

# San Francisco Chronicle

L6 | Sunday, June 27, 2010 | SAN FRANCISCO CHRONICLE AND SFGATE.COM

## WINE COUNTRY



Liz Hafalia / The Chronicle 2008

**Solbar in the Solage resort is worth a drive from just about anywhere. Diners can sit in the impressive barnlike structure or outside overlooking the pool.**

### DINING

## Where to eat — 10 good choices

**By Michael Bauer**  
CHRONICLE  
RESTAURANT CRITIC

Long before Napa, Yountville and St. Helena became wine-and-dine destinations, there was Calistoga.

It was the spot for refreshing repasts, what with the spas, mineral springs and the train depot that deposited visitors directly downtown. Yet as the other towns along Highway 29 have grown, thanks to the wine business, Calistoga feels like it's been left behind and preserved in time. That's, of course, part of its charm.

The main street features many 100-plus-year-old buildings, and looks much as it did more 20 years ago when it looked as if the town would be gentrified.

While there are some new restaurants, most places have a middle-of-the-road appeal and have been there for several decades.

If you want cutting edge cuisine, you pretty much will need to head south, but if you want to stay in the neighborhood, Calistoga has many options. Think humble: Mexican, barbecue and good ol' American fare. For a "fancy" meal there's the new Solbar in the Solage resort that's worth a drive from just about anywhere, but it's in Calistoga's backyard.

Here's a rundown of 10 of the top stops in Calistoga:

#### **Solbar**

This is the prime destination, a restaurant and resort that provide a sharp contrast to the

tried-and-true and that can compete with its glitzy neighbors to the south. It's elegant and expensive, but diners can sit inside the impressive barnlike structure, nicely designed by Howard Backen, or outside overlooking the pool. You can have snacks, cocktails or any one of three meals supervised by Brandon Sharp, one of the Bay Area's top chefs. The menu is arranged in conventional fashion, but each category has dishes that are denoted as being lighter and those that are marked as heartier. On the lighter side, there might be halibut with hearts of peach palm and artichoke ravioli; for heartier dishes, there's leg of lamb with sausage, white beans and artichoke mint salsa verde.

755 Silverado Trail, Calistoga; (707) 226-0850 or [sobarnv.com](http://sobarnv.com). Breakfast, lunch and dinner daily. Full bar. Main courses at dinner, \$18-\$36.



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A monthly section on the region's restaurants, tasting rooms and wineries.

Calistoga

Wine Country

A GLASS WITH *Hugh Davies*

## Bubbly in Calistoga

By **Stacy Finz**  
CHRONICLE STAFF WRITER

Hugh Davies knows a thing or two about Calistoga. The 44-year-old president of Schramsberg, one of the country's top sparkling wine houses, was raised in this Wine Country town. His parents, the late Jack and Jamie Davies, moved here from Los Angeles a month before Hugh was born to take over the historic but run-down estate.

They had plans to make sparkling wine using the same *méthode champenoise* techniques as they do in Champagne. But first they had to rebuild the crumbling estate that had been founded by Jacob Schram in the 1800s. They restored the Victorian home on the property, weeded until their hands were raw and set out to make the best American sparkling wine, eventually paving the way for other prominent bubbly makers to set up shop. Even French Champagne houses such as Moët Hennessy and Louis Roederer were inspired to open Northern California satellites.

Soon Schramsberg Blanc de Blancs was being enjoyed by the world's heads of state. In 1972, President Richard Nixon publicly touted the wine by using it at the "Toast to Peace" dinner in China with Premier Zhou Enlai.

Now Hugh Davies runs the winery. Besides sparkling wine, the winery produces a limited amount of Cabernet Sauvignon under the J. Davies label in homage to his family. We decided to tap Davies on growing up in Calistoga, about where to go and what to see, and of course, wine.

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Mike Kepka / The Chron

### A few favorites

#### Places to eat in Calistoga:

→ "Solage. It's hip, new, modern and very comfortable.

"As far as a place for the family we go to Soo Yuan a lot. The Chinese restaurant is not fancy and will never get a Michelin star — ever. But it has one of those round tables with the lazy Susan and they bring out chopsticks, which my kids think are great.

"I also like All Seasons, Hydro Bar and Grill, Brannan's Grill, and for Mexican my family goes a lot to Puerta Vallarta restaurant.

"If you're staying overnight, Calistoga Ranch (pictured) is about the most upscale place in town. It's very secluded and just gorgeous."



Kurt Rogers / The Chronicle 2004