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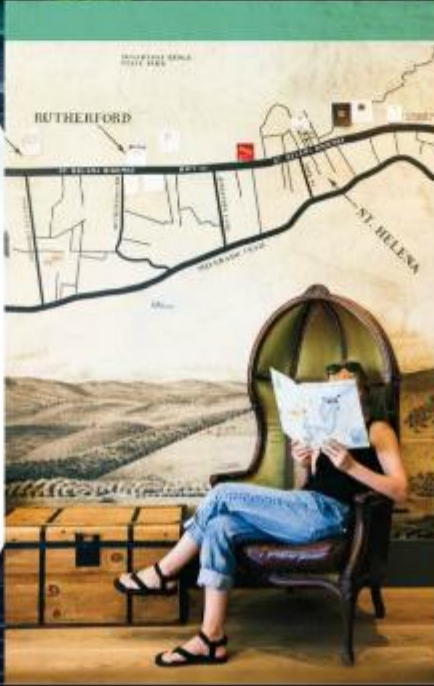
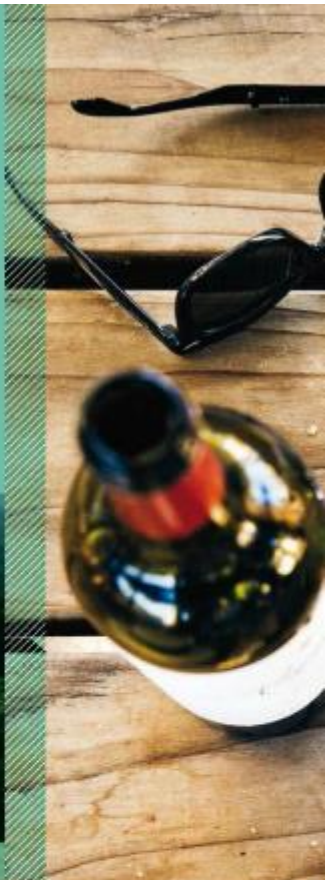
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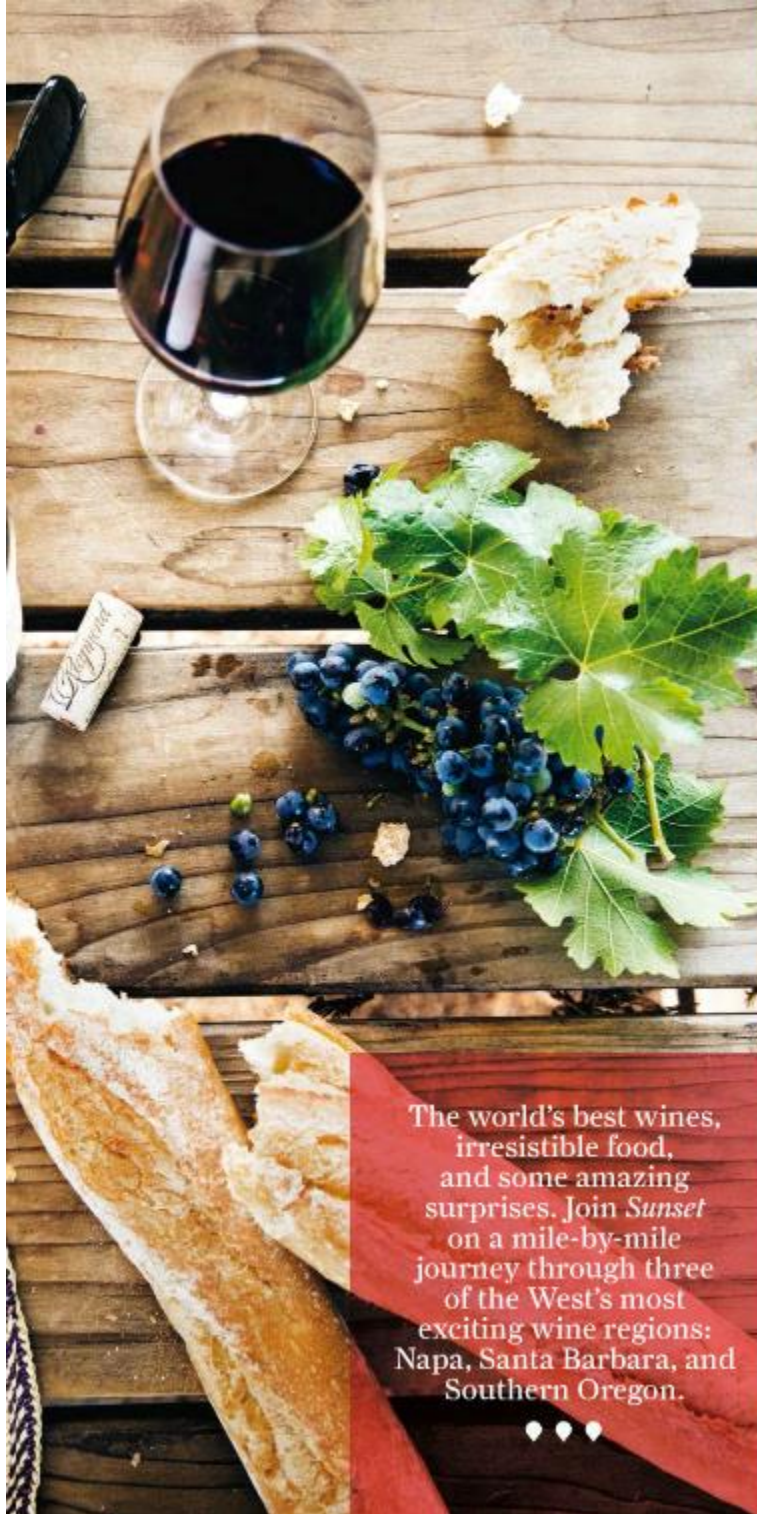
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**Get your dream kitchen!
9 design ideas**

— THE GRAND — WINE TOUR



46 OCTOBER



The world's best wines,
irresistible food,
and some amazing
surprises. Join *Sunset*
on a mile-by-mile
journey through three
of the West's most
exciting wine regions:
Napa, Santa Barbara, and
Southern Oregon.

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NAPA VALLEY

Here's where you'll fall in love with wine.

BY SARA SCHNEIDER, SUNSET WINE EDITOR

THE TIME: a hot summer day in the 1960s. The place: a hilltop overlooking a Northern California valley. My family lived on that mountain, and my sister and I had grabbed baskets and were about to harvest an enormous patch of blackberries. I reached too far, slipped, and toppled into the warm, thorny thicket. Just before the pain hit—those thorns were sharp—I got a distinct whiff of ripe berries, mixed with the wild mint that was laced through the bushes.

My life was shaped by that tumble. The valley was Napa. The hilltop was Howell Mountain. The aroma—the berries, the mint—is what I smell, even now, when I pour a glass of Howell Mountain Cabernet Sauvignon.

Today, Napa Valley is in a class by itself among America's wine regions. There are some 500 wineries in the 16 subappellations that make up the 30-mile-long, 5-mile-wide valley. They include the historic, such as Stag's Leap Wine Cellars, whose Cabernet Sauvignon demolished an array of French Bordeaux in the 1976 Judgment of Paris, thereby putting Napa firmly on the world wine map. They include the very luxe: Prime Napa vineyard land can run as much as \$300,000 per acre, and a few of the wines produced here can go for \$1,500 a bottle.

Napa's popularity and those prices can make the valley seem intimidating to people who just want to spend a fun day tasting wine. The crowds are real—try turning left onto Highway 29 on a busy weekend. And at times, the pretensions have been too. (I've heard the occasional admonition to check in with the concierge before grabbing a picnic table on a winery lawn.) But my recent forays have revealed a new Napa—still serious about wine but willing to cut loose a little. Take an evening spent in Raymond Vineyards' luxury-exuding "crystal" tasting room, for instance. I looked up from a glass of owner Jean-Charles Boisset's lush red wine to see a masked, nearly naked acrobat staring down at me from her trapeze. Napa, stuffy? Hell, no.

Another sign of the valley's changing mood: The hottest new restaurant in St. Helena is Cliff Family's bruschetta truck, parked beside their bicycle-themed Velo Vino tasting room. And formerly unassuming downtown Napa has emerged as a destination in its own right, with terrific restaurants and tasting rooms, and a top-notch music scene.

After all, Napa knows that wine is about romance. Certainly it was for me. After my mountaintop tumble, I moved away, then returned for college, back on Howell Mountain as it happened. A conservative college, it forbade drinking. But the valley and its wines called. One Saturday afternoon, not long after I had turned 21, I decided an illicit wine-tasting trip was in order, to celebrate senior year and my arrival at adulthood. Sipping in Napa tasting rooms, I began to understand that I wanted wine in my life.

That's the big Napa secret. Learn to navigate the valley, and you'll realize that it's still the best place in the world to fall in love—deeply, lastingly in love—with wine. Visit, sip, savor. You'll make your own wine memories, as potent and pleasurable as mine, but without the thorns.

Previous pages, clockwise from top left: Stagecoach Vineyard; Raymond Vineyards; B Cellars tasting room and wine caves; Raymond's Frenchie Winery for dogs; Andaz Napa; La Taberna.

PHOTOGRAPHS BY EVA KOLENKO



ST. HELENA | Bruschetteria Food Truck



NAPA | Olerio Estate



NAPA

1 STARMONT WINERY & VINEYARDS

In the Carneros region south of Napa, Starmont offers just what the valley needed: accessibly priced wines and a younger vibe. The general Carneros wines are deals; the single-vineyard Pinots and Chardonnays, compelling. And the handsome, reclaimed-wood and concrete tasting room has a bar that can roll right out to the patio firepit. Tasting from \$20; 1451 Stanly Lane; starmontwinery.com

WE RECOMMEND: Starmont 2013 Stanly Ranch Pinot Noir (Los Carneros; \$55).

2 ANDAZ NAPA

Recovering quickly from the battering it took in the 2014

earthquake, downtown Napa has become a place to land and linger, with excellent restaurants and an increasingly vibrant music scene (see page 52). Andaz fits the new setting, with its walkable location and small but elegantly modern rooms. From \$329; andaznapa.com

3 TORC

Downtown Napa had already become dining heaven—with big city-caliber restaurants like Morimoto and La Toque—when Sean O’Toole introduced another stellar round. The menu at O’Toole’s Torc harmoniously rooms the world, with dishes like Indian sweet-potato pakora, Japanese hamachi crudo, and heritage porchetta with Mexican huitlacoche (a mushroomlike fungus). All this and a

terrific Negroni too. \$55; 1140 Main St.; farcmapa.com.

LA TABERNA

New from the owner of ZuZu, a beloved Spanish restaurant down the street, this tapas bar would be at home in San Sebastián. Scan the printed menu for your drinks, including sherries, beers, and an eclectic list of international wines. Food options are chalked on a board above the bar: pintxos like *jamón ibérico de bellota*, smoked trout, and *pato* (duck) empanadas... you can't go wrong. \$55; 815 Main; lataberna.napa.com.

SENZA

Craig and Kathryn Walt Hall of Hall St. Helena reworked an existing B&B into a luxurious boutique hotel and spa. At the property's core is the restored 1870s Parker Mansion, where rooms off-season can be a stealth deal (as low as \$219) if there's a late-breaking vacancy. From \$379 *otherwise*; senzahotel.com.

STAG'S LEAP WINE CELLARS

A new visitor center lends sheen to this Napa institution. Seemingly built from the stones and earth it sits on, the center—a treasure trove of wine info—looks out onto the venerable Fay Vineyard, adjoining the vines that produced the S.L.V. Cabernet that won the famous Judgment of Paris. Today, winemaker Marcus Notaro crafts wines that do Leap's legacy proud. Tasting from \$25; 5766 Silverado

Trail; cask23.com.

WE RECOMMEND: Stag's Leap 2012 S.L.V. Cabernet Sauvignon (Stags Leap District; \$125).

ODETTE ESTATE

The first winery in the Stags Leap District in 15 years comes from the PlumpJack Group, owned by billionaire philanthropist Gordon Getty and California Lieutenant Governor Gavin Newsom. Winemaker Jeff Owens's first vintage of Odette Estate Reserve, the 2012, shot straight to the top with a perfect 100-point rating from wine critic Robert Parker. That wine's character—the Stags Leap "iron fist in a velvet glove"—is reflected in the elegantly feminine new tasting lounge. Tasting from \$15; 5998 Silverado Trail; odetteestate.com. **WE RECOMMEND:** Odette 2012 Odette Estate Cabernet Sauvignon (Stags Leap District; \$98).

YOUNTVILLE

CICCIO

It's not easy breaking into the gourmet fiefdom that is Yountville. But with its colorfully tiled wood oven, little Ciccio has quickly become a local fave. A rotating lineup of crusty pizzas from that oven anchors dinner here. You'll also want to try the wood-fired baby artichokes with a delicious walnut *bagna cauda*, and Ciccio's assured renditions of old Italian mainstays like chicken *piccata* and pork chop Milanese. \$5; 6770 Washington St.; ciccio.napavalley.com.

DON'T MISS THESE CLASSICS

AD HOC + ADDENDUM

In Yountville, the Thomas Keller restaurant you can actually get into. adhocrestaurant.com.

AUBERGE DU SOLEIL

Still one of the valley's most glamorous places to stay, with the best views. aubergedusoleil.com.

CHARLES KRUG

Napa's first commercial winery, started in 1861. charleskrug.com.

INGLENOOK

Historic chateau and vineyards restored by director Francis Ford Coppola. inglenook.com.

ROBERT MONDAVI WINERY

Heritage of groundbreaking wines; stunning Cliff May–designed winery. robertmondavivintner.com.

OAKVILLE

B CELLARS VINEYARDS AND WINERY

B is the newest addition to Napa's Golden Mile—the stretch of Oakville Cross Road between Highway 29 and Silverado Trail that's home to some of the valley's most revered labels, among them Groth, Silver Oak, and Rudd. It makes the most of the tony address with rich red blends that you taste in sleek new wine caves or in the winery garden. But it's about food too. A demonstration kitchen gives you a birds-eye view of what the chef is cooking for your wine pairing—dishes that capitalize on the produce from B's kitchen garden and the fresh eggs from its well-kept chickens. Tasting from \$35; 703 Oakville Cross Rd.; bcellars.com. **WE RECOMMEND:** B Cellars 2011 Blend 25 (Napa Valley; \$64).

ST. HELENA

RAYMOND VINEYARDS

Talk about a makeover. Much loved but styled along the lines of a '70s dentist office, Raymond has been reinvented by Jean-Charles Boisset, scion of one of France's prominent winemaking families and husband to California wine aristocrat Gina Gallo-Boisset. "We don't just make wine... we create dreams!" Boisset says. At Raymond, the dreams now include a Champagne lounge with a gold-flecked resin floor and karaoke, and Louis XIV–style furniture under the trees. But there's also a serious appellation-education room, a lab for blending your own wine, and a demonstration biodynamic garden with an app to guide you through it. And you can even bring your pooch to the doggie winery run by Boisset's French bulldog,

NAPA | La Taberna



OAKVILLE | B Cellars

