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SAVE THE ECONOMY**

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Los Angeles

**RAISING
MADDY**
NOTES FROM A
WIDOWED DAD
—
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ESCAPE TO

WINE COUNTRY

The Newest Spots to Eat, Shop, and Drink in Napa and Sonoma

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A TRAVELER'S GUIDE TO

WINE COUNTRY



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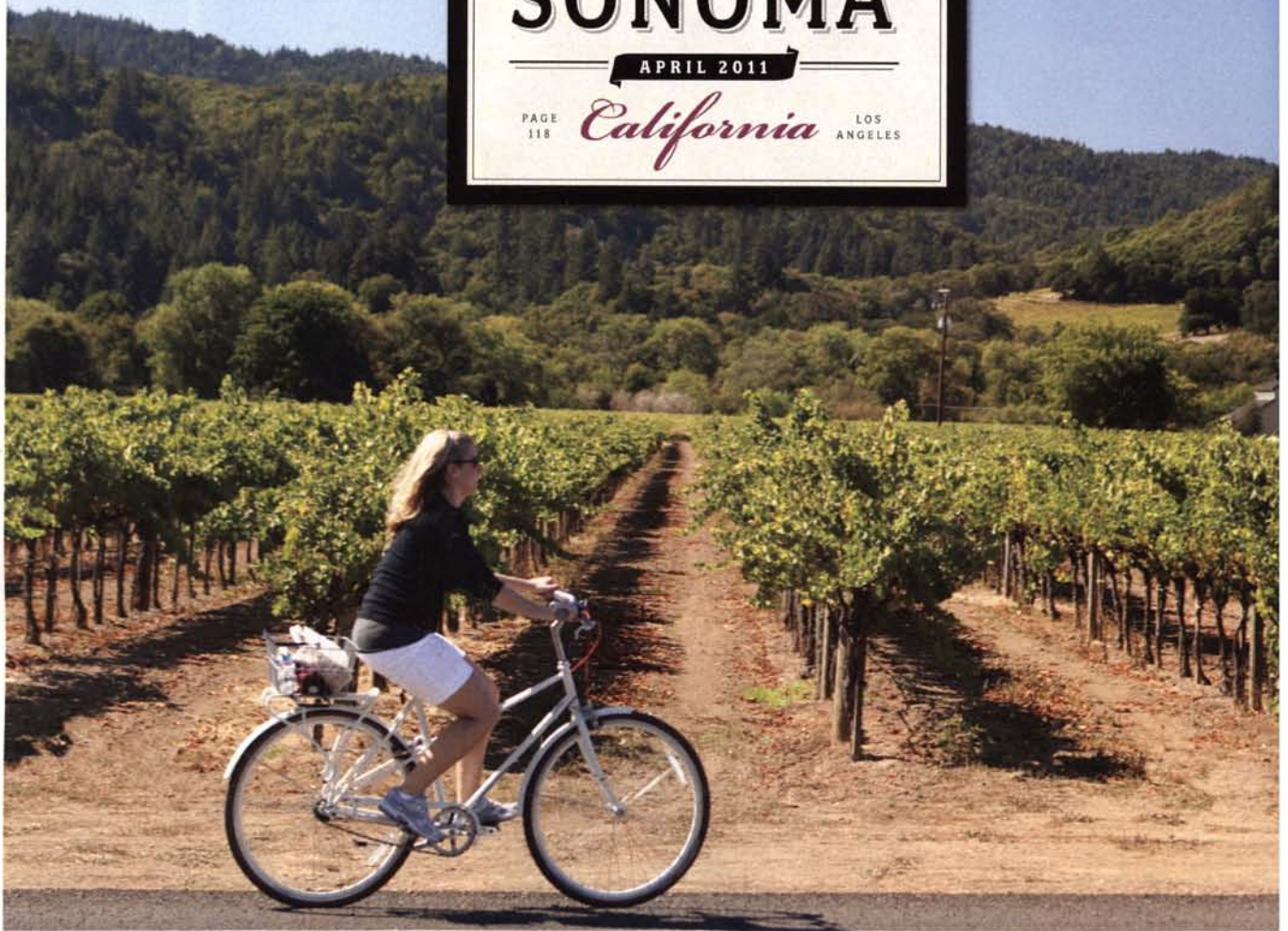
NAPA & SONOMA

APRIL 2011

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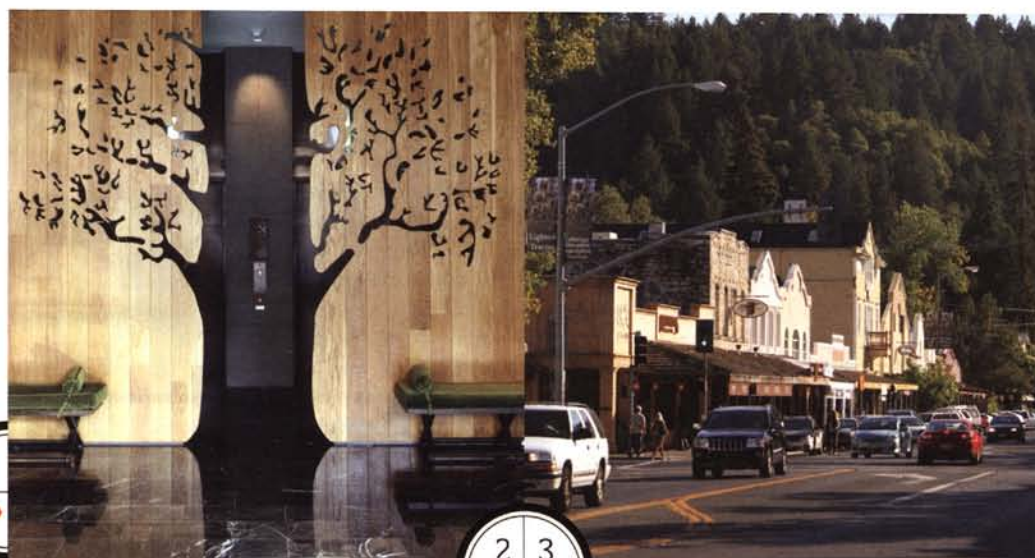
California

LOS
ANGELES



**ONE REGION IS GLITZY, THE OTHER EARTHY,
BUT BOTH ARE PERFECT FOR A SPRING
GETAWAY, WHEN THE VINES ARE BUDDING
AND THE CROWDS ARE STILL THIN**

BY DAVE GARDETTA ✦ PHOTOGRAPHS BY BROWN CANNON 3



OLD AND NEW

1) Outside the Farmstead restaurant in St. Helena; 2) inside the AVIA Napa Hotel; 3) downtown Calistoga

to a large sign that reads **The Petrified Forest**. The Calistoga countryside hides some wonderful and woefully undervisited pockets of Eisenhower-era entertainment like the ancient stone forest (the **Old Faithful Geyser of California** is down the road), and I gladly handed over my \$10 at the lonely visitor's counter. True, a mere sapling of a 649-year-old oak was showboating at the entrance, but those 3.4 million-year-old pines inside didn't look a day over 100,000.

Of all the valley's destinations, historic Calistoga seems to be the one that time and venture capital forgot. A mash-up of mission and Wild West frontage, many of the local shops (the **American Indian Trading Company**, **Vintage Vogue**) would be at home in the 19th century. Drive through town to the Silverado Trail and you will find the **Solage Calistoga**—22 acres of green design that recalls a stylish Levittown created by Al Gore, complete with a trio of pools, a prime spa, and a sandy bocce court. The interior of my cottage was a head turner, with an au courant concrete floor, a pebbled shower stall, and a dozen beautiful tones of rock, wood, and natural fabric. Parked at the front door was a shiny beach cruiser that I rode into town to meet Patti, the "cheese lady" at the **Cal Mart** store. Patti handed me an old goat and a Lamb Chopper (a sheep's milk) to go with the bottle of Stag's Leap I'd been keeping. Back at the Solage the tables were filling up at **Solbar**, the Michelin-starred restaurant, as waiters trucked around plates of seared Monterey Bay sardines and smoked short ribs.



WAKING UP, I FELT AS IF I'D BEEN FEASTING on the (mostly) fat of the land for a week, not two days. My liver needed time off, and I'd booked an appointment for a mud bath to mollify any offended internal organs. On the way I picked up a cup of Yrgacheffe at the groovy **Yo el Rey Roasting** coffeehouse, which is stashed somewhere inside the year 1974 in the middle of downtown Calistoga. It was good Yrgacheffe, too. I carried it to **Dr. Wilkinson's Hot Springs Resort**, an unpretentious midcentury gem. There's no cucumber-mint water to soothe delicate sensibilities at the Dr.'s. Instead I found a no-nonsense room run by men dressed in institutional whites who employ giant hoses to spray down what mud slops from the room's hulking tiled baths. Turns out, mud heated to a ripe 103 degrees can be a peaceful immersion, though

any recommendation comes with this caveat: Peat clings with a steely vengeance to the equatorial regions of the human body.

I arrived at this itchy realization on the road south to **Sterling Vineyards**, a whitewashed Greek fortress atop a small pine-covered hill. The operation could have been Imagineered by Walt Disney himself. A floating gondola, just like the buckets that once sailed over Anaheim, ferried me from the parking lot to an alpine pavilion. Upon disembarking, visitors follow a self-guided tour on a catwalk that leads through the bustling operation: stainless steel vats filling with cabernet, oak casks being carted about by animatronic figures (on closer inspection these proved to be real humans). The valley views alone are worth the ticket price (mine was \$40, with a "VIP" wine tasting). On a nearby hilltop sat the brooding **Castello di Amorosa**, a medieval castle slash winery that requires women visitors to wear a veil when attending on-site Latin Mass.

After Sterling, I wanted to downsize. So I traced the Silverado Trail south past Stag's Leap, where my Napa trip had begun, and took a left onto a country lane that led to Henri Vandriessche's front door. Henri was born in France, attended Berkeley, and in 1977, along with his new American wife, purchased the little valley vineyard **White Rock**, named after the volcanic soil that yields a pleasingly crisp chardonnay. As he will for anyone who calls in advance, Henri led me first through his vineyard and then into the mouth of White Rock's cave, where all of the wine is produced (roughly a million cases less



DAVID MYERS

CHEF-OWNER
COMME ÇA & DAVID
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CAFE LA HAYE

→ The tiny place serves fresh local, seasonal New American-style cuisine at a high level. The modern decor is an interesting contrast to the picturesque scenery. • 140 E. Napa St., Sonoma, 707-935-5994 or cafelahaye.com.

THE GIRL & THE FIG

→ The menu changes weekly, if not more, and they only use the best local products. They also have an interesting "Rhône-alone" wine list and an incredible Black Mission fig jam. • 110 W. Spain St., Sonoma, 707-938-3634 or thegirlandthefig.com.

HARVEST MOON CAFE

→ The husband-and-wife chef team beautifully executes simple yet elegant bistro dishes. People obsess over their trout. They have a nice outdoor dining area and a chef's table. • 487 1st St. West, Sonoma, 707-933-8160 or harvestmooncafesonoma.com.

ZAZU RESTAURANT & FARM

→ It's magical. The restaurant feels like it's in the middle of nowhere and has an interesting, locally sourced menu that leans toward Northern Italian. • 3535 Guerneville Rd., Santa Rosa, 707-523-4814 or zazurestaurant.com.

BARNDIVA

→ This hidden gem has a modern-rustic menu with French influences and great handcrafted cocktails that use local produce. • 231 Center St., Healdsburg, 707-431-0100 or barndiva.com.