OUR NEW TEST GARDENS, REVEALED!

WINE LOVER’S GUIDE
WHERE TO GO, WHAT TO SIP, AND THE $11 BOTTLE TO BUY NOW

FRANCIS FORD COPPOLA & GRANDDAUGHTER GIA TALK FAMILY AND VINES

FALL’S BEST COMFORT FOOD
HAWAII DREAM TOWN

18 SPECTACULAR SPOTS TO CELEBRATE SONOMA COUNTY WINE MONTH

GLODOW NEAD COMMUNICATIONS

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SURPRISE! IT'S SONOMA

Want a bit of adventure with your world-class Chardonnay? Treasures await in the heart of wine country.
By Christine Ciarmello

Where wine meets waves
SONOMA COAST'S TIMBER COVE
"When we installed the first one here, it looked a bit sacrificial," says Anne Moller-Racke, pointing at a giant ox head speared atop an 8-foot bronze spike. Clad in a white T-shirt and overalls, the winegrower and I have just reached a crest of acreage on The Donum Estate in Sonoma Valley. Into view pops Circle of Animals, a dozen bronze animal heads staked firmly into the Pinot-loving soil of Carneros. This is esteemed artist Ai Weiwei's reinterpretation of an 18th-century artwork, each animal representing the 12 cycles of the Chinese zodiac. And although Moller-Racke is responsible for growing the grapes behind some of the best Pinot Noirs and Chardonnays in the region, now and again her duties stray into the realm of art. She oversees the arrival and assemblage of sculptures, placement of each piece, and landscaping choices surrounding them. It's been fascinating, she says, to learn a whole new language and even navigate customs.

In that field of fine art, in fact, rumor has it that tucked into a nearby Pinot Noir vineyard is the work of world-famous artist James Turrell, whose installations manipulate light and space. That hidden piece isn't for public consumption, but Donum does encourage visitors to walk the vineyards and find 15 other art secrets. Discovering them can be particularly surprising after finishing a tasting in the dairy barn—among lavender fields and olive trees, it's startling to confront two 9-foot-tall contemporary terra-cotta warriors guarding vines. Their faces twist with laughter, sculpted by Chinese artist Yue Minjun. It's amazing what pairs with wine, I think, as I examine Keith Haring's King and Queen. The sculpture is made for absorbing slowly—like a Pinot.

Recently, exploring Sonoma County (whose landmass is bigger than Rhode Island) has felt more like a scavenger hunt—with great wines as the prize. Drinkers are traipsing to the vineyards to uncover the Sonoma stories that unfold into adventures that might last one hour or three. It's like a liberal arts education with ample Chardonnay. You pick up tips on where to head next from those you meet, so don't simply drink Sonoma County. Hunt for the treasures and allow for a little serendipity.

With that in mind, here are a few wine-soaked adventures to start your day, but be fluid. See where the wine takes you after that first taste.
AROUND SONOMA TOWN

1. ALFRESCO ART SHOW
It’s not just grapes you’ll encounter in the vineyards of The Donum Estate in Carneros, but very large art pieces. In addition to terra-cotta warriors and bronze animal heads (see page 20), you’ll confront the 40-foot tall face Jaume Plensa. Incredible Pinots and Chardonnays are then poured either in the former dairy barn or in a room overlooking local mountains. $50 tasting; thedonumestate.com.

2. SCORING WINE TO MUSIC
Can a musical composition change how wine tastes? That’s for you to uncover at Buena Vista, the historic 1857 winery now owned by wine mogul Jean-Charles Boisset. The Frenchman restored the location a few years ago, adding his signature (whimsical) flourishes, like the music-and-wine experience. Two choices for your tasting: symphony music, recorded or live. You can also join a tasting that invites you into an animatronic museum of wine-making tools ($25). Tasting from $20; buenavistawinery.com.

3. A HIKE WITH CABERNET
The word “park” in Bartholomew Park Winery is to be taken literally. The tasting room is in 400 acres of old oaks and meadows, surrounded by the Cab-friendly Mayacamas Mountains. A museum includes Victorian photographer Eadweard Muybridge’s photos documenting viticulture back in the day. $10 tastings; bartpark.com.

4. WELCOME HOME TO THE 1840S
You’ll be transported to old Mexican territory of Northern California from the moment you set eyes on The Adobe at Three Sticks Wines. The Sonoma town structure was built circa 1842, bought in 2012 by Three Sticks’ owner Bill Price, and restored historically, with artful touches by designer Ken Fulk. Even better is what’s to drink: Behind the bottles is winemaker Bob Cobral, who built Williams Selyem into a legendary label. This is his new gig. Tasting from $35; threesticks wines.com.

5. CAVE MEN AND WOMEN
You might be met with a moment of reverence when mentioning Hansell Vineyards in Sonoma Valley. Its founder, James David Zellerbach, was a U.S. ambassador to Italy under Eisenhower, was a pioneer, first bottling from the hills of the Mayacamas Mountains in 1957. In subsequent decades, winemaker Bob Sessions built a legacy of wine quality unmatched in the county. Hansell’s heritage tour welcomes you into this world of caves, barrels, and exquisite Pinots and Chardonnays. Tour and tasting $45; hansell.com.

FROM TOP Garden tasting table at Three Sticks Wines; Three Sticks mural by artist Rafael Arana.
TASTING PLUS IN SONOMA COUNTY

At nearly 1,600 square miles, Sonoma County is vast. Plan a gateway that lasts a day or week, with activities centered in different parts of the region (pages 22–24), and lodging options in each (page 26).

6. A LITERARY WINE GALLOP
Jack London State Historic Park is one of the most fascinating in the system, connecting nature to the area's storied literary past in Glen Ellen. Triple Creek Horse Outfit leads guided horseback riding tours into its 1,400 acres, ending at Benziger Winery for a tasting. Since 2016 is the centennial of London's death, a commemorative three-hour ride brings you to the place where a famed photo of the author was snapped. $330; triplecreekhorseoutfit.com.

7. COCKTAILING AT A WINERY
Medlock Ames turns out some terrific dark reds, highly drinkable on an outdoor table next to its gorgeous tasting room in a quiet part of Alexander Valley. But come 5 p.m., the tasting room's back door opens onto the world of a dark-wood saloon. Herbs picked from the garden are muddled and slushed to concoct some original cocktails at Alexander Valley Bar. A brilliant transition to the evening—aka winetasting. Tasting from $15; medlockames.com.

8. TOUR DE FRANCE
Visiting Jordan Vineyard & Winery for an Estate Tour & Tasting ($120) feels a little like having free run of a French-style Downton Abbey, especially when staffers wearing brass nametags welcome you into the foyer with fresh-cut roses and spa water. A full-time chef prepares tasty fixings for the 90-minute tour that whisks you from breakfast by the fountain to bento-box pairings near a lake, culminating in 360° valley views. About 80 employees are needed to maintain the apiaries, orchards, gardens, olive trees, animals (donkeys and cows), and the grapes. Tasting from $30; jordanwinery.com.

9. RUBBLY PAIRING PAR EXCELLENCE
Wine drinkers are always on the hunt for a great pairing. They'll find the real spoils in The Bubble Room at J Vineyards & Winery, a five-course exploration of unexpected bites (lobster ravioli in nasturtium leaves, or watermelon
IRON HORSE VINEYARDS

INDULGE IN AN AFTERNOON OF SIPPING AND SLURPING

Topped with unagi (chose to match with a range of wines, hosted by a dating staff. Take time to peak at the jars displayed at the Terrace; each contains a soil with differing qualities, like fine sandy "Steinbeck" and gravelly clay "Arbuckle." Five-course pairing menu $95, tasting from $20; jwine.com.

10. GET DIRTY IN THE FIELD

By the time La Crema's estate tour ($65) is over, you'll know how to decipher the strange notation on vineyard blocks, recognize distinct microclimates and ecosystems, and drink elegantly from a wingless as you putter around the roughly 200 acres on a golf cart. The Russian River home once belonged to iconic local personalities Saralee and Richard Kunde, whose eccentric design choices included an elevator that moved as it ascended from floor to floor, and, currently, a classic London phone booth and a retired cargo truck as garden art. While La Crema wines are widely distributed, visitors to the estate can taste special bottles that are poured only here. Tasting from $15; lacrema.com.

HEADINIG TO THE COAST

11. OYSTER GIRLS PARTY

You can't deny the pairing of bubbly and oysters, and Iron Horse Vineyards will not deny you either. Sunday is the day to reserve a picnic table beneath a redwood gazebo. The Oyster Girls are on hand, shucking the bivalves ($3/oyster) for purchase. The cost is $35, the flat fee for a picnic table (which seats up to six), plus a minimum of one bottle (bubbles start at $42). Glasses included, $25 tasting; ironhorsevineyards.com.

12. GEOLOGICAL PAIRING WITH AN OCEAN VIEW

Take advantage of Fort Ross Vineyard's elevation, ranging from 1,200 to 1,700 feet above the sea with breezes and views from the balcony. A marker of the terrain here in one of the state's newest AVAs (approved in 2012) is the San Andreas Fault, which crosses the land 2 miles away at Fort Ross State Historic Park (fortross.org). A hike through the historic orchards will reveal telltale signs of geologic rumblings. At the Fort Ross-Seaview Wine Festival (from $20; fortross-sea-view.org/events), you can taste bottles highlighting the juice that grows in these AVAs.

DIGITAL BONUS: Do a deep dive into Sonoma's wine regions with tips from our complete travel guide: sunset.com/sonomaguide.