



Solbar



Milliken Creek Inn & Spa




Hyde de Villaine



Lucy





# An undiscovered world awaits wine lovers who venture off the valley's beaten path.

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PHOTOS BY KATIE NEWBURN

First-time travelers to Napa Valley often appreciate the apparent simplicity of its infrastructure. Large, well-signed wineries line the backbone of Route 29, making each visit as easy as pulling into a driveway.

But for seasoned visitors, as well as those seeking more authentic experiences closer to Napa's rural roots, there are plenty of ways to get off the main drag.

For one, the "valley" is home to as many mountains as pockets of valley floor. Those mountains, and their twisting side roads, are littered with vinous gold.

At these small-scale wineries, a handful of people make the magic happen, but a polite phone call will often peel one of them away from their work. It's a chance to taste through their wines and discover their individual dreams and terroirs.

These experiences are worth savoring for their intimacy, proximity to one-of-a-kind vineyards and rare wine finds.

The same applies to restaurants and inns, equally hidden away, which offer a chance to discover where the locals—or regulars, anyway—hang out.

So turn on the GPS and turn off the highway. Here's your guide to the roads less traveled.

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# NAPA OFF THE GRID WINERIES

## Failla

St. Helena

Failla, off the Silverado Trail in St. Helena, is an unusual find in the Napa Valley. It's the personal project of Ehren Jordan, who toiled for years as the general manager/winemaker/viticulturalist at Turley Wine Cellars. Jordan makes Sonoma Coast Chardonnay, Pinot Noir and Syrah, unlikely wines for this part of the world. Stop in, blow your mind and freshen your palate. Tours and tastings are by appointment.

## Arkenstone Vineyards

Up the twistingly sloped, conifer-lined narrows of Howell Mountain lies Arkenstone Vineyards, a relative newcomer that's already making world-class Cabernet Sauvignon. Schedule an appointment to tour and taste (\$45/person), and enjoy structured Cabernet blends, Syrah, Sauvignon Blanc and the lovely, bone-dry Loupé Rose, made in miniscule quantities. The views of the valley are worth the price alone.

## Larkmead Vineyards

Calistoga's Larkmead is a respected producer of allocated wines open by appointment daily from 10 am–3 pm. Taste the winery's rare Tocai Friulano, Sauvignon Blanc, Cabernet Sauvignon, a range of proprietary blends and the signature Firebelle, a Bordeaux-style blend ideal for cellaring.

## Palmaz Vineyards

At Palmaz Vineyards in Napa, the two-hour appointment includes a seated tasting with small hors d'oeuvres and a walk through the expansive caves (including the world's largest underground reinforced structure, with a height of 54 feet and diameter of 72 feet) dug into the living rock of Mount George (\$60/person). The gravity-flow winery and consultant Mia Klein make valley standards like Cabernet Sauvignon and Chardonnay, but also Riesling and Muscat Canelli.

## Stony Hill Vineyard

On the rocky slopes of Spring Mountain, Stony Hill is a breath of fresh air in a land of red wine. It's a historic producer of elegant white wines, including crisp, minimally oaked, no-malolactic Chardonnay, Gewürztraminer and Riesling. Cabernet Sauvignon is a recent addition after 60 years of family ownership. Proprietor Willinda McCrea and longtime winemaker Mike Chelini give 90-minute tours and tastings (\$45/person) at the ranch house by appointment Monday–Saturday from 9 am–3:30 pm. Hungry groups of four should consider the cooking classes (\$175/person) by appointment from 11 am–3 pm.

## The Grade Cellars

By definition, The Grade Cellars in Calistoga is off the beaten path—its Winfield Vineyard is located on remote Old Toll Road Pass. Acclaimed winemaking consultant Thomas Rivers Brown crafts The Grade Cabernet Sauvignon and Sea-Fog Sauvignon Blanc from two single vineyards. Reflecting the owners' passion, the brand is named after a passage in Robert Louis Stevenson's *The Silverado Squatters*. By appointment.

## Venge Vineyards

Also in Calistoga, Venge Vineyards lies within the foothills of the Palisades Mountains. It's the culmination of meticulous winemaking by Kirk Venge, who learned the ropes from dad Nils. The focus is Cabernet Sauvignon, with smaller smatterings of Chardonnay, Pinot Noir and Syrah. Advance reservations are required to taste allocated wines at the winery ranch house, limited to eight guests at a time, from Wednesday–Sunday.

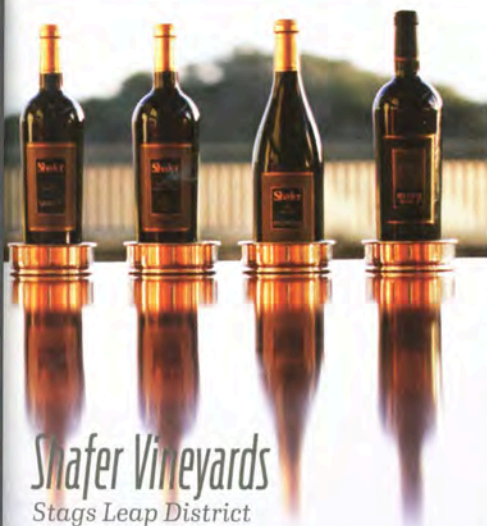




## Spottswode

St. Helena

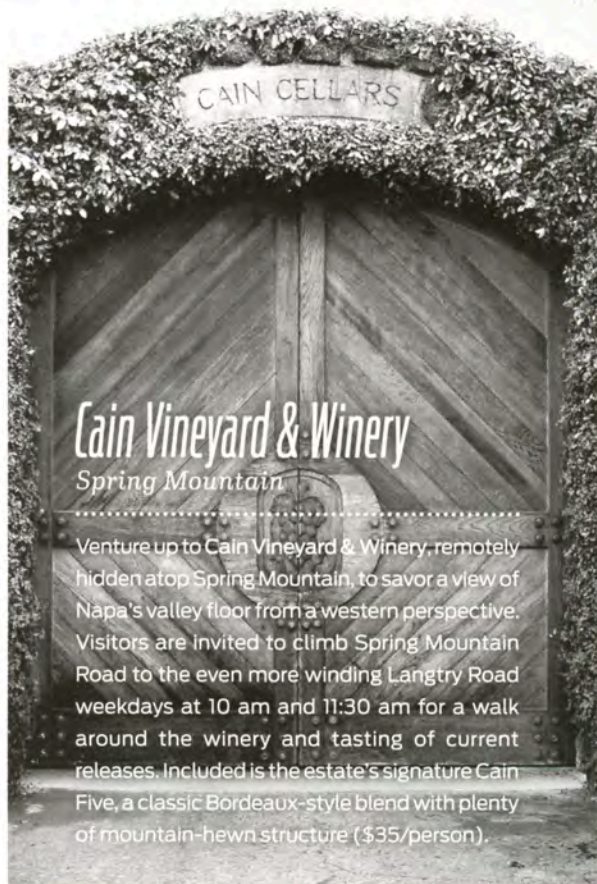
Another family-run winery, Spottswode, occupies a very different setting near downtown St. Helena. The 90-minute tasting and tour (\$50/person) includes stops at its estate vineyard, historic family home, gardens and "ghost winery" stone cellar. It offers tasters the chance to indulge in a more genteel side of the valley, plus supremely elegant Cabernet Sauvignon and Sauvignon Blanc.



## Shafer Vineyards

Stags Leap District

Shafer's Hillside Select is one of Napa's iconic Cabernet Sauvignons. Taste it without being on the mailing list or dropping \$300 by visiting family-run Shafer Vineyards in the Stags Leap District. Tastings are by appointment weekdays at 10 am and 2 pm (\$55/person), limited to 10 guests at a time. The relaxed visits consist of five wines, including Hillside.



## Cain Vineyard & Winery

Spring Mountain

Venture up to Cain Vineyard & Winery, remotely hidden atop Spring Mountain, to savor a view of Napa's valley floor from a western perspective. Visitors are invited to climb Spring Mountain Road to the even more winding Langtry Road weekdays at 10 am and 11:30 am for a walk around the winery and tasting of current releases. Included is the estate's signature Cain Five, a classic Bordeaux-style blend with plenty of mountain-hewn structure (\$35/person).



## Hyde de Villaine

Napa

Hyde de Villaine is unassumingly tucked off a main road in downtown Napa. This partnership between Burgundy legend Aubert de Villaine of Domaine de la Romanée-Conti and long-respected Carneros grape-grower Larry Hyde produces gorgeously rendered Chardonnay, Syrah and Belle Cousine, a blend of Cabernet Sauvignon and Merlot. Tastings by appointment.







## Cindy's Backstreet Kitchen

St. Helena

To eat where the locals eat, particularly winemakers, head to Cindy's Backstreet Kitchen, situated literally on a back street behind the main drag in St. Helena. The combination of Chef Cindy Pawlcyn's elevated comfort food (oysters, pork tacos, burgers, polenta fries and meatloaf), inspired list of wines (by the glass and half-bottle) and casual atmosphere is hard to beat.





## Farm Napa

Further off the grid is Farm Restaurant at The Carneros Inn outside of Napa, surrounded by Instagram-worthy swathes of vineyard and endless sky. Enjoy dinner near the fireplace or on the expansive patio—equally desirable destinations to take in a fresh cocktail or two or a glass of Carneros-made wine. It just feels like vacation.



## Solbar Calistoga

For a true escape into swimming pool-and-palm-tree-lined heaven, head to Solbar within the confines of the Solage resort in Calistoga. Not only has the food deservedly earned a Michelin star, inspired by local, sustainably-farmed ingredients turned into California soul food, it's the place to while away an afternoon or early evening indulging in ridiculously delicious cocktails (the Charbay Green Tea Vodka-based Sex in the Valley is a favorite) or wines on tap. The wine list is inspired, a place to discover small, local brands you haven't yet had the chance to try.

## Lucy Yountville

Hidden in restaurant-heavy Yountville is Lucy Restaurant & Bar. Situated within the calming Bardessono Hotel, the menu and cocktails are inspired by the hotel garden and nearby purveyors, and the wine list focuses on small-production organic, sustainable and biodynamic wines. The special, family-style Garden Table Menu for 6–10 people is the star here, centered around a chef-guided garden tour and cooking demonstration, followed by lunch or dinner.



## Alex Italian Rutherford

In Rutherford, Alex Italian offers the chance to indulge in fine Italian food in a small dining room, just fancy enough to wear a tie or dress, but not otherwise ridiculously overstated. Grandly made pasta is on heavy rotation, with *secondi* centered on the likes of seared duck, wild-caught sea bass and Sonoma rabbit. The well-stocked half-bottle list of Napa and international superstars (Araujo, Opus One, Gaja) alone makes Alex well worth the stop—sample several from your wine “bucket list.” The restaurant is attached to the tranquil Rancho Caymus Inn, also worth a visit.





# NAPA OFF THE GRID LODGING

## Calistoga Ranch

Calistoga

Calistoga Ranch is hidden among the trees off a back road on the eastern edge of Calistoga. Sprawling over 157 acres, with 50 well-appointed rooms and lodges, spa services, forest and hiking trails, it's a true getaway that's not too removed from the action. The Lakehouse is the property's onsite restaurant, overlooking Lake Lommel.







The Poetry Inn



The Poetry Inn

## The Poetry Inn

### Stags Leap

The Poetry Inn, perched atop a climbing Stags Leap District road, defines hideaway, a contrast to sister property Cliff Lede Vineyards down below. Rooms range from 960–1,450 square feet, with a three-course gourmet breakfast included in any stay. Rooms face west to take in the views of the Mayacamas range, and feature fine amenities like Italian linens, wood-burning fireplaces and outdoor showers. There's an outdoor pool and hot tub, and much more. The entire property may be rented for larger groups or serious privacy.



## Milliken Creek Inn & Spa

### Napa

Milliken Creek Inn & Spa lies hidden along the Silverado Trail behind the city of Napa along Milliken Creek. With 12 luxurious rooms, complimentary breakfast and soothing spa treatments, it emphasizes mental and physical renewal, a philosophy that includes wine, of course. The inn hosts the Magic Hour every night, a wine-and-cheese reception held at sunset, then pours premium Ports to close out the night.

