopes on the east side of the valley known as the Palisades, amid prime vineyard terrain. The 23-acre site holds 7.5 acres of Cabernet Sauvignon, and small rows of vines are planted around many of the 85 guest rooms and suites, which feature a contemporary wine country farmhouse design, complete with fireplace. No unit is higher than two stories, and they are arrayed to provide maximum privacy amid the expansive vineyard views.

There's a large spa, outdoor steam decks and a mudding bay to help guests relax and enjoy the geothermal heat. Multiple pools and smaller whirlpools are ensconced in a broad and airy terrace, which will also feature a Mexican-style grill called Campo, outfitted with a cocktail bar. Just a few steps away, the resort's headline restaurant, Truss, helmed by chief Erik Anderson, formerly of the San Francisco Michelin two-star Coi, will offer a California-inspired menu.

A 24-seat demonstration kitchen designed for interactive and hands-on learning is also on tap, as is a full bar, fireside lounge and more casual dining space. Not least, sommelier Morgan Gray, formerly of Grand Award-winning Restaurant Gary Danko, is building a 250-selection wine list for the property.

Brion

5537 Solano Ave., Napa; (707) 339-7686; brionwines.com; tastings by appointment; \$NA

Just south of the town of Yountville is Brion, the passion project of former oil and gas executive Brion Wise. Located on the west side of the valley at the end of an idyllic country lane that traverses the winery's Sleeping Lady Vineyard, the smartly designed gravity-flow winery offers expansive views of the valley, the Vaca Range to the east and the surrounding vineyards.

Housed in a renovated 1876 "bank" barn built into a hillside, Brion offers an open and airy tasting environment that extends onto a spacious patio

surrounded by an oak woodland. The winery makes single-vineyard Cabernet Sauvignons from top appellations in Napa and Sonoma, overseen by a trio of talented winemakers—Julien Fayard, Mark Herold and Massimo Monticelli—who each specialize in a given site.

Two tours (by appointment) are given per day, each about an hour-and-a-half to two-hours long, that begin with a glass of Champagne. For an exploration of Cabernet far from the madding crowd, Brion is hard to beat.

Faust Haus

2867 St. Helena Highway, St. Helena; (707) 200-2560; faustwines.com; tastings by appointment, Thursday to Monday; \$55

The charcoal-colored Victorian house perched on the west side of Highway 29 stands in stark contrast to its surrounding natural landscape. Built in 1878, the house was formerly St. Clement winery before Huneus Vintners purchased the property in 2016.

The renovation evokes Dr. Faust, a character from German lore who sells his soul to the Devil in exchange for worldly pleasures. The first floor represents Faust's sullen and moody vibes, like in the narrow, dark-hued library with a long dining table and blue and gold accents. Here, collodion photographs and ephemera from the winery's estate in Coombsville (20 miles south) adorn the walls. Up stairs, the room transforms from dark to light, representing Faust's enlightenment. Drenched in sun, the open second floor has minimal furnishings and white-neutral-and-tan accents.

Outside, a terrace overlooking the valley is an excellent setting for an alfresco tasting. Below ground, a stonewall wine cellar with lounge seating offers a speakeasy-like feel.

Rivers-Marie

900 Foothill Blvd., Calistoga; (707) 341-3127; riversmarie.com; tastings by appointment, Tuesday to Saturday; \$75

There's a good chance Napa wine lovers have tried wines from some of the dozens of labels winemaker Thomas Rivers Brown consults for. Fewer people have tasted Rivers-Marie, a limited-production brand he founded in 2002 with his wife, Genevieve Welsh, focused on single-vineyard Pinot Noir and Chardonnay from the Sonoma Coast and Cabernet from Napa.

The wines are available primarily through allocation, but visitors can now taste them at a new winery south of downtown Calistoga. Located at the home of Forni-Brown-Welsh Gardens, an organic farm that supplied produce to many local restaurants over the years, the site also happens to be where Welsh grew up.

Tucked between two unassuming production warehouses, the tasting room is intimate and airy, with a lush living wall and a long wooden table to host parties of up to eight guests. Large glass doors can be opened fully to allow fresh air to blow through as guests take in a view of the Palisades mountain range to the east.

—*Kim Marcus and Aaron Romano*

Downtown Napa

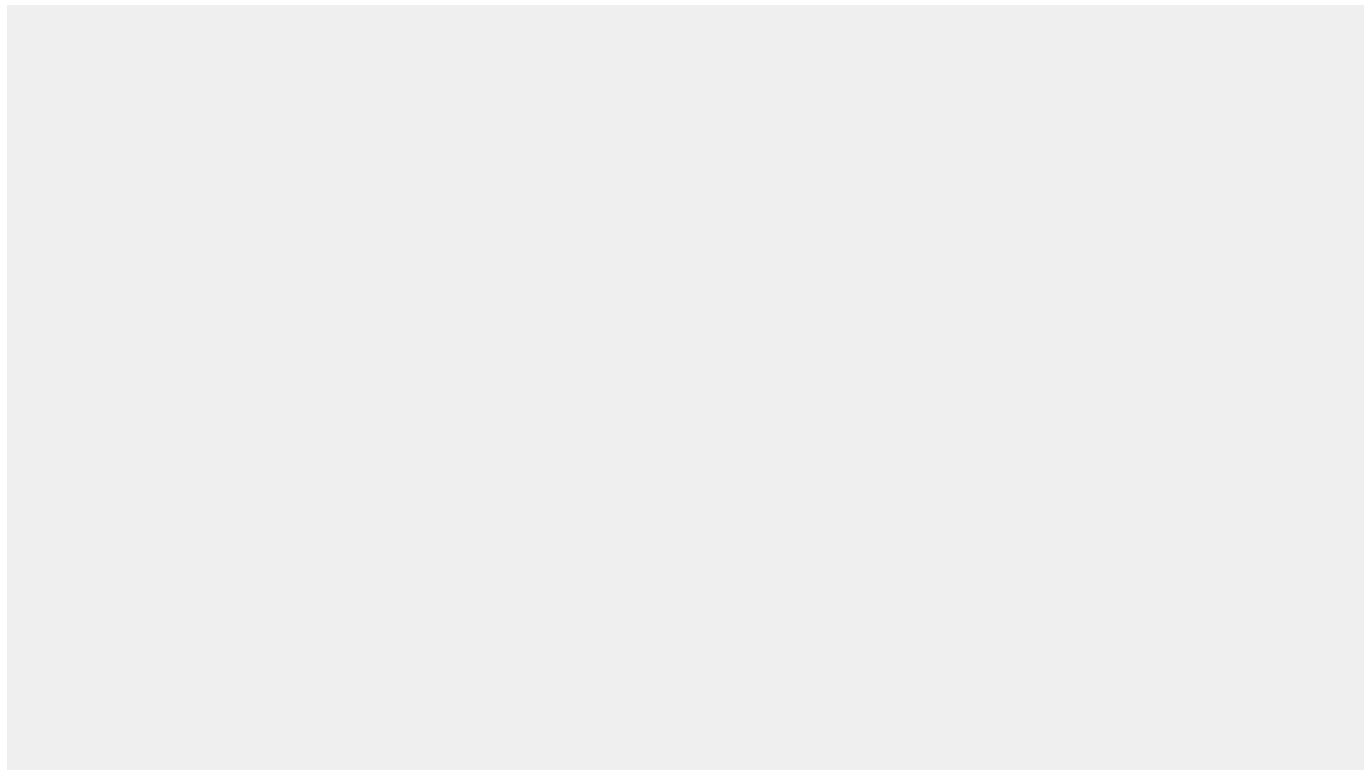
There's a saying that it takes a lot of great beer to make great wine. In the city of Napa, it took plenty of great wine, beer, cocktails and spirits to turn this once-sleepy town into a destination for people who enjoy a good drink.

"Napa is a flavor playground, not just a wine playground," observes local distiller Arthur Hartunian of Napa Valley Distillery.

Nearly 50 different tasting rooms and wine bars are operating in the easily walkable downtown district, which now includes one dedicated to sparkling wine and another devoted to rosé. There's also a growing trend of cooperative tasting rooms, where multiple brands pour their wines to customers under one roof.

Napa's surge in development started more than a decade ago, led by local entrepreneurs. They continue to take into account the new, younger

demographic making its way downtown, inspired by events like the BottleRock music festival.



California Brandy House (Adrian Gaut)

Sean Q. Meyer, general manager of a new collective tasting room called Mia Carta, points out that just a few years ago downtown Napa was empty during the day, as visitors would head up valley to tour wineries. But now the town is buzzing with activity all day long. With more hotel rooms than ever, dozens of restaurants and the plethora of tasting options, Meyer says downtown Napa is “shifting to become a more experience-driven space—it’s becoming almost a resort community, minus the resort.”

Below, we add yet more recommendations to the list of places serving fine beverages that we published in our last roundup (“[Napa: Where to Taste \[https://www.winespectator.com/articles/napa-where-to-taste-063020\]](https://www.winespectator.com/articles/napa-where-to-taste-063020),” June 30, 2020). Says Kara Haspel Lind, founder of both Kara’s Cupcakes and Bar Lucia, “The wine is flowing!”

The same can be said for the beer, spirits and cocktails.

Bar Lucia

610 1st St., Napa; (707) 226-7673; barlucia.com; open Thursday to Sunday

Kara Haspel Lind has made her first name synonymous with some of the most tempting desserts in the area. Now, adjacent to the Kara's Cupcakes outpost in the Oxbow Market, comes Bar Lucia, named after Kara's daughter and great-grandmother.

Primarily a rosé wine bar, mostly from Napa and Sonoma, Lucia also offers choices from around the world, including a selection of reds and whites. "Rosé is so fun and so celebratory," explains Lind.

Prices are friendly, with the recent selection including wines by the glass from \$8 to \$28, and bottlings from \$26 to \$160. Small bites such as pimento cheese dip, plus salads, sandwiches and yes, cupcakes, are available to pair with the wines.

Be Bubbly

1407 2nd St., Napa; (707) 637-4532; bebubblynapa.com; open Thursday to Monday

Erin Riley is the "Chief Bubblehead" of the dedicated sparkling wine bar she opened in downtown Napa after deciding that the category was underserved among the wineries and tasting rooms in the area. Sparkling wine fans can peruse her curated list covering a mix of grower Champagnes and local bubbly. There's also something for everyone cost-wise; on a recent visit, bubbles by the glass ranged from \$14 to \$42, with bottles priced from \$42 to \$750. You can also indulge in salty snacks, caviar and treats like tater tots, French fries and sliders to nibble with the glasses and bottles on offer.

California Brandy House

1300 1st St., Suite 309, Napa; (707) 732-1200; californiabrandyhouse.com; open Wednesday to Sunday; tastings \$15–\$20

This chic new spot has a prime location in the First Street Napa development and is the town's first stand-alone tasting room dedicated to luxury brandy. It's a destination that should appeal to wine lovers and craft-spirit fans alike.

Brandy, made from distilled wine, has a deep history in California. The helpful and knowledgeable staff at California Brandy House will take you through a guided flight of Germain-Robin and Argonaut brandies, explaining how wine grapes can contribute to the taste of a brandy and walking you through the steps of distillation. They'll also extoll the saga of brandy in the Golden State, from the Spanish missions to its modern status as a key ingredient in the creation of cocktails.

Hollywood Room

2485 Stockton St., Napa; (707) 265-6272; napadistillery.com/Visit/Hollywood-Room-Bar-Reservations; open Thursday to Monday

Napa Valley Distillery's tasting bar in the Oxbow Market has been a welcoming place to experience a limited selection of this local distiller's wares and cocktail ingredients. Now, the actual distillery, a mile-and-a-half away, is open to visitors for tours and tastings that showcase the entire lineup of as many as 40 different bottlings, including gin, bourbon, shrubs and bottled cocktails.

The Hollywood Room is the on-site cocktail lounge. Owner Arthur Hartunian explains that one aim of the cocktail bar is to show how the drinks can pair with food. Cocktail purists will love the attention paid to the history of the drinks on offer, down to the original recipe for bitters in the classic Manhattan. "We love wine, too," says Hartunian. "But for us, wine is food, enjoyed on the dinner table. And we know people want to try something different."

Mia Carta

1209 1st St., Napa; (707) 346-2244; miacartanapa.com; open daily (by appointment 10 a.m. to 5 p.m.; public happy hour 5 p.m. to 7 p.m)

Napa's newest tasting room is a collective of local micro-wineries including Art House Wines, Essere, Ilsley, Rarecat, Redmon and Sciandri Family. Winery principals hang out at the modern space to personally pour wine and interact with wine lovers. With local laws limiting tastings up-valley to winery spaces only, Mia Carta gives these small family brands a chance to show off their wines downtown. General manager Sean Q. Meyer explains that the group of vintners are friends, and that both the name of the tasting room and its focal point, a 14-foot walnut wall with a map of downtown Napa, speaks to their journeys together. "Community is front and center," says Meyer of the group.

Quilt & Co.

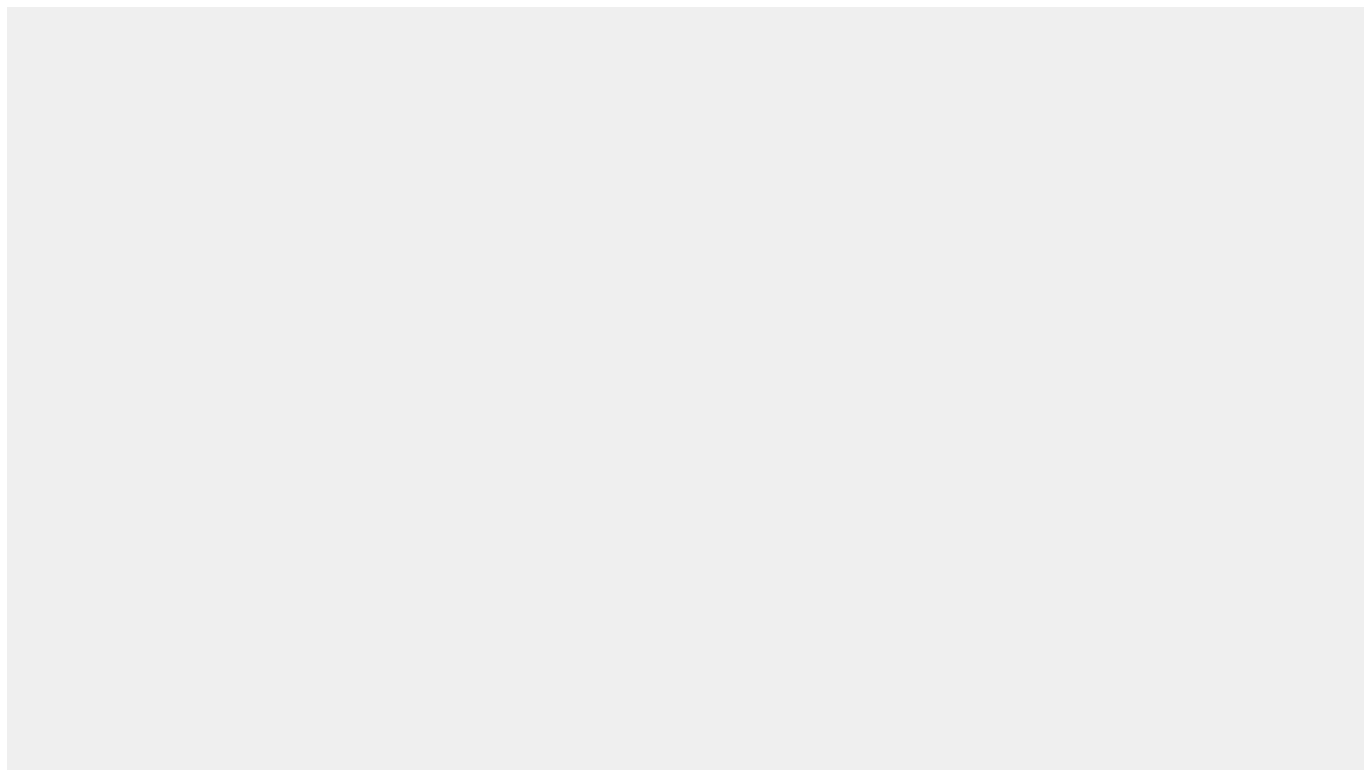
807 Main St., Napa; (707) 777-8198; quiltandco.com; open Wednesday to Sunday

Fifth-generation Napa vintner Joseph Wagner is the force behind many different wine brands. The Quilt & Co. tasting room offers a homey setting in which to check out his wines bottled under the Quilt, Belle Glos, Boen, Elouan and Steorra labels.

The space is true to Wagner's aesthetic, with a portrait of his grandmother (the namesake of the Belle Glos Pinot Noir lineup) and handmade quilts adorning the high, exposed brick walls. "We want [guests] to feel unhurried," says manager Lloyd Vance, adding that it's a spot to grab a glass of wine, but also, "If they want to sit down and get the whole story of Joseph Wagner from age five through now, we can do that too." Snacks and charcuterie from sister restaurant Avow, next door, are available to pair with the wines, which are offered by the glass (\$8–\$60) or in flights (\$25–\$70).

—*MaryAnn Worobiec and Elizabeth Redmayne-Titley*

Sonoma County



Bricoleur Vineyards (Adrian Gaut)

Montage Healdsburg

*100 Montage Way, Healdsburg; (707) 979-9000;
montagehotels.com/Healdsburg*

Sheltered in 258 wooded acres on the northern edge of Healdsburg, Montage is an escapist dream. The world seems far away, which is the whole idea of this luxurious yet laidback resort that ranks among the finest in California wine country. Opened in fall 2020, Montage exemplifies Sonoma County's modern sensibilities: savvy, upscale without being showy, and close to the land.

The resort's 130 bungalow-style guest rooms, scattered amid rolling hills and old oak and madrone trees, were built to have minimal impact on the original landscape. When the trees are thick with leaves in the summer, the bungalows blend into the countryside. All rooms have private outdoor areas with forest, vineyard or mountain views.

The decor is modern, casual and elegant, with hardwood floors, calming color tones and light wood accents. Windows are floor to ceiling.

Bathrooms, done in marble, have soaking tubs and many have outdoor showers. For large groups, there's a 4,635 square-foot guest house, which has three bedrooms and a fully equipped kitchen.

The grounds include a family pool and a zero-edge adult pool with cabanas and a bar and grill. Nearby is the spa, which has 11 treatment rooms and a fitness room. Yoga classes are set in a vineyard at the heart of the resort.

Fifteen acres of newly planted vines include Cabernet Sauvignon, Malbec, Merlot and Sauvignon Blanc. Winemaker Jesse Katz oversees the vineyards, and when the vines mature he will produce wines for Montage at his nearby Aperture winery. The resort also planted 450 hazelnut trees: "We hope to have truffles in 10 years or so," says general manager Allen Highfield.

Food and drink feature prominently in Montage's main building. Just off the lobby is the handsome Scout Field Bar, with a fireplace and views of Mount Saint Helena. Hazel Hill is the main dining room, open for three meals a day. Guests can hang out at the restaurant's wine bar or choose outdoor dining accented by fire pits. The kitchen is in full display and foodies may want a seat at the counter to watch the action. The cuisine focuses on local ingredients prepared with French flair. The dinner menu offers indulgences such as Wagyu tartare, braised Sonoma lamb shank, and King salmon with sunchokes, wild mushrooms and hazelnuts.

Beverage manager Petra Polakovicova has put together a savvy list of nearly 300 wines, including about 20 by the glass. Flowers Pinot Noir Sea View Ridge Sonoma Coast 2016 sells for \$160 a bottle, while Château Margaux 2010 is a relatively reasonable \$2,600. "I'm a huge fan of Sonoma wines," Polakovicova says. "There are so many different micro-climates, varietals and soils. The idea is to show guests Sonoma."

The Matheson

106 Matheson, Healdsburg; (707) 723-1106; thematheson.com; open daily for lunch and dinner; corkage \$30

Native son Dustin Valette already runs one of Healdsburg's best restaurants, Valette, but the youthful chef has even bigger designs with his new place, The Matheson. The location is ideal, right on the popular downtown plaza, and this tri-level restaurant will be quite the destination when it opens this summer.

The Valette family has called Healdsburg and Sonoma County home for more than 100 years, and the Matheson building has historical significance for the chef. It was once home to his great-grandfather Honore Valette's Snowflake Bakery. The restaurant's decor pays tribute to the family's Sonoma connection. Murals by artist Jay Mercado highlight local historic agricultural figures, and the towering ceiling of the first floor is curved like the inside of an oak barrel.

The main dining room and mezzanine can seat about 125 guests, while an open kitchen, the centerpiece of the room, offers counter seating. A "wine wall" allows guests to personally tap 88 wines by the glass. Wine director Jon McCarthy focuses his list tightly on Sonoma but also draws from Napa, France and beyond, with more than 300 selections overall. Valette's menu emphasizes Mediterranean flavors and seafood, and local star Ken Tominaga oversees a significant sushi program.

Roof 106 occupies the third floor; it features a lounge and bar with a rooftop patio that overlooks the plaza. The menu is more casual than the main dining room's and makes use of a wood-burning oven to produce seasonal flatbreads and small, shareable plates such as charred octopus.

Wit & Wisdom

1325 Broadway, Sonoma; (707) 931-3405; witandwisdomsonoma.com; open for dinner Tuesday to Sunday

Star chef Michael Mina, whose restaurants are popular around the country,

long had his eye on Northern California wine country but didn't find the right fit until Wit & Wisdom. Open since the end of 2020, it's a fresh addition to the village of Sonoma, which has a good but limited restaurant scene.

Located just outside the entrance of The Lodge at Sonoma, the restaurant was long known as Carneros. The Mina Group gave it a full facelift. The dining room has an open kitchen, with a long counter bar for guests, and lounge areas for casual drinks and nosh. The interior has a sleek, clubby tone, with light wood accents and a mural of historic local hero *Call of the Wild* author Jack London above the fireplace. There are also two outdoor dining areas with fire and water features.

The menu is upscale American tavern food prepared in the wood-fired oven or over charcoal or wood stoves. Pizza is a specialty and the lamb sausage is a knockout, plus there's local fish, crispy porchetta, burgers and steak frites. The wine list of more than 600 selections emphasizes Sonoma and Napa but also takes a wider view, with a rich collection of older bottlings. Harlan Estate Napa Valley 1999 is an investment at \$2,100 while Hanzell Chardonnay Sonoma Valley 2015 is just ready to drink at \$110.

Bricoleur Vineyards

7394 Starr Road, Windsor; (707) 857-5700; bricoleurvineyards.com; tastings by appointment, Thursday to Monday; \$45-\$85

This Russian River Valley estate, which opened in 2020, is off the usual wine trails but worth seeking out. Owners Mark and Beth Wall Hanson transformed a vineyard and former horse ranch into a sprawling destination for wine and food lovers, with olive and fruit trees, a gourmet garden and even a fishing pond.

The winery barn is the centerpiece and it's a handsome location for tasting wine, constructed from redwood and stone with an interior of reclaimed barn wood. When weather permits, outdoor seating is plentiful. Tastings

are seated, and veteran winemaker Cary Gott oversees an extensive portfolio, with Pinot Noir, Zinfandel and rosé the focus. Shane McAnelly, formerly of Chalkboard in Healdsburg, creates the food pairings and has a creative knack with small plates like beef short rib croquette with porcini crust and horseradish crème fraîche.

—*Tim Fish*