



Northern California's Wine Country

Q: What's red and white, and green all over? (Grapes under vines.)

Q: Where are some of the best vineyards in the world? (In Northern California.)

Q: Where would you most enjoy sampling Northern California wines? (At the wineries.)

If you answered three-out-of-three questions correctly, you're ready for a trip to Northern California's Wine Country.

Most of Northern California's wines are made by 700-plus wineries in three adjoining areas: the Napa Valley, the Sonoma Valley, and the combination of the Alexander, Dry Creek, and Russian River Valleys. Those are the three areas that are featured in this issue of *Pathfinder Newsletter*. We suggest a three-day circular tour, one day for each area. Summer or fall is best.

Pathfinder Newsletter

Summer 2008

Guided Tours of Cities, Towns, and National Parks in the American West

by the Authors of *Seven Perfect Days in Northern California* and *Seven Perfect Days in Colorado*

We've selected five wineries in each area that we would want to visit if this were our first trip to the Wine Country. They all have "something extra," such as a vineyard tour, picnic area, gardens, distinctive architecture or interesting history. Instead of simply hopping from one wine tasting to another, you'll have the opportunity and time to enjoy the eclectic aura of Northern California's Wine Country. And, with that in mind, we've suggested non-wine activities in each area that you might enjoy, and interesting places to purchase and eat lunch each day.

We had the assistance of knowledgeable locals in selecting these wineries, and we've confirmed their excellence during personal visits. For additional wineries that we recommend in each area, see the accompanying maps. You may, of course, have a favorite winemaker or two in each area. By all means, substitute those for the ones we've selected!

Almost all wineries are open to visitors from 10am to 5pm, and most of them have a tasting fee, which is sometimes waived with purchases. Wine tasting is sometimes complimentary in the Alexander/Dry Creek/Russian River Valley area.

As you tour the wineries, please keep in mind that drinking wine can lead to slowed reflexes; so eat something between those tastings, and be especially cautious as you drive—or appoint a designated driver.

A Brief Wine Primer

Before you begin the three-day tour, we thought you'd like some information on the history, making, and tasting of wines. If you're a wine sophisticate, you may want to skip this section and go directly to Day One of the tour. What we hope to do is briefly prepare occasional and typical wine drinkers for their tasting experiences.

Consider the grapevine. The Franciscan priests who established California's missions during the 1700's brought a pedestrian variety of grape to the area from Mexico. During the 1800's, European varieties were imported, and along with them came a root-chewing insect called phylloxera, which devastated most of the vineyards of Europe and America. Thanks to the bug-resistant California grapevines, onto which other varieties were grafted, European and American wine making was able to survive.

"Thrive" is a better word for what happened in the Napa, Sonoma and Alexander/Dry Creek/Russian River Valley areas, all of which have ideal soil and weather conditions for wine making. They produce some of the best wines in the world.

There will be several opportunities today for you to learn about the winemaking process, so we'll leave that educational task mostly to the wineries themselves. In a nutshell, however, it involves *planting* the vines, *growing* and *harvesting* the grapes, *pressing* the juice from the grapes, *fermenting* the juice in wooden casks or stainless-steel vats, and *bottling* the processed wine. Fermentation, which is the conversion of fruit sugar into alcohol, is caused by bringing the juice into contact with yeasts on the skins of ripe grapes.

White wine is made mostly from light-colored grape varieties such as Chardonnay, Chenin Blanc, Gewurztraminer, Riesling and Sauvignon Blanc. When red grapes are used for white wine, the skins are removed before they can color the juice.

Red wine is made from dark-colored grape varieties such as Cabernet Sauvignon, Gamay, Grenache, Merlot, Pinot Noir, Syrah (Shiraz), and Zinfandel. In the making of red wine, the grape skins and seeds are kept in contact with the juice throughout fermentation, giving the wine its greater depth of color and taste. The sharp taste that's experienced, to varying degrees, in red wine comes from chemicals called "tannins" which are found in grape skins, seeds and stalks. Tannins are important in the aging of red wines, that is, in bringing them to peak maturity.

White wines and light-bodied reds generally have little tannin and require less aging before consumption.

Wines made from a single variety of grape are referred to as "varietals"; those made from two or more varieties are called "blends."

White wines are usually classified as dry (without sweetness), medium, or sweet. Almost all red wines are dry.

Both whites and reds are characterized as light-bodied, medium-bodied, or full-bodied. This has to do with the wine's consistency, or thinness.

What we've done below is arranged the white varietals that you're most likely to encounter in the tasting rooms from dry to sweet:

- Sauvignon Blanc - dry, light-bodied
- Chardonnay - dry, medium-bodied and full-bodied
- Chenin Blanc - medium, light-bodied
- Riesling - medium, light-bodied
- Gewurztraminer - semi-sweet, medium-bodied

And we've arranged the red varietals from light- to full-bodied:

- Gamay - light (used in making Beaujolais)
- Grenache - light
- Zinfandel - medium
- Merlot - medium
- Cabernet sauvignon - medium
- Pinot Noir (Burgundy) - full
- Syrah (Shiraz) - full and often robust

Bordeaux wines are not listed because they are a blend, usually of Cabernet Sauvignon and Merlot.

If you're wondering where port wine, sherry, vermouth and dessert wine fit into this classification, the answer is: they don't. All are fortified blends; that is, a grape-based sweetening agent is added to the juices of two or more grape varieties just before or after the end of fermentation. Vermouth also has herbs and spices added. Dessert wines are made from grapes that are picked late to maximize sweetness and then are heated and cooled after fermentation.

Champagne, or sparkling wine, is made from Chardonnay and Pinot Noir grapes during a second fermentation in bottles after yeasts and sugars are added. Tiny bubbles result during the second fermentation, or when carbon dioxide is injected.

The term "reserve wine" is reserved (pun intended) for that winery's best output.

Now let's get to the best part: wine-tasting. (See the right photo on page 1.)

So that you can better taste the flavors of the more subtle wines, the "general rule" is to sample white before red, dry before sweet, and light before full bodied.

Wine tasting is basically a simple four-step process:

1. *Examine* the color and clarity of the wine in the glass.
2. Gently *swirl* the wine in the glass and take a deep *sniff* of its aroma. Taste, as you know, is heavily influenced by smell.
3. Take in a small amount and *roll it* around your mouth. The idea is to expose the wine to the back, top, tip and sides of the tongue where different taste sensations occur.
4. *Swallow*, and *assess* the aftertaste; that is, the continuation of the aroma and flavor in your mouth after swallowing.

If you keep these things in mind as you visit the wineries and sample their products, you'll move one step closer to being a connoisseur of wines.

Day One – Napa Valley

We'll start with a winery visit that includes a guided tour. We're suggesting that you choose from among Domaine Chandon, Cakebread Cellars and Robert Mondavi Winery, so you'll have that special experience. *Advance reservations are not required at Domaine Chandon, but they are required at Cakebread, and they are strongly recommended for Robert Mondavi tours during the summer and fall.*

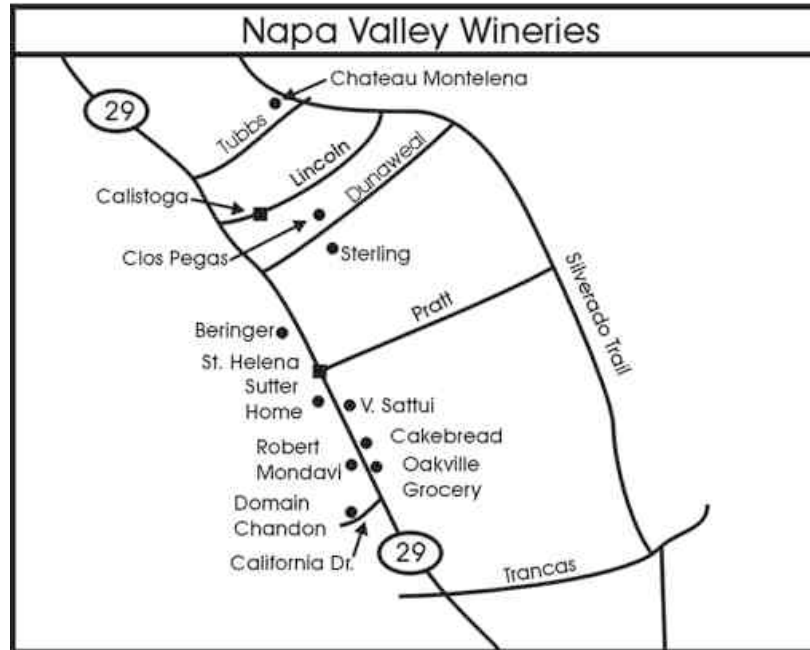
Choose Your Guided Winery Tour

Domaine Chandon's inside tour is 35 minutes long and shows the entire manufacturing and bottling process. It's very educational for newcomers to champagne making. The tour includes tasting, does not require a reservation, and departs from the visitor center at 11am, 1pm and 3pm Sunday through Friday, and at 11am, and 1, 3 and 5pm on Saturday. There is a fee for the tour.

Cakebread's "Educational and Tasting Tour" of the vineyard periphery and the winemaking process is given once daily, at 10:30am, and lasts approximately 90 minutes. The tasting is held in the courtyard instead of the tasting room. A reservation is necessary and can be made by telephoning 707-963-5222. There is a fee for the tour.

The **Robert Mondavi** "Tokalon Tour and Tasting" of the vineyards and the winemaking process takes about 75 minutes. Tours depart on the hour from 10am-4pm, and we recommend that you arrive at least ten minutes early to sign in and pay for the tour. Because of the popularity of Robert Mondavi's tour, during the summer and fall you should make a reservation in advance at 888-766-6328, extension 2000. There is a fee for the tour. (See the left photo on page 1.)

Notice the start times of the three tours: Domaine Chandon at 11am; Cakebread at 10:30am; Robert Mondavi at 10 or 11am. If this were our first time to Napa Valley, we would arrive at Domaine Chandon a little before their 10am opening, examine the lighted display of the champagne-making process in the hallway, and drive four miles (6.4 km) north to tour either Cakebread at 10:30am or Robert Mondavi at 11am.



Domaine Chandon

Owned by Moët Hennessy Louis Vuitton of France, Domaine Chandon is Napa Valley's best-known producer of champagne. If you don't join a tour, be sure to see the lighted display of the champagne-making process in the hallway. The winery's French cuisine restaurant is on everyone's list of the best places to eat in the Napa Valley; it's open for lunch and dinner. Interestingly, Domaine Chandon also produces still (non-bubbly) varietals that are only available in the restaurant, store, or by mail and Internet. There are three tasting groups of sparkling and varietal wines to choose between.

Open Nov.-Apr., daily 10am-6pm, May-Oct., Mon.-Thurs. 10am-6pm, Fri.-Sun. 10am-7pm; inside tour as described four paragraphs above; tasting fee; 1 California Drive, Yountville 94559; 707-944-2280; www.chandon.com.

Robert Mondavi Winery

Robert Mondavi is four miles (6.4 km) north of Domaine Chandon on Hwy 29. The first thing you'll notice is this winery's lovely, sweeping architecture. From its front entrance to the inside layout, the winery resembles a modernesque California mission. This is one of the Napa Valley's "anchor" wineries; that is, it's widely known and draws many visitors to the area. One reason for its popularity is that from the time he founded the winery in 1966, Robert Mondavi's goal was to educate the public about wine. This led, among other things, to the offering of several different kinds of tours, picnics in the vineyard, a summer music series and The Great Chefs at Robert Mondavi Winery series. The winery was purchased in December 2004 by Constellation Brands, a major producer and marketer of alcoholic beverages.

The 75-minute guide-led tour starts in the demonstration vineyards with a description of how grapes are grown and harvested, then proceeds to the grape presses, aging cellars, bottling

area and private tasting room. After the tour and tasting, see the art gallery down the walkway from the tour reception desk. Try the Cabernet Sauvignon, Fume Blanc and Chardonnay.

Open daily 10am-5pm; vineyard tours on the hour, 10am-4pm; the tour fee includes an excellent sit-down tasting; 7801 St. Helena Hwy. (Hwy. 29), Oakville 94562; 888-766-6328; www.robertmondavi.com.

Cakebread Cellars

This winery is a bit difficult to find because it's small, unpretentious and the identifying sign is hard to see. Just after you pass Robert Mondavi heading north on Highway 29, you'll see Opus One Winery and Turnbull Wine Cellars on your right. Cakebread Cellars is the first winery past Turnbull. Turn in at the black mailbox (if you reach Sequoia Grove Vineyards, you've gone too far).

We love the informal-but-classy aura and sense of quality about this winery. The tour is intimate and excellently done. (And the wine is good, too!) We particularly enjoyed learning how the Cakebread family acquired the land from a cattle rancher in 1973 and started their winery. Try the Sauvignon Blanc, Chardonnay and Cabernet Sauvignon.

Open daily 10am-4pm; *all tasting requires a reservation*; 90-minute tour of vineyard and production facility at 10:30am (includes tasting); 8300 St. Helena Hwy (Hwy. 29), Rutherford 94573; 707-963-5222 or 800-588-0298; www.cakebread.com.

V. Sattui Winery

Next, drive three and one-half miles (5.6 km) north to V. Sattui. We can't imagine a more pleasant commercial picnic environment than this one, despite the presence of so many people.

Inside, you'll find a wonderful delicatessen and a wine-tasting room (there's no tasting fee). V. Sattui's wines are sold only at the winery, by mail order, or from their website. There are condiments and cheeses to sample, and you have three choices for lunch: 1) "go European" by purchasing bread, cheese, fruit and wine; 2) buy chicken, ribs, and prepared vegetables, delicatessen-style; or 3) buy delicious ready-made sandwiches. Ask for a package of utensils and napkins at the cash register. Then take your picnic outside to the tables under two-and-a-half acres of spreading oaks; relax, and enjoy.

Architecturally, this winery is a very pretty place. The delicatessen and tasting room are in the original winery building. The second stone building, in the Italian Romanesque style, was built in 1985. Be sure to visit the cellars and historical museum under this building. You'll learn how Vitorrio Sattui established the winery (in San Francisco) in 1885 and his great-grandson, Daryl Sattui, reopened it in the Napa Valley in 1976. Try the Gamay Rouge, Morisoli Cabernet and the Victorio Vineyards Sauvignon Blanc.

Open daily 9am-6pm (closes 5pm Nov-Feb); 111 White Lane, St. Helena 94574; 707-963-7774; www.vsattui.com.

Sutter Home/Trinchero Family Estates Winery

Sutter Home is about one-half mile (0.8 km) north of V. Sattui. Yes, if you're wondering, this winery, which dates from 1874, was named for John Sutter of gold-discovery fame. It's been owned and run by the Trinchero family since 1947.

At this stop you'll admire the Victorian mansion (from outside only) and enjoy a walk through the winery's gardens, which contain 40 varieties of day lilies, 100 varieties of roses, palm trees from the Canary Islands, and a 130 year-old camellia at the mansion's entrance.

Sutter Home's claim to fame is its innovative White Zinfandel that became the best-selling wine in the United States in the 1980's. Another innovation is the winery's unusual line of alcohol-free wines bottled under the Fre label. We particularly enjoyed the Montevina Zinfandel and a delicious proprietary triple-cream sherry that's available only at the winery. Take a look around the tasting room; you'll find some interesting food and gift items for sale.

Open daily 9am-5pm; tasting of three wines is complimentary; 277 St. Helena Hwy. (Hwy 29), St. Helena 94574; 707-963-3104 or 800-967-4663; www.sutterhome.com and www.trincherofamilyestates.com.

St. Helena is two miles (3.2 km) beyond Sutter Home. As you drive through St. Helena, it's time for a time-check. *Our primary objective is to get you on the aerial tram at Sterling Vineyards by 4:30pm. Sterling is a winery experience that should not be missed.*

If you look to the right about seven miles (11.3 km) after passing through St. Helena, you'll see the white Mediterranean-style buildings of Sterling perched on a 300-foot knoll. From that high vantage point, you'll soon be enjoying one of the best views in the Napa Valley.

But, for now, let's drive on to Chateau Montelena, about three and a half miles (5.6 km) past Donawea Lane, and then right, to the end of Tubbs Lane.

Chateau Montelena Winery

The name suggests a castle near a mountain. And that's what it is. The French-style stone chateau, built in the early 1880's by the winery's founder, Albert L. Tubbs, is situated at the base of Mount St. Helena (4,343 ft). But the property didn't attain its current level of beauty until the Frank family purchased the winery in 1958. They excavated Jade Lake and installed Chinese gardens with red-lacquered pavilions and colorful bridges connecting two islands. Do take a walk down to see them.

The winery earned its reputation from a formal Parisian blind tasting in 1976. In it, nine French wine experts judged four French white Burgundies against six California Chardonnays, and Chateau Montelena's 1973 Chardonnay won top honors. Interestingly, the Stags Leap Wine Cellars entry (also in the Napa Valley, on the Silverado Trail) was the top-scoring red wine at the same tasting. Suddenly, California wines ranked right up there with the best wines from France. Try the Riesling, Chardonnay and Cabernet Sauvignon.

Open daily 9:30am-4pm; tasting fee; 1429 Tubbs Lane, Calistoga 94515; 707-942-5105; www.chateaumontelena.com.

Now, backtrack on Tubbs Lane and Highway 29 to Dunawea Lane, where you'll turn left and find the entrance to Sterling Vineyards on the right side of the road.

Sterling Vineyards

You'll need to arrive at Sterling and be in line (if any) by 4:30pm in order to enter the winery. You can tour and taste at your leisure; you will not be rushed.

Sterling's aerial tram is a unique and beautiful way to enter a winery. Once in the winery, you'll enjoy the panoramic view of the valley from the terrace, as well as Sterling's excellent self-guided tour of winemaking operations viewed from elevated platforms. Interesting descriptions at every stage of the winemaking process make this a very educational tour.

The tasting experience is also unique. Weather permitting, you'll be seated outside on the deck, under the trees, served by very pleasant and professional staff. Sterling's Napa Valley Merlot is the best Merlot we've ever tasted. Also try the Malvasia Bianca, SVR and Cabernet Sauvignon.

Open daily 10:30am-4:30pm; the entrance fee includes tram, self-guided winery tour, and tasting; 1111 Dunaweal Lane, Calistoga 94515; 707-942-3344; www.sterlingvineyards.com.

Calistoga

To get to Calistoga, return to Highway 29, turn right, and drive a little over a mile to Lincoln, where you'll turn right. This is a town with a laid-back western look and feel. Our guess is that you'll be ready for dinner about this time, so won't want to stop; but you might find a brief walkaround to be a nice change of pace.

The town of Calistoga was founded in 1859 and started the resort spa industry that thrives in the area today

Return to St. Helena via the Silverado Trail

Simply continue east on Lincoln a half mile or so to the Silverado Trail and turn right. About nine miles (14.5 km) south, turn right onto Pratt to cross back over to Highway 29 and St. Helena.

You'll only see the top third of the Silverado Trail, but it's a beautiful, peaceful and quick drive. There are quite a few Napa Valley wineries on the Silverado Trail, but most of them are south of Pratt.

St. Helena

St. Helena is a town where residents shop, buy and eat locally, mixing with the tourists, who enjoy it as well. Its few blocks of downtown are homey but classy, and busy but relaxed. The town runs the gamut from down-home shops to pricey boutiques. In other words, it has the feel of Main Street America of 30 or 40 years ago, with overtones of elegance. Soak up the ambiance!

Our choice would be to first have dinner, then stroll St. Helena's downtown—unless the shops are still open and you need to scratch the shopping itch before dinner. (Most shops close at 5 and 6 p.m.)

We suggest that you have dinner and spend the night in St. Helena. For easy access to listings, see "Where to Eat and Sleep in St. Helena" at the end of this issue.

Day Two – Alexander/Dry Creek/Russian River Valleys

Here's a tip for your tastings today: The Alexander Valley is known for Cabernet and Merlot, the Dry Creek Valley is known for Zinfandel and Sauvignon Blanc, and the Russian River Valley is known for Pinot Noir and Chardonnay.

In our opinion, the Rosso & Bianco and Ferrari-Carano wineries are not to be missed; their gardens and architecture are exceptional.

You already know where Tubbs Lane is in Napa Valley. To get to today's first wine tasting, drive north from Tubbs Lane on beautiful Hwy 128 for 18 miles (29 km) to where Hwy. 128 dead-ends at Geyserville Ave. Turn left and follow Geyserville Ave. for several miles to the Independence Ave. exit of US 101. You'll find Rosso & Bianco on the west side of the US 101 overpass.



Rosso & Bianco

The entrance and grounds of Rosso & Bianco are spectacular, as are the French chateau and fountain courtyard with its exceptional rose garden. There is a great view from the outdoor terrace. Try the Directors Cut Zinfandel, Directors Cut Cabernet Sauvignon and the Diamond Sauvignon Blanc. This winery was bought from Souverain in March 2006 by Frances Ford Coppola.

Open daily 11am to 5pm, except Christmas and New Year's Days; 300 Via Archimedes (formerly Souverain Rd.), Geyserville, 95441; 877-767-7624, 707-857-1400; www.rossobianco.com.

Ferrari-Carano Vineyards & Winery

To get to Ferrari-Carano, drive north on US 101 three miles (4.8 km) to the Canyon Rd. exit, head west two and one-half miles (4 km) to Dry Creek Rd., then north a mile and a half (2.4 km) to the winery.

This breathtaking winery showcases deep green lawns, eye-popping red flowers and a beautiful Italian villa. (See the center photo on page 1.) Try the Siena, a “super Tuscan” blend of reds, the Fume Blanc and the Alexander Valley Chardonnay. After tasting, be sure to enter through the wrought-iron gate, next to the wild boar sculpture, and follow the path through the winery’s five acres of gardens.

Open daily 10am to 5pm; 8761 Dry Creek Rd., Healdsburg, 95448; 707-433-6700;
www.ferrari-carano.com.

Preston Vineyards

Next, drive about two miles (3.2 km) south on Dry Creek Rd. to Yoakim Bridge Rd. Turn right, and then right again on West Dry Creek Rd. You’ll find Preston Vineyards on your right.

In marked contrast to Ferrari-Carano’s Italian opulence, Preston has the appearance of a farm in rural America. Besides making wines, Preston bakes fresh bread in its own bakery, makes olive oil and brined olives from its 1,000 olive trees, and sells in-season vegetables from its garden. Preston’s wine is distributed only in California and via their website. Try the Sauvignon Blanc, Barbera and L.Preston Rhone Blend.

Open daily 11am-4:30pm; tasting fee refunded with purchase; 9282 W. Dry Creek Rd., Healdsburg 95448; 707-433-3372; www.prestonvineyards.com.

Dry Creek General Store

The store is located on Dry Creek Rd. about four miles (6.4 km) south of Yoakim Bridge Rd. Stop here and purchase a delicious deli sandwich to go. Then, cross the road to Passalacqua.

Passalacqua Winery

Family owned and operated, this is a great place to eat your deli lunch. Head for the tables down the hill, under jasmine and wisteria; they are a hidden treasure...a great setting, panoramic view and protected if there’s any wind. Stroll by the redwood-shaded veranda, gardens, stone fountains and koi pond. Try the Zinfandel and Cabernet Sauvignon.

Open daily 11am-5pm; 3805 Lambert Bridge Rd., Healdsburg, 95448; 887-825-5547;
www.passalacquawinery.com.

Healdsburg Town Square

Next, continue south on Dry Creek Rd., about three and one-half miles (5.6 km), until you pass under US 101 and arrive at Healdsburg Ave./Old Redwood Hwy. Turn right and drive to Healdsburg Plaza on your left.

Take a stroll around the square for a change of pace. It’s loaded with quality shops.

To get to our last winery of the day, follow Healdsburg Ave./Old Redwood Hwy south for about two and one-half miles (4 km). You’ll find it on your right, just before the stop sign at Eastside Rd.

Rodney Strong Vineyards

The main building features modern architecture outside and an educational, self-guided tour inside, adjacent to the tasting room. Be sure to see the panel featuring Sonoma County's wine-growing history from 1810 to 1990. An interesting fact: Rodney Strong uses the largest number of solar panels of any winery in the world. Try the Russian River Pinot Noir, Merlot, Meritage, and Sauvignon Blanc.

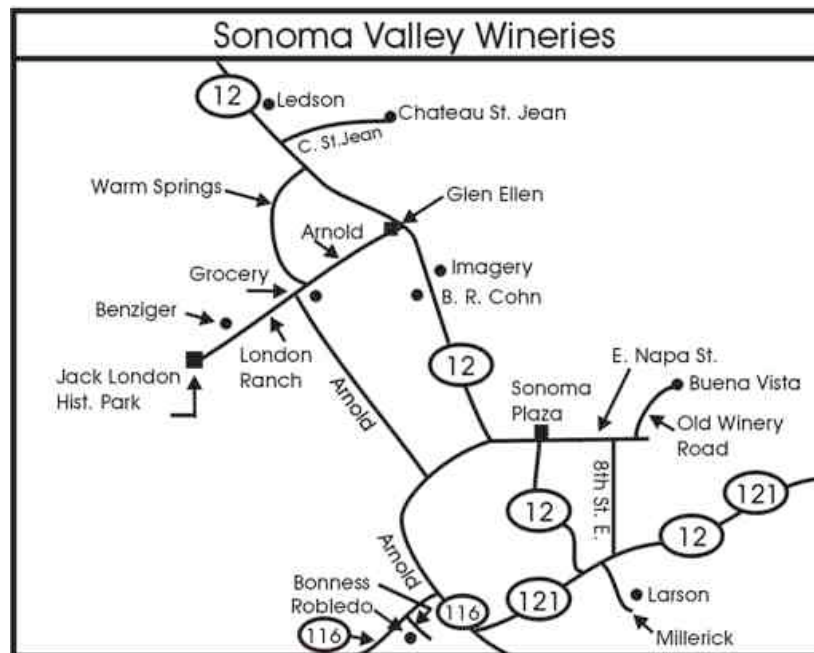
Open daily 10am-5pm; 11455 Old Redwood Highway, Healdsburg 95448; 707-431-1533; www.rodneystrong.com.

We suggest that you have dinner and spend the night in Healdsburg. For easy access to listings, see "Where to Eat and Sleep in Healdsburg" at the end of this issue.

Day Three – Sonoma Valley

To get to the Sonoma Valley from Healdsburg, travel about 16 miles (25.7 km) south on US 101 through Santa Rosa to the Sebastopol/Sonoma 12 exit, and then drive east and south on Hwy 12 about nine and one-half miles (15.3 km) to Chateau St. Jean.

The wineries we've chosen in the Sonoma Valley are arranged in sequence from north to south, so that you can complete your circular tour of the Wine Country. In our opinion, Chateau St. Jean's architecture and gardens and the Benziger vineyard tram tour should not be missed.



Chateau St. Jean

This is a gorgeous French chateau setting, with formal gardens, an expansive green lawn, fishponds, an arched footbridge, and fountains. There's a small deli inside. We recommend that

you pay the extra fee to taste in the Vineyard reserve room, so that you can try any of the Cinqs and the Robert Young Vineyard Reserve Chardonnay.

Open daily 10am-5pm; 8555 Sonoma Hwy, Kenwood, 95452; 707-833-4134;
www.chateausjjean.com.

Lunchtime in the Glen Ellen Area

Next, drive about three miles (4.8 km) south on Hwy 12 to Arnold Dr., where you'll turn right into the town of Glen Ellen.

Buy your deli lunch at the Glen Ellen Village Market, 13751 Arnold Drive. This market features the best delicatessen that we've ever seen, and the ready-made sandwiches are super-delicious. Picnic at: Benziger (shaded, with the most seating), B.R. Cohn (a wonderful patio), or Imagery (sunny tables in both front and back of the winery).

Benziger Family Winery

Benziger is just one-half mile up London Ranch Rd. from the market. Exceptional are the 45-minute tractor-pulled tram tour through vineyards, a visit to the wine caves, and the included wine tasting. In summertime and fall, be sure to reserve the tram ride in advance at 888-490-2739. The winery is known for its organic wines. Try the Sonoma Mountain Red, Tribute and Chardonnay.

Open daily 10am-5pm; 1883 London Ranch Rd., Glen Ellen 95442; 707-935-3000;
www.benziger.com.

Jack London State Historic Park

If you're a reader of Jack London's books—among them, *The Sea Wolf*, *The Call of the Wild*, *White Fang* and *Valley of the Moon*—you may enjoy visiting his 1,400-acre “Beauty Ranch” (just one-half mile beyond Benziger), where you can see London's ranch buildings, the cottage where he and his wife, Charmaine, lived, his museum, and what remains of his four-story, 26-room, 15,000-square-foot dream home (that burned just before he was to move in). The short hike on the Lake Trail is also enjoyable.

Open daily 10am-5pm, except Thanksgiving, Christmas and New Year's Day; 2400 London Ranch Road, Glen Ellen 95442; 707-938-5216; www.jacklondonpark.com.

Imagery Estate Winery

Imagery is just one mile (1.6 km) south of Arnold Dr. on Hwy 12. Owned by Benziger, Imagery commissions artists to create new labels each year and displays 170 original pieces of label art around the tasting room and in the gallery, thus claiming the world's largest wine label art collection. Outside, on the “Appellation Trail,” be sure to read the descriptions of a dozen varietals in the showcases. Although wines are distributed only to California restaurants and wine shops, they can be purchased in the tasting room and online. Try the Malbec and White Burgundy.

Open daily 10am-4:30pm; 14335 Sonoma Hwy., Glen Ellen, 95442; 707-935-4500;
www.imagerywinery.com.

B.R. Cohn Winery

B.R. Cohn is less than a mile south of Imagery. Here, you'll find not only vineyards, but also a 140-year old olive grove. Not surprisingly, they sell wines, olive oils and vinegars. The winery's owner was the Dooby Brothers road manager. There are also a stage for large benefit concerts and a patio area for picnics. Try the Cabernet Sauvignon, Pinot Noir and Sauvignon Blanc.

Open daily 10am to 5pm; 15000 Sonoma Hwy., Glen Ellen, 95442; 707-938-4064;
www.brcohn.com.

Robledo Family Winery

To get to Robledo, travel south five miles (8 km) to Petaluma Ave. and turn right. Petaluma joins Arnold shortly thereafter. Three miles (4.8 km) farther on you'll come to Hwy 116, where you'll turn right and then left onto Bonness.

This is the first winery established in the United States (1997) by a Mexican migrant vineyard worker, Reynaldo Robledo. All nine Robledo children are involved in the operation. Their story has been told in *People* magazine, *The New York Times*, *Reader's Digest* and other publications. The winery is in the Carneros Region, which is influenced by Pacific Ocean and San Francisco Bay weather. Try the Pinot Noir, Syrah and Sauvignon Blanc.

Open Monday through Saturday 10am to 5pm and Sunday 11am to 4pm; 21901 Bonness Rd., Sonoma 95476; 707-939-6903, www.robledofamilywinery.com.

Sonoma

Now, backtrack on Arnold Dr. and Petaluma Ave. Sonoma Plaza is less than a mile past where you left Hwy 12.

In the 1830's and '40's, Sonoma was Mexico's northernmost settlement and military garrison. The garrison was commanded by Mariano Guadalupe Vallejo, who surrendered on June 14, 1846 to a rag-tag group of Americans during the "Bear Flag Revolt." You might be interested in seeing some of the remaining buildings on the historic north edge of Sonoma Plaza (Spain St.): the Indian Servant's Quarters, the Barracks, the Mission San Francisco Solano de Sonoma, and the Blue Wing Inn across the street from the mission. Also noteworthy are The Vallejo Home, 3/10ths of a mile west of the plaza on Spain St. (it closes at 5pm), and the Sonoma Cheese Factory next to the Indian Servant's Quarters (about 16 different cheeses to sample).

We suggest that you have dinner and spend the night in Sonoma. For easy access to listings, see "Where to Eat and Sleep in Sonoma" below.

See the websites of the following visitor centers for links to lodging and dining establishments. Visitor guides are available by phone or mail.

Where to Eat and Sleep in St. Helena:

St. Helena Chamber of Commerce, 1010 Main St, Suite A, St. Helena, CA 94574; 707-963-4456, 800-799-6456; www.sthelenacalifornia.com; open Mon.-Fri. 10am-5pm, Sat. 11am-3pm. (Tra Vigne and Cindy's Backstreet Kitchen restaurants are favorites of ours.)

Where to Eat and Sleep in Healdsburg:

Healdsburg Chamber of Commerce & Visitors Bureau, 217 Healdsburg Ave., Healdsburg, CA 95448; 707-433-6935; www.healdsburg.com/chamber; open Mon.-Fri 9am-5pm, Sat. 9am-3pm, and Sun. 10am-2pm.

Another wonderful resource for general information about the Alexander/Dry Creek/Russian River Valleys is www.wineroad.com.

Where to Eat and Sleep in Sonoma:

Sonoma Valley Visitors Bureau, 453 First St. East, Sonoma, CA 95476; 707-996-1090, 866-996-1090; www.sonomavalley.com; open Mon.-Sat. 9am-5pm, and Sun. 10am-5pm. (The Girl & the Fig and The General's Daughter restaurants are favorites of ours.)

Bill and Celia Ginnodo are residents of Arlington Heights, Illinois. They have lived and traveled extensively in Northern California, and have enjoyed the Wine Country over many years. They are the authors of *Seven Perfect Days in Northern California: A Guided Driving Tour* and *Seven Perfect Days in Colorado: A Guided Driving Tour*, which can be seen at www.pridepublications.com and at www.amazon.com.

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