

# Wine Spectator

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## Napa & Sonoma When Can We Return?

**100 SPARKLERS AT VALUE PRICES**  
**BRUNELLO 2015: A CLASSIC VINTAGE**  
**CALIFORNIA ZINS FOR  
SUMMER GRILLING**



# ❖ WINE COUNTRY ❖ HEARTLAND

*Napa and Sonoma vineyards nurture an extraordinary culture of food and wine in Northern California*

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Donum Estate in Sonoma boasts an open-air sculpture collection with works in various media, such as this 24-foot-tall stainless-steel heart by Richard Hudson.



California wine country is the image of paradise. In the state's northern destinations of Napa and Sonoma, oak-covered mountains shelter lush valleys carpeted with manicured vineyards and studded with historic farmhouses and modern wineries.

This idyllic backdrop belies a hard-won success. California wine country is continually evolving and has often suffered setbacks. During Prohibition, Napa Valley was planted mostly to prunes and walnuts. It wasn't until the 1970s that vineyards began to reestablish prominence. Natural disasters too have played roles—an earthquake in 2014, deadly wildfires in 2017 and 2019.

In March, a new coronavirus strain reached the United States. To slow its spread, government bureaus ordered major lifestyle changes. Closures have included schools, sporting events and cultural establishments such as museums, concert venues, restaurants and bars—in short, any environment where people gather together. In California, Governor Gavin Newsom asked wineries to close their guest centers. As we go to press in April, there are very few visitors in Napa and Sonoma.

But wine country will survive this crisis, as it has endured in the past. The adjacent counties of Napa and Sonoma, located just north of San Francisco, are the heartland of California wine country. They are home to some of the oldest vineyards in the state and some of the newest and most exciting places to taste and dine. Wine lovers can look to better days to come, when we will plan our future trips to these wine meccas.

The following pages profile our recommended hotels, restaurants and tasting rooms for your next visit. We've focused on venues that are new or recently improved, and that represent the region's diversity; all were open in early 2020 and will welcome visitors again as soon as possible. Among the impressive new projects to open recently are the Louis M. Martini and Bouchaine tasting rooms and hospitality facilities, and the Avow restaurant, in Napa.

Both counties also have exciting projects now under construction or in the planning stages. In Sonoma, Montage Healdsburg is a luxury resort scheduled to open soon on the northern edge of that city. Star chef Michael Mina has just unveiled Wit & Wisdom tavern at the Lodge at Sonoma. Homegrown chef Dustin Valette has a new Healdsburg Plaza restaurant in the works, the Matheson, slated to open in January 2021.

In Napa, the largest of the new projects on deck is the Stanley Ranch resort, part of the Auberge Resorts Collection, which owns Auberge du Soleil, Calistoga Ranch and Solage in the valley. The estimated \$250 million to \$275 million venue, which broke ground last fall, is located on 96 acres south of the city of Napa, in the Cameros district. Slated for completion next spring, Stanley Ranch will encompass 135 cottages, 40 furnished villas and 70 residences set in the vineyards, as well as spa facilities and multiple pools.

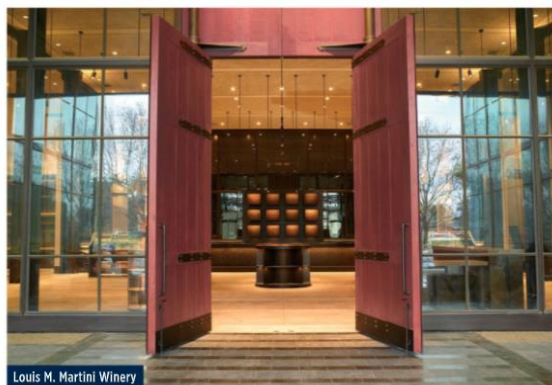
A soon-to-open luxury destination in Calistoga is Resort at 400



Bouchaine Vineyards



Rendering of the forthcoming Resort at 400 Silverado Trail



Louis M. Martini Winery

Silverado Trail, operated by the Four Seasons group. The property will feature 85 rooms and 20 private homes spread out over 23 acres, including in a 6-acre vineyard. Star winemaker Thomas Rivers Brown will operate a tasting room at the site, which will also offer a restaurant, a spa and even a wedding barn.

There are more places worth exploring—you can read about many of them in past issues of *Wine Spectator* magazine and at [WineSpectator.com](http://WineSpectator.com). If you simply hit the open road and follow your heart, let us know what you find.

*Napa-based bureau chief Kim Marcus, senior editors Tim Fish and MaryAnn Worobiec, tasting coordinator Augustus Weed and associate tasting coordinator Aaron Romano researched and wrote this story.*

TOP RIGHT: COURTESY OF THE FOUR SEASONS; BOTTOM LEFT: STEVE DRONKO



AVOW





La Crema's tasting salon

# SONOMA ✕ HISTORY, DIVERSITY AND A DOWN-HOME CULTURE

BY TIM FISH • PHOTOGRAPHS BY TAI POWER SEEFF

**S**onoma County is California's most well-rounded wine region, offering experiences from laid-back to luxury, from historic to cutting edge, a diversity that applies to its landscape, its wine production and its culinary culture.

This cornucopia draws nearly 11 million visitors a year to Sonoma, boosting its economy by \$2.2 billion in 2018, according to the county tourism statistics. Yet most of the county remains rural, with plenty of elbow room for locals and travelers alike. Driving the region's winding roads, you'll find a different Sonoma County

around every bend, a patchwork of valleys and pastures, rivers and woodlands, plus a dramatic, rocky coastline.

Sonoma spawned California's commercial wine industry in 1857, when Buena Vista was founded. Today, the county includes 18 distinctive American Viticultural Areas (AVAs), each with a unique personality and *terroir*. Pinot Noir and Chardonnay thrive in the cooler regions of Russian River Valley, Sonoma Coast and Carneros. Alexander Valley provides most of the county's Cabernet Sauvignon. Zinfandel's traditional homes are Dry Creek and Sonoma



Valley; now, along with Syrah and Sauvignon Blanc, Zin is planted throughout the county.

The thriving food scene includes specialty farmers and artisans who produce herbs and vegetables, olive oils, fruits, cheeses, and specialty meats and charcuterie, all of which are featured extensively on local restaurant menus.

While Santa Rosa (population: 164,000) is the largest city, the main hubs for wine touring are Healdsburg and Sonoma. Each town has an iconic plaza with a host of restaurants, tasting rooms, boutiques, historic sites, hotels and inns. Both towns are nearby to beautiful vineyards and top wineries.

Tradition and history are important in Sonoma. Many of the immigrant families who broke ground there in the late 1800s spawned generations of growers and winemakers, including names such as Sangiacomo and Pedroncelli. Even today, many of the larger players are family companies—Jackson, Gallo and Foley, for example.

Although Sonoma is more moneyed now than in the old days, it shows less gentrification than neighboring Napa Valley. At heart, it remains a farming community, with a down-home culture that welcomes visitors to explore the back roads and local attractions. The following pages offer some suggestions for a wine-loving traveler who wants to experience the very best of Sonoma County.



Aperture Cellars

## ✦ WHERE TO TASTE ✦

### Aperture Cellars

12291 Old Redwood Highway, Healdsburg **Telephone** (707) 200-7891  
**Website** [aperture-cellar.com](http://aperture-cellar.com) **Open** Daily **Cost** Tastings \$50

Aperture is the brainchild of rising winemaker Jesse Katz, who co-founded the brand in 2009 with his father, vineyard photographer Andy Katz. Katz focuses on Bordeaux-style wines crafted from cool-climate vineyards in Sonoma. The winery and tasting room, located south of Healdsburg, are brand new, just opened this spring.

The winery and tasting facilities lie on different parts of the property but were designed in parallel. The gallerylike tasting center is broken into sections; the main tasting area, three private rooms and an outdoor terrace each combine natural light with sliding doors and translucent overhead shutters that can alter the “aperture” of the spaces. Katz wanted to incorporate the estate vineyard into the guest experience as much as possible, and each area offers a different view of the 40-acre domaine.

The elder Katz’s photography graces the walls and wine labels, which are on full display behind the main bar. Tasting options include regional representations, vineyard-specific flights and in-depth tastings that come with food pairings.

—A.R.

### Bedrock Wine Co.

414 First St. E., Sonoma **Telephone** (707) 343-1478 **Website** [bedrockwineco.com](http://bedrockwineco.com) **Open** By appointment **Cost** Tastings \$30

Secluded behind the storefronts of First Street East, Bedrock’s tasting room just off Sonoma Plaza is worth searching out. Built in the 1850s, the General Joseph Hooker House is an ideal backdrop for history buff Morgan Twain-Peterson to showcase his distinctive wines. The winery is a few miles

away in a generic warehouse, where Twain-Peterson and his crew produce stylish, full-flavored Zinfandel blends and Syrah, made almost exclusively from vines 75 to 100 years old. The small tasting salon is like a museum dedicated to the old vineyards, as well as to the growers who tend those historic vines.

—T.F.

### Donum Estate

24500 Ramal Road, Sonoma **Telephone** (707) 732-2200 **Website** [thedonumestate.com](http://thedonumestate.com) **Open** By appointment **Cost** Tastings \$95

The Carneros district, straddling southern Napa and Sonoma counties, is on a roll, making some of the best Chardonnay and Pinot Noir in the Golden State. One of the newest venues in the region is Donum, which recently completed a new winery and hospitality complex. It’s set amid the rolling hills on the Sonoma side of the border, with views that, on a clear day, can stretch across the waters of San Pablo Bay and all the way to downtown San Francisco. A tour at Donum starts with its impressive open-air sculpture collection, which includes huge works in various media, and moves to the on-site working farm and surrounding lavender fields. The estate is biodynamically cultivated, and visitors will discover what that means during one of the most visually stunning tours around.

—K.M.

### Dry Creek Vineyard

3770 Lambert Bridge Road, Healdsburg **Telephone** (707) 433-1000 **Website** [drycreekvineyard.com](http://drycreekvineyard.com) **Open** Daily **Cost** Tastings \$15–\$125

Dry Creek Valley is just a 10-minute drive from Healdsburg, but it’s a hidden rural gem of a location, where family-owned wineries make distinctive wines including top Zinfandels and Sauvignon Blancs. Enjoy the charms of Quivira, Ferrari-Carano and Preston wineries. But no stop by the region would be complete without a visit to Dry Creek Vineyard, one of the first wineries in the area, founded in 1972 by David Stare and now under the direction of his daughter, Kim Stare Wallace. Rich with history, this laid-back spot includes picnic grounds ideal for enjoying sandwiches from the nearby Dry Creek General Store. The winery has recently refocused its efforts to play to its strengths: estate-grown wines and an impressive Sauvignon Blanc program. Tasting options abound, including a blending session. A tour of the property offers a firsthand look at the Dry Creek Habitat Restoration Project, which several local vineyards, this one included, are working to support.

—M.W.



# ✧ 50 TOP SONOMA PRODUCERS ✧

*The county grows exemplary Chards, Pinots, Zins and more*

**W**ith its varied geography and micro-climates, Sonoma succeeds with many grapes, the best known being Chardonnay, Pinot Noir and Zinfandel.

Appellations influenced by the maritime flow of air from the Pacific Ocean contribute to the county's success with cool-climate-loving Chardonnay. The two leading regions for this white are the Sonoma Coast and the Russian River Valley, each offering different styles and textures. The Sonoma Coast appellation is sprawling, extending from the coast all the way inland to the border of Sonoma Valley. As such, the AVA's overall wine character is diffuse, but at the upper end of quality, with wines that are well-structured and sleek. Wines from Russian River Valley are more opulent and powerful. Chardonnay excels on the rolling uplands and vales that flank and spread out from the river proper in vineyards rooted in loamy, well-drained soils, especially the Goldridge formation. Cool nights and warm days are optimal for even ripening, which winemakers harness to pursue their own stylistic nuances.

Russian River Valley is also the cradle of modern California Pinot Noir. Pinots from Russian River are rich with red berry and cherry flavors, backed by plentiful acidity and firm tannins. Many have details of smoke and earth, with vibrant, spicy accents lending complexity. Versions from the Sonoma Coast appellation balance richness

with elegance. Those from vineyards closest to the Pacific typically show more tannins, dried fruit character and vibrant acidity than those from interior locations, where wines feature riper, more concentrated flavors and plusher textures. In the southern tier of the county, the Carneros district produces distinctly spicy and savory Pinot Noirs, with peppery and mineral accents. The soils are dense with clay and can be extremely shallow, which accentuates the savory notes. In the Petaluma Gap appellation to the northwest of Carneros, the Pinots are broad-textured, with dried red fruit flavors.

The county is also an epicenter of quality for Zinfandel. Many of the top vineyards were planted 100 years ago or more; the first were planted by Italian immigrants trying to replicate the red blends of their homeland. Stylistically, Sonoma Zin has two basic camps: warm region and cool region. Dry Creek and Sonoma valleys are generally warmer and offer wines with bright cherry and raspberry flavors, savory sage and pepper notes. Russian River Valley is cooler, and its Zins are more brooding, with bracing acidity along with blueberry, mineral and licorice flavors.

Many wineries bottle stellar versions of multiple varietals. Here, we've selected 50 standout producers, along with recent releases that represent their track records for excellence. But with myriad worthy wineries in Sonoma, we urge you to explore widely.



Hanzell

## CHARDONNAY

### Arista

95	Chardonnay Russian River Valley UV-El Diablo Vineyard 2016	\$78
93	Chardonnay Russian River Valley 2016	\$60

### Aubert\*

95	Chardonnay Sonoma Coast UV-SL Vineyard 2017	\$85
94	Chardonnay Sonoma Coast CIX 2017	\$100

### Blue Farm

94	Chardonnay Russian River Valley Laceroni Vineyard 2017	\$70
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### Ferrari-Carano

91	Chardonnay Russian River Valley Emelia's Cuvée Vineyard Select Collection 2017	\$38
90	Chardonnay Russian River Valley Tré Terre Vineyard Select Collection 2017	\$32

### Flowers

92	Chardonnay Sonoma Coast 2018	\$50
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### Fort Ross

94	Chardonnay Fort Ross-Seaview Fort Ross Vineyard 2017	\$44
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### Hanzell

92	Chardonnay Sonoma Valley 2017	\$78
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### Hartford Court

92	Chardonnay Russian River Valley 2018	\$30
92	Chardonnay Sonoma Coast Far Coast Vineyard 2017	\$65

### Kistler

94	Chardonnay Sonoma Coast Durell Vineyard 2016	\$80
94	Chardonnay Sonoma Coast Stone Flat Vineyard 2016	\$80

### La Crema

92	Chardonnay Russian River Valley Saralee's Vineyard 2017	\$45
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### Marcassin

93	Chardonnay Sonoma Coast Marcassin Vineyard 2011	\$150
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### Patz & Hall

92	Chardonnay Russian River Valley Zio Tony Ranch 2017	\$70
92	Chardonnay Sonoma Valley Durell Vineyard 2017	\$70

### Paul Hobbs

96	Chardonnay Russian River Valley Ross Station Estate 2017	\$85
93	Chardonnay Russian River Valley 2017	\$55

### Peter Michael

94	Chardonnay Knights Valley Point Rouge 2016	\$225
92	Chardonnay Knights Valley Belle Côte 2017	\$100

### Ramey

94	Russian River Valley Woolsey Road Vineyard 2017	\$70
93	Russian River Valley Ritchie Vineyard 2017	\$70

### Ram's Gate

92	Chardonnay Russian River Valley El Diablo Vineyard 2017	\$70
92	Chardonnay Sonoma Coast 2017	\$42

\*Napa-based winery facility



## Sojourn

91	Chardonnay Sonoma Coast Durell Vineyard 2017	\$48
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## Stonestreet

94	Chardonnay Alexander Valley Broken Road Vineyard 2016	\$60
92	Chardonnay Alexander Valley 2016	\$45

## Wayfarer

94	Chardonnay Fort Ross-Seaview Wayfarer Vineyard 2018	\$80
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## PINOT NOIR

### Aston\*

93	Pinot Noir Sonoma Coast 2016	\$75
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### Dehlinger

93	Pinot Noir Russian River Valley Champ de Mars 2017	\$70
91	Pinot Noir Russian River Valley Goldridge 2017	\$52

### Donum

93	Pinot Noir Russian River Valley Single Vineyard Reserve 2017	\$100
92	Pinot Noir Russian River Valley Single Vineyard 2017	\$85

### Dutton-Goldfield

92	Pinot Noir Green Valley of Russian River Valley Dutton Ranch Emerald Ridge Vineyard 2017	\$68
91	Pinot Noir Russian River Valley Dutton Ranch Freestone Hill Vineyard 2017	\$62

### Failla\*

93	Pinot Noir Russian River Valley Keefer Ranch 2017	\$52
92	Pinot Noir Sonoma Coast Lola 2017	\$48

### Gary Farrell

93	Pinot Noir Russian River Valley Bacigalupi Vineyard 2016	\$65
92	Pinot Noir Russian River Valley Hallberg Vineyard 2016	\$55

### Ferren

94	Pinot Noir Sonoma Coast Silver Eagle Vineyard 2017	\$80
93	Pinot Noir Sonoma Coast 2017	\$60

### Hirsch

94	Pinot Noir Sonoma Coast Block 8 2016	\$95
93	Pinot Noir Sonoma Coast Raschen Ridge 2016	\$85

### J

92	Pinot Noir Russian River Valley Eastside Knoll Vineyard 2017	\$65
90	Pinot Noir Russian River Valley Foggy Bend Vineyard 2016	\$65

### Kanzler

93	Pinot Noir Russian River Valley Walker Station 2017	\$72
91	Pinot Noir Russian River Valley 2017	\$60

### Kosta Browne

94	Pinot Noir Sonoma Coast Kanzler Vineyard 2017	\$165
90	Pinot Noir Russian River Valley 2017	\$115

### Littorai

94	Pinot Noir Sonoma Coast 2018	\$60
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Gary Farrell

### Lynmar

94	Pinot Noir Sonoma Coast Kanzler Vineyard 2017	\$82
91	Pinot Noir Russian River Valley Quail Hill Vineyard 2017	\$65

### Martinelli

93	Pinot Noir Russian River Valley Zio Tony Ranch Vineyard 2017	\$68
92	Pinot Noir Green Valley of Russian River Valley Bondi Home Ranch Vineyard 2017	\$68

### Rochioli

94	Pinot Noir Russian River Valley Little Hill 2017	\$86
91	Pinot Noir Russian River Valley 2017	\$62

### Three Sticks

94	Pinot Noir Sonoma Coast Price Family Estates 2017	\$65
94	Pinot Noir Sonoma Coast Walala Vineyard 2017	\$70

### Walt\*

93	Pinot Noir Sonoma Coast Bob's Ranch 2017	\$95
93	Pinot Noir Sonoma Coast La Brisa 2017	\$40

### Williams Selyem

94	Pinot Noir Russian River Valley Eastside Road Neighbors 2017	\$59
90	Pinot Noir Sonoma County 2017	\$39

## ZINFANDEL

### Bedrock

94	Bedrock Vineyard Heritage Sonoma Valley 2018	\$50
93	Zinfandel Russian River Valley Carlisle Vineyard 2018	\$45

### Carlisle

94	Zinfandel Russian River Valley Papera Ranch 2017	\$48
94	Zinfandel Sonoma Valley Bedrock Vineyard 2017	\$48

### Carol Shelton

92	Zinfandel Rockpile Rocky Reserve Florence Vineyard 2017	\$38
91	Zinfandel Fountaingrove District Karma Zin Bastoni Vineyard 2016	\$33

### Dry Creek

94	Zinfandel Dry Creek Valley Spencer's Hill Vineyard Single Vineyard Series 2016	\$44
91	Zinfandel Sonoma County Heritage Vines 2018	\$26

### Limerick Lane

93	Zinfandel Russian River Valley 2017	\$42
93	Zinfandel Russian River Valley 1910 Block 2017	\$60

### Ridge

93	Geyserville Alexander Valley 2018	\$45
92	Three Valleys Sonoma County 2018	\$30

### Seghesio

94	Zinfandel Dry Creek Valley Cortina 2017	\$40
90	Zinfandel Sonoma County Sonoma 2018	\$26

## OTHER WHITES & SPARKLING WINES

### Gloria Ferrer

93	Brut Carneros Royal Cuvée Late Disgorged 2013	\$40
90	Blanc de Blancs Carneros NV	\$22

### Hall\*

94	Sauvignon Blanc Knights Valley 2018	\$35
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### Iron Horse

93	Brut Rosé Green Valley of Russian River Valley LD 2011	\$110
92	Russian Cuvée Green Valley of Russian River Valley 2014	\$45

### Marimar Estate

90	Albariño Russian River Valley Don Miguel Vineyard 2017	\$29
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### Merry Edwards

93	Sauvignon Blanc Russian River Valley 2018	\$36
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### Quivira

93	Sauvignon Blanc Dry Creek Valley Fig Tree Vineyard 2018	\$240
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Senior editors Kim Marcus, Tim Fish and MaryAnn Worobiec contributed reviews to this story.