

# COAST

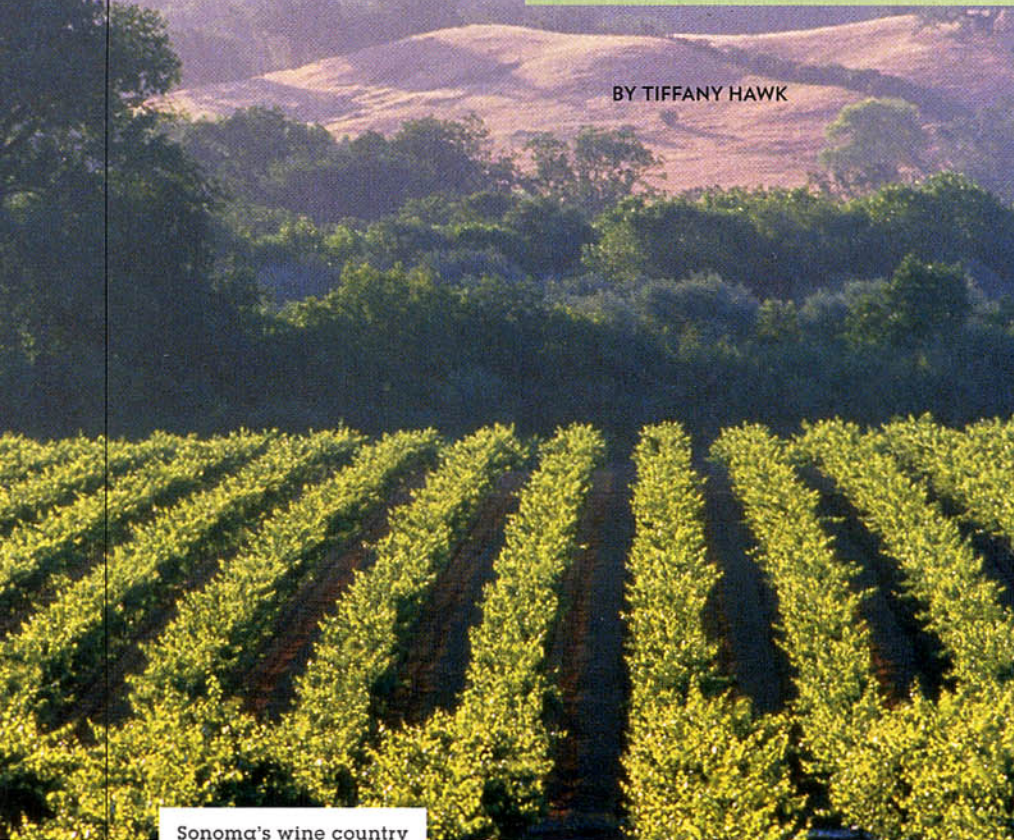
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# WINE COUNTRY

BY TIFFANY HAWK



Sonoma's wine country

## OF THE MOMENT

**YOUNTVILLE** Long known for Thomas Keller's renowned French Laundry and Bouchon restaurants, sleepy Yountville is poised to become the hub of the Napa scene. An astounding infusion of upscale new development – luxury resorts, restaurants, and wineries – is joining a town already endowed with six Michelin stars and 24 wineries within a four-mile radius. On the hotel front, you'll find the just-opened Hotel Luca, a 20-room boutique hotel being developed by the folks who created L'Auberge Carmel, along with newcomers Bardessono, a chic 62-room hotel and spa that aims to be the greenest luxury resort in America; and Villagio Inn and Spa, the high-tech Tuscan-style resort that debuted last year with four AAA diamonds and a romantic spa with five private spa suites for couples.

While French Laundry remains a must (if you can get a reservation), you can also now sample the cuisine of another celebrity chef – Michael Chiarello. Last year, the Food Network star moved into Yountville's V Marketplace with a vengeance, opening a NapaStyle store and Bottega, a rustic Italian restaurant, which *Esquire* magazine recently named one of the 20 best new restaurants in the U.S.

## FAIR GAME

**TEMECULA** In 2008, when Temecula's South Coast Winery was named the state's best winery by the California State Fair Wine Competition, some people called it a fluke. But then, after competing with more than 600 wineries from around the state, they won again in 2009. Judging for yourself couldn't be easier. South Coast is a working winery, but it's also a 76-room resort and spa in the heart of Temecula Wine Country. Spend the night, enjoy complimentary tastings and then see how they stack up against 30 other local vintners. (Don't miss Wiens Family Cellars two doors up on Rancho California Road.) To experience it even closer to home, head to their South Coast Winery Restaurant on South Bristol Street in Santa Ana.

:: [wineresort.com](http://wineresort.com)

## BIO SAMPLE

**GLEN ELLEN** Benziger Family Winery, which has been experimenting with sustainable winemaking since the 1980s, is now teaching visitors what they've learned through their new Biodynamic Vineyard Tram Tour. Find out how regenerative farming techniques make for better wines with the 45-minute guided tour, which will take you through the vineyards, fermentation facility, crush pad, and barrel caves before letting you sample their award-winning biodynamic wines.

:: [benziger.com](http://benziger.com)

Napa Valley's current "it" place, Yountville



This winter, hope for the long-awaited opening of Vita, a Sicilian and Southern Italian restaurant by Laura Cunningham, the front-of-the house guru who helped create French Laundry and Per Se in New York.

Of course, you're really expecting wine while in Napa, and you'll find no shortage of new venues in which to indulge. Set inside a 1904 stone manor listed on the National Register of Historic Places, newcomer Ma(i) sorry has been making a splash with its "living gallery" approach. What feels like an estate or private club is home to rotating collections of art, private tasting rooms and public lounges stocked with limited production boutique wines. Also worth a stop is the Girard Winery's sleek new tasting room, which opened one block up and has become known for its bold Cabs and, of all things, its designer restrooms.



Fairmont Sonoma Mission Inn

## TV DINNER

**SANTA ROSA** When you dream of a gourmet Sonoma County experience, chances are you're not thinking of sprawling suburban Santa Rosa. But these days, those in the know are. Thanks to a team of television chefs (Duskie Estes who appeared on "Food Network Challenge," her husband John Stewart, whose salami made an appearance on "Good Morning America," and "Top Chef" competitor Zoi Antonitsas), Zazu Restaurant & Farm has become one of the hottest tables in town. The self-proclaimed roadhouse whips up what can best be described as American comfort food meets rustic Italian meets local Sonoma ingredients.  
 :: [zazurestaurant.com](http://zazurestaurant.com)

## UP AND COMING

**NAPA** Over the next few years, Napa the city hopes to get back in the spotlight with a massive gentrification project (\$300 million and counting). A reprise that started seven years ago with the now defunct COPIA complex, has spread roots with the artisanal food mecca of Oxbow Public Market (although not for the faint of wallet, Hog Island Oyster Bar should not be missed) and red-hot Ubuntu (an organic restaurant and yoga studio). Also new to the 'hood is the just-opened AVIA Napa, boasting downtown's first rooftop deck; and the Westin Verasa, an upscale condo-hotel complex that recently lured Ken Frank and his Michelin-starred La Toque restaurant from Rutherford. Up next, a 351-room Ritz-Carlton slated for 2011.

## WINEMAKER WEEKEND

**SONOMA** Take the map folding and guessing out of your wine country trip with a one-stop package at the Fairmont Sonoma Mission Inn and Spa. With their Winemaker Suite Package, even one-night stays include a sommelier-selected collection of in-room wines and private VIP tour of local wineries. Book their two-night Food and Wine Experience package and they'll bring the wineries to you. First stop – the resort's wine cave, where the sommelier will host an evening of food and wine tastings. On night two, you'll be treated to a chef's seven-course meal with wine pairings at Santé, the on-site fine dining restaurant. From \$699.  
 707.938.9000 :: [fairmont.com/sonoma](http://fairmont.com/sonoma)

## RAISING THE BAR

**NAPA VALLEY** Whether elegant or rustic, pretentious or laidback, Napa and Sonoma wineries and restaurants offer some of the best tastings, pairings and prix fixe menus around. But sometimes, don't you long for something a little different, something a little more fun? Enter SolBar at Solage Calistoga, a hotel bar that has become one of the most popular watering holes in town for good reason. From family-style brunches, to fried chicken dinners, BYOB complimentary corkage dinners, and locals night happy hours with cheap specialty cocktails, SolBar spins a unique and community-centered Napa vibe. On the opposite end of the spectrum is La

Galerie, a new private dining experience at Auberge du Soleil that features local and national artists along with views of the valley.  
[solagecalistoga.com](http://solagecalistoga.com) :: [aubergedusoleil.com](http://aubergedusoleil.com)



SolBar at Solage Calistoga