

EXECUTIVETRAVEL

News, advice and insight for today's small business leader

September 2006

Trendspotting

Six ideas that are taking travel and business in a new direction

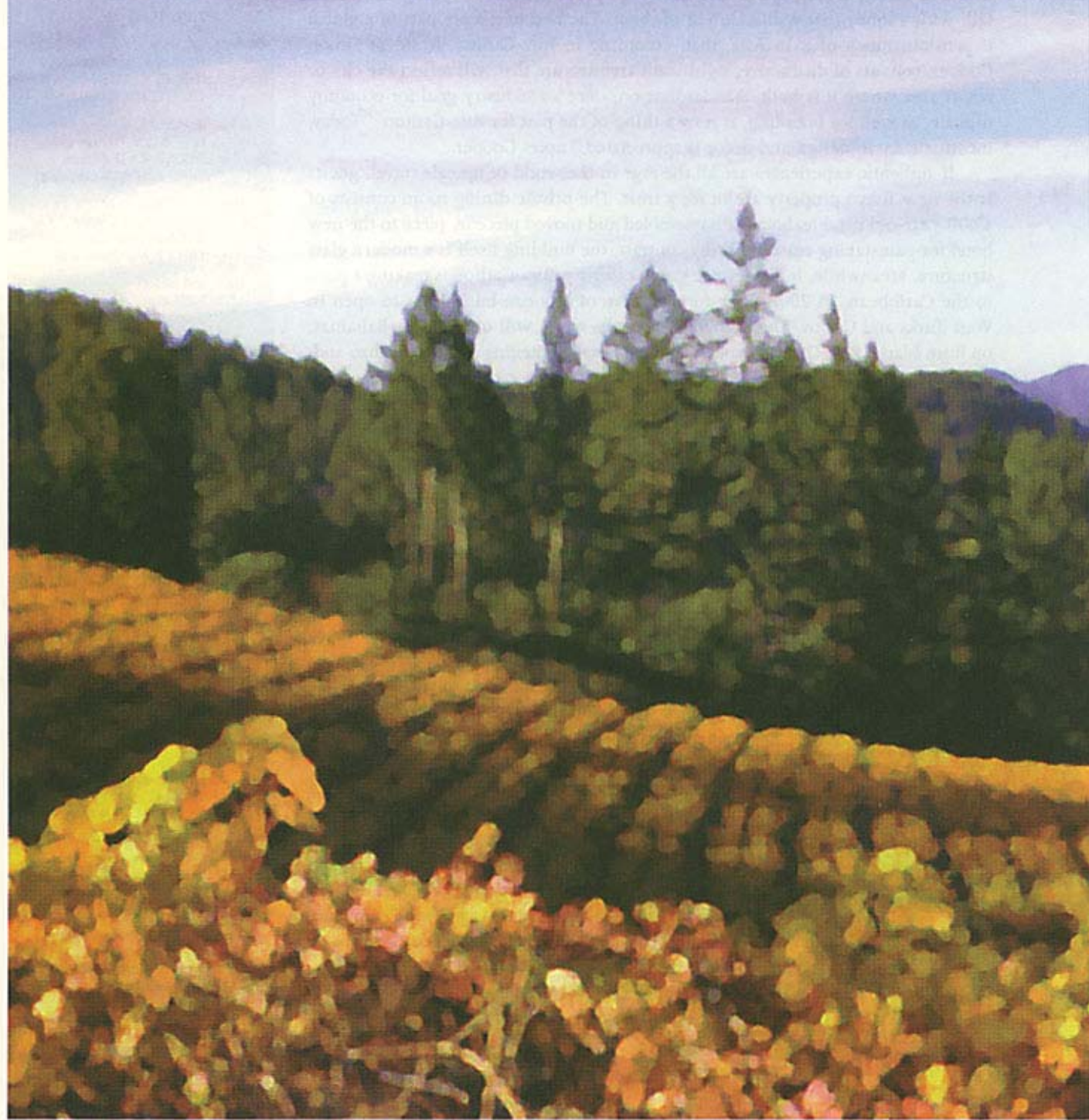
PLUS
Tokyo
Philadelphia
California Wine Country

SPECIAL BONUS SECTION
The hottest trends
in small business



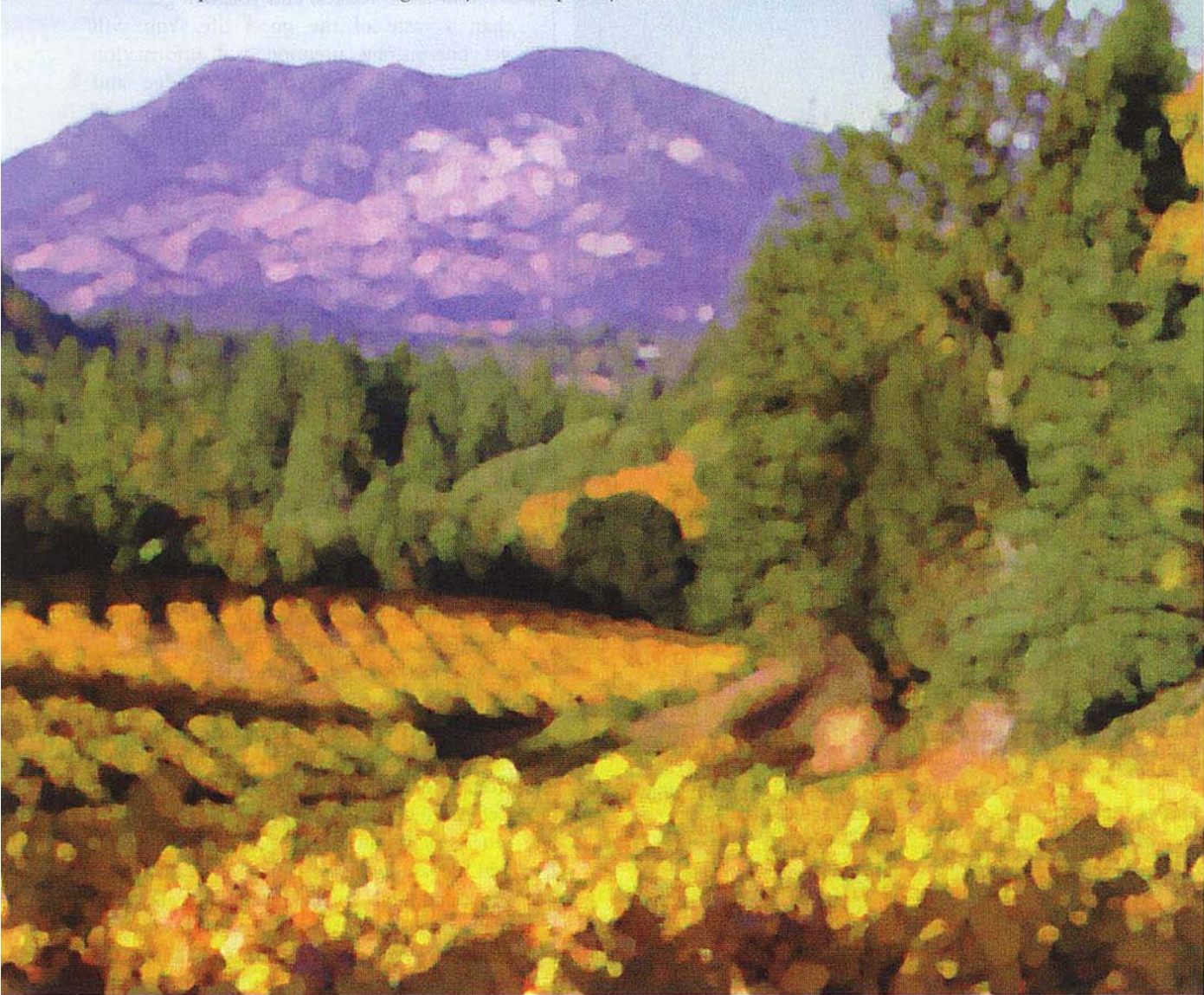
Inside: Special offers for Centurion members. See insert at page 25.

THE BUSINESS OF PLEASURE



Could it be the endless sipping of wine? The nine-course meals? Or is it the four-star view from your private cottage? There's something about Northern California wine country that leaves even the toughest road warrior charmed and completely rejuvenated. by Erika Lenkert

If you've ever been out to dinner with someone who confidently takes control of the evening's wine selection, you know that person does more than help the table to enjoy a good bottle of wine. He or she also exudes an air of worldliness, sophistication and capability. This ability is not only a great business tool. It's also a fantastic reason to make Northern California wine country your next leisure destination. Home to some of the nation's most luxurious resorts and legendary restaurants, the vineyard-draped regions of Napa Valley and northern Sonoma are optimal places to sip your way to a fantastic vacation, with educational perks that will last long after you've emptied your last souvenir bottle.



Exclusive Napa Valley

Though merely an hour's drive north from cosmopolitan San Francisco, Napa Valley is about as far as you can get from a suit-and-briefcase existence, which may be one reason famous last names like Disney, Coppola and Redford call the region home. More than 250 wineries are tucked into pristine hillsides and the vine-trellised valley flanked by the two major thoroughfares, Highway 29 and the Silverado Trail. Still, with 4.7 million visitors annually to the rural 25-mile-long region, tasting rooms can be as crowded as an airport terminal during commuter rush hour. But if you've got an appointment-only wine-tasting itinerary highlighting limited-access wineries, you can be one of 12 guests who get VIP treatment and a real wine education.

With throngs of visitors corralled in and around its mission-style shrine to wine, Robert Mondavi Winery doesn't seem like an intimate, focused environment for learning. However, with an appointment, you

can join one of the most comprehensive educational programs in the valley. More incognito is Joseph Phelps Vineyards, home of the famed cabernet sauvignon blend Insignia and a great wine basics seminar. In nearby Rutherford, Staglin Family Vineyard, which pulled in the top bid—\$1.05 million—for its wine-and-travel lot at the 2006 Napa Valley Wine Auction, receives only 10 guests each weekday for its cave tour and sit-down tasting. Another big ticket at the wine auction, hidden Shafer Vineyards, is the place to savor cabernet sauvignon with the award-winning flavor of the Stags' Leap district. At Schramsberg, a captivating 217-acre champagne estate once frequented by Robert Louis Stevenson, hand-dug caves carved by Chinese laborers in the 1800s are the stunning setting for a sparkling wine schooling.

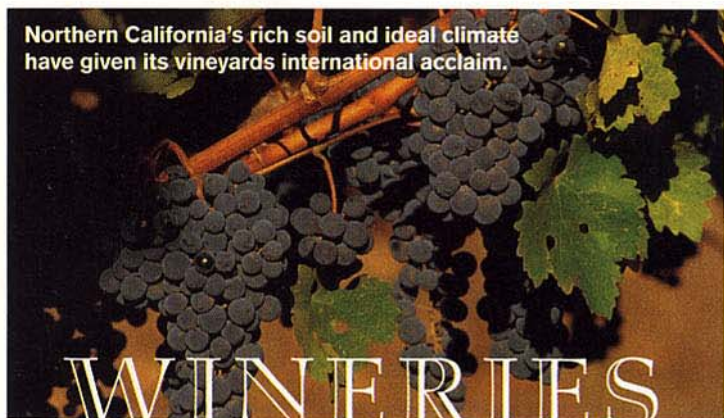
Visit these venues, and you will get more than a taste of the good life. You will get one-on-one attention and information that will enhance your knowledge and vocabulary in a way that enables you to discuss wine intelligently with peers and wine professionals.

Food for thought

It's a good idea to limit winery visits to three per day, but there is ample opportunity to continue your wine education—and indulge in truly memorable meals—within the region's finest dining rooms. Whether you head to a basic diner for a burger and fries or a white-tablecloth destination serving foie gras and sweetbreads, someone on the staff will be able to guide you to the perfect wine pairing. But if you really want to take advantage of the region's expertise, look to a handful of restaurants that promise the ultimate food and wine combinations.

Rightfully reputed as one of the best dining experiences in the world, The French Laundry is reserved for guests who have unlimited expense accounts, an inside track on getting reservations and the patience to sit through three-plus hours of culinary theater directed from the kitchen by famed chef Thomas Keller. Technically, it's a nine-act affair, where each unbelievably precious, composed and elegant bite-size course is dramatically presented and finished tableside. But the kitchen invariably sends out enough surprises to make everyone lose count. Challenge the staff to include wine pairings and describe why each combination works, and you will

Northern California's rich soil and ideal climate have given its vineyards international acclaim.



Napa Valley

Cliff Lede Vineyards

1473 Yountville Cross Road, Yountville
707-944-8642
cliffledevineyards.com

Joseph Phelps Winery

200 Taplin Road, Saint Helena
800-707-5789
jpvwines.com

Robert Mondavi Winery

Highway 29, Oakville
888-RMONDAVI
(888-766-6328)
robertmondaviwinery.com

Schramsberg Vineyards

1400 Schramsberg Road, Calistoga
707-942-2414
schramsberg.com

Shafer Vineyards

6154 Silverado Trail, Napa
707-944-2877
shafervineyards.com

Staglin Family Vineyard

P.O. Box 680, Rutherford
707-944-0477
staglinfamily.com

Sonoma

Bella Vineyards and Wine Caves

9711 West Dry Creek Road, Healdsburg
866-572-3552
bellawinery.com

Jordan Winery

1474 Alexander Valley Road, Healdsburg
800-654-1213
jordanwinery.com

Martinelli Winery

3360 River Road, Windsor
800-346-1627
martinelliwinery.com

Rafanelli

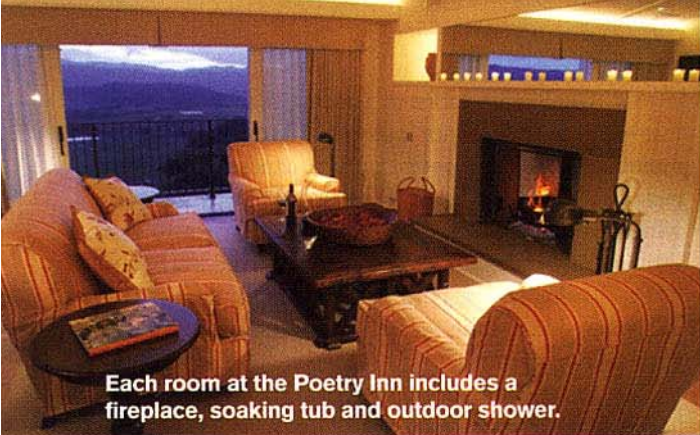
4685 West Dry Creek Road, Healdsburg
707-433-1385
arafanelliwinery.com

Rochioli Vineyards & Winery

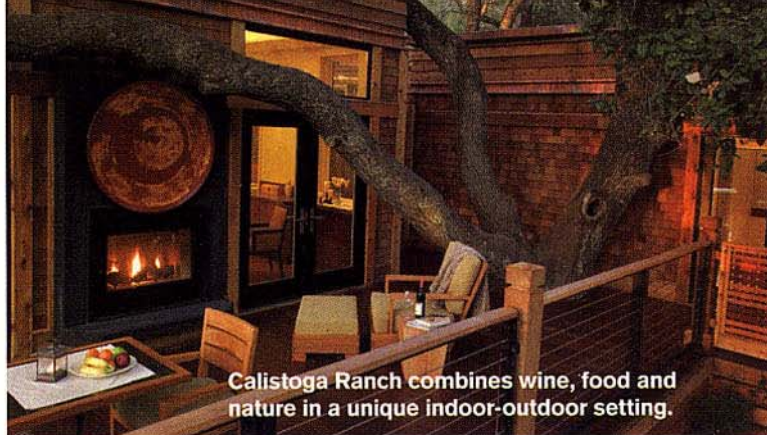
6192 Westside Road, Healdsburg
707-433-2305

Stryker Sonoma

5110 Highway 128, Geyserville
800-433-1944 or 707-433-1944
strykersonoma.com



Each room at the Poetry Inn includes a fireplace, soaking tub and outdoor shower.



Calistoga Ranch combines wine, food and nature in a unique indoor-outdoor setting.

leave full of truly exceptional French-inspired cuisine and a better understanding of the dance between wine and cuisine.

Down the road, newcomer Redd bucks romantic wine country convention with a shockingly stark and contemporary dining room and patio. But the menu, overseen by chef Richard Reddington, who established himself as a serious culinary player as the chef at Napa's luxury resort Auberge du Soleil, woos guests and locals with masterful five- and nine-course menus. Make a reservation to taste a showcase of fresh California ingredients, French technique, and Asian and Mediterranean influences that come with an optional wine-pairing program. Splurge on both, and your homework is virtually handed to you on a silver platter.

HOTELS

Napa

Auberge du Soleil

180 Rutherford Hill Road, Rutherford
707-963-1211
aubergedusoleil.com

Calistoga Ranch

580 Lommel Road, Calistoga
707-254-2800
calistogaranch.com

Meadowood Napa Valley

900 Meadowood Lane, Saint Helena
800-458-8080
meadowood.com

Poetry Inn

6380 Silverado Trail, Napa
707-944-0646
poetryinn.com

Private Homes

BeautifulPlaces

800-495-9961
beautiful-places.com

RESTAURANTS

Napa

The French Laundry

6640 Washington Street, Yountville
707-944-2380
frenchlaundry.com

Redd

6480 Washington Street, Yountville
707-944-2222

Sonoma

Cyrus

29 North Street, Healdsburg
707-433-3311
cyrusrestaurant.com

Dry Creek Kitchen

317 Healdsburg Avenue, Healdsburg
707-431-0330
hotelhealdsburg.com

Napa's best beds

It is impossible to fully indulge in Napa's offerings without needing to recuperate before hitting the wine and food roads again. Fortunately, the valley is home to the kind of four-star retreats that end up on "best of" magazine lists the world over.

For the nature and luxury lover, there's no better option than Calistoga Ranch, a chic retreat with opulent freestanding "cabins" dotting a pristine canyon, a private restaurant overlooking a lake, and a full-service spa, gym, pool, wine caves and vineyard. Sister property Auberge du Soleil is the hillside yin to the ranch's woodsy yang, with its resort amenities accented by mammoth Mediterranean-inspired suites perched high in the Rutherford hills. Visitors with a penchant for country-club living make the cottages of Meadowood a temporary home. Perhaps the most exclusive experience can be found at newcomer Poetry Inn. Located high on the Stags' Leap district's eastern slope, its five enormous and elegantly appointed rooms have the very best valley views, expansive marble bathrooms with outdoor showers, and complete exclusivity—not to mention the inside track on their sister winery, Cliff Lede, and its prestigious \$15,000 three-day "blend your own barrel" program, offered twice annually.

The next great wine destination

If Napa is the most famous region in Northern California wine country, northern Sonoma County has been its best-kept secret. The region is characterized by family-owned wineries stretching from the Napa border to the ocean. With casual, lesser-known wineries hidden along rustic, winding two-lane roads, quaint country towns and award-winning wines, it's long been in the shadow of its glitzier sister county to the east. However, the recent arrival of luxury hotels and destination restaurants have put these charming country communities onto the must-visit map. Fortunately, the region still manages to maintain the friendly, low-key existence that makes it possible to stumble into a winery and taste its wares with the person who made them—and garner a far less formal and structured education than you'll find in Napa.

The area's wine appellations—including such well-known names as Dry Creek, Russian River and Alexander Valley—surround the beautiful Victorian town of Healdsburg. Though its boutique shops, restaurants and historic centerpiece square command attention, the region is a spectacular place to become familiar with one of their most famous products—luscious, jammy zinfandel. Drop by Bella Winery to sample award-winners within chicly decorated caves, or make reservations for a sit-down tasting at Rafanelli.

Is your client a riesling or a cab?

There's no one right way to order wine when hosting a business dinner in a restaurant. But here are a few tips to make your experience go down as smoothly as a perfectly aged cabernet.

First, get your bearings. Before even looking at the list, determine if any of your guests would enjoy helping with the selection. Giving a wine-loving guest the reins is a generous gesture. If you end up in charge, take a few minutes to get comfortable with the list by noticing the types of wine it includes and how they're organized and priced.

Next ask fellow diners if they have any likes or dislikes. Matching a person with wine they like is equally, if not more, important than finding the perfect wine to pair with the steak and potatoes.

If a wine professional is on hand, share the table's preferences and desired menu selections with him or her and ask some evocative questions: What's drinking particularly well right now? Are there any wines not on the list that I should know about? If I like X wine, can you recommend something similar in price and style from a different region? Or better yet, challenge them to come up with the perfect choice.

Even if you know wine, it's often a good idea to leave the selection to the pros. They know their list better than anyone and enjoy sharing their knowledge and favorite selections. Challenge them by offering parameters, such as personal style preferences, the table's dinner choices and desired price point. Then let them do the work for you. The mere fact that you can express your desires to a wine professional has already shown the table that you know your stuff, so your work is done.

If there isn't a wine professional on hand or a consensus on food among your guests, follow the advice of Evan Goldstein, master sommelier and vice president of global wine education for Beam Wine Estates. He suggests, "Pick the most flexible types of wines—pinot noir or merlot for reds and pinot grigio or riesling for whites."

And when all else fails, remember that a great wine pairing is as simple as wine and good company.

—E.L.

But there's a lot more to Sonoma than great wines that pair perfectly with barbecue. Martinelli's newly remodeled red barn pours fantastic zinfandel, but the rest of its lineup garners equal merit. Crafted by superstar winemaker Helen Turley, some selections have a 10-year waitlist. At benchmark winery Rochioli, the sauvignon blanc, chardonnay and pinot noir are popular enough that the winery has to limit the number of bottles that can be purchased per visit.

Not to be outdone by Napa, laid-back Sonoma also has its share of grand estates, and Jordan Winery is one of the grandest. Make an appointment to explore the 18th-century château-inspired structures and grounds, and participate in a formal sit-down tasting of their well-regarded chardonnay and cabernet sauvignon. A more casual place to acclimate your palate to the region's chards and cabs is in the friendly tasting room at Stryker Sonoma.

Rest assured

While lace-and-lattice B&Bs used to be Healdsburg's accommodations mainstay, the 2001 arrival of Hotel Healdsburg changed the tone with homey and contemporary rooms, a pool and full-service spa, and the area's first destination restaurant, Dry Creek Kitchen. Run by celebrity chef Charlie Palmer, the spacious, rustic-modern room was the highest-profile eatery in the region until San Francisco restaurant pro chef Douglas Keane and maître d'hôtel Nick Peyton opened Cyrus. Now known as one of the top restaurants in the entire Bay Area, Cyrus offers a French fine dining experience that starts with champagne and caviar carts in an environment inspired by the restaurants of the Burgundian countryside. With a multicourse menu that warrants overindulgence, it's a good thing this hot spot adjoins the region's top hotel, the 16-room, European-style luxury inn Les Mars. For well-fed guests, it's a one-minute waddle from the dining room to one of the superfluously elegant rooms adorned with 18th- and 19th-century antiques. Even better for the wine student is the hotel's custom wine program, where for \$7,500, a private group of one to eight people is led on a wine tour of restricted properties and seminar by one of the nation's leading wine educators and authors, Karen MacNeil.

There are also more all-inclusive programs that make scheduling a tasting curriculum as easy as picking up the phone. Newly launched BeautifulPlaces rents luxury homes in Napa and Sonoma and offers all the services of a four-star concierge, including babysitting, private wine tours and dinner reservations at the most popular tables. The only thing they can't do is help clear your schedule. But as wine experts will tell you, the best way to learn about wine is to taste it. Cheers.☺

ERIKA LENKERT is a freelance writer based in San Rafael, Calif.

The French Laundry boasts an extensive wine list to accompany its renowned nine-course meals.

