

Wine Spectator

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Visiting Wineries in Napa Valley

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Despite its many outstanding restaurants, striking vistas, spa options, golf courses, biking and hiking trails, and general sightseeing opportunities, Napa Valley remains wine country. Nearly 250 wineries currently grace the valley floor and its surrounding mountains. As far as the eye can see, grapes are the dominant crop, and they produce the highest concentration of exceptional wines to be found just about anywhere.

And you probably want to taste them. After all, this is why people come to Napa Valley. Yet the sheer number of tasting possibilities can be daunting.

Certainly, a modest, qualitative approach will be more successful than a forced-march strategy that attempts to generate the maximum number of winery visits. There is something for everyone at every winery, whether it's an update on current winemaking methods, a historical walking tour or simply a taste of the new vintage.

As always, wine lovers should tackle the tasting game in a responsible manner. Even with a designated driver among your party, a little sip here and there can add up to an unpleasant experience. "I can't eat or drink another drop," is a common refrain heard throughout hotels in the valley, as wine travelers, unaccustomed to the bounty of the region, overdose on excellence.

The best way to taste wine, without exception, is the way winemakers do it. They swirl, sniff, taste and then spit. Any winery tasting room that doesn't have readily accessible spittoons is not acting responsibly; a visitor should never feel uncomfortable or embarrassed about requesting one. This, after all, is what the pros do.

Alas, even devoted spitters will eventually find the excitement and rigors of winery touring and tasting to be tiring. In the interest of moderation and good health, select only three or four wineries to visit daily and group them geographically to avoid long drives. Plan lunch at a restaurant on your wine route or at one of the wineries that offer picnic areas. With a modest tasting schedule, a Napa Valley "vacation" just might feel like one.

While spontaneous winery visits are encouraged at many wineries, others are open by appointment only. If your favorite wineries are not on the following list, don't wait for an invitation to go see them. Pick up the phone, tell them you love their wines and ask if you can come for a visit. Most vintners live to please, and their response will generally be cordial.

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Wineries in Calistoga

Chateau Montelena

1429 Tubbs Lane, Calistoga

Telephone (707) 942-5105

Tours Daily, 11 a.m. & 2 p.m.; reserve ahead.

Tastings Daily, 10 a.m. through 4 p.m. \$10 fee. Old vintages and large-format bottles of Chardonnay available.

Built into a hillside and concealed by a dense stand of trees, this dramatic, French-inspired, 19th century stone structure resembles an old European castle. Chateau Montelena is a convincing, although comfortable, fortress. Its moat is a large pond with two islands, each with a Chinese pavilion, and numerous Chinese bridges. Stories of the company's colorful history are enough to recommend the tour, but stepping through the heavy wooden doors into the cool, cavelike winery adds another wonderful dimension to the experience. Upstairs, a snug, wood-paneled tasting room offers current releases.

Clos Pegase

1060 Dunaweal Lane, Calistoga

Telephone (707) 942-4981

Website www.clospegase.com

Tours Daily, 11 a.m. and 2 p.m.

Tastings Daily, 10:30 a.m. to 5 p.m., \$2.50 fee.

Completed in 1987, Jan Shrem's Clos Pegase is dedicated to wine and art. The postmodern winery buildings, evoking an updated Greco-Roman look, were designed by architect Michael Graves. The main attraction here is the modern sculpture gracing the grounds. The best way to enjoy Shrem's sculpture garden (which includes "Twins" by controversial sculptor Richard Serra and a 6-foot thumb by France's César) is to tour with the winery-provided guidebook in hand.

Schramsberg Vineyards

1400 Schramsberg Road, Calistoga

Telephone (707) 942-4558

Website www.schramsberg.com

Tours By appointment.

Tastings With tours only, fees range from \$7.50 to \$20.

In front of the annex at sparkling wine producer Schramsberg Vineyards, which contains the winery's offices, there are raised garden beds that date from the 19th century. "We tried to combine the elements from Schram's Victorian garden and modern plantings," says owner Jamie Davies. To the left is a natural waterfall that empties into a small lily pond where a bronze statue of a jaunty frog, named Riddler, raises a glass skyward. Paths wind through the perennial garden, alive with nicotiana and antique roses. Now that Schramsberg has debuted its new tasting room, visitors can enjoy a taste for \$6.50 after a short tour of the grounds and winemaking process. Even if you don't take this tour you can take a self-guided tour of the beautiful gardens.

Sterling Vineyards

1111 Dunaweal Lane, Calistoga

Telephone (707) 942-3344

Website www.sterlingvineyards.com

Tours Self-guided tour and tram ride, \$6.

Tastings Daily, 10:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., fee included in tour charge.

Sterling Vineyards certainly raised some eyebrows when it opened in 1972 due to its stark, Mediterranean-styled white stucco design (said to be inspired by the architecture found on the Greek island of Mykonos). Sterling's tram ride, part of the self-guided winery tour, is one of the easiest ways to see the beautiful Mayacamas Mountains, take in an overview of Sterling's Chardonnay plantings below, and then admire views of the entire valley. The tram ride is easily accessible to visitors who would otherwise have to fly over in a plane or spend several hours floating in a hot-air balloon to experience this bird's-eye view. The tour costs \$6; four at a time board a closed ski gondola-like tram that rises to an incline of 300 feet to sweep over the valley on its ride to the winery.

Storybook Mountain Vineyards

3835 Hwy. 128, Calistoga

Telephone (707) 942-5310

Website www.storybookwines.com

Tours By appointment only.

Tastings Same.

Storybook Mountain does, indeed, evoke the spirit of a fairy tale. The winery is so named because its original owners were two brothers named Grimm (not related to the brothers of fairy-tale fame), who founded it in 1883. A tour begins on the steep hillside vineyard and then brings visitors into caves excavated by Chinese laborers in the 1880s. Here, you can leisurely taste Zinfandel, the only wine made at Storybook Mountain, while owner Jerry Seps, a retired history professor, reveals with gusto the story of the winery and his wines.

Wineries in St. Helena

Anderson's Conn Valley Vineyards

680 Rossi Road, St. Helena

Telephone (707) 963-8600

Tours By appointment only.

Tastings Only as part of tour.

Although only a short twisting drive from the Silverado Trail, Anderson's Conn Valley Vineyards, snugly set in a beautiful, narrow valley east of Napa's main benchland, has the feel of a frontier homestead. Because it is hidden behind hills, Conn Valley is often overlooked by travelers to Napa. Owners and winemakers Gus Anderson and son Todd, along with partners Phyllis (Gus' wife) and Dana (Todd's wife), planted their vineyards, built their modest home and winery, and lead their own tours and tastings. The tour includes a peek inside the winery (frugally housed in a green tin garage) and a visit to the low-ceilinged caves and surrounding vineyards. Straightforward and friendly, the Andersons are clearly passionate about their wines and the land that produces them.

Beringer Vineyards

2000 Main St., St. Helena

Telephone (707) 963-7115

Website www.beringer.com

Tours Daily, every half-hour from 9:30 a.m. to 5 p.m.

Tastings \$5 (refunded with purchase).

Beringer makes much of its wine in the functional, no-frills winery sitting on the east side of Route 29. But the original winery, founded in 1876 and sitting on the west side of the street, has been wonderfully preserved and restored. Complimentary tours last up to 45 minutes and include a short tasting.

Cain Vineyard & Winery

3800 Langtry Road, St. Helena

Telephone (707) 963-1616

Website www.cainfive.com

Tours Fridays and Saturday mornings, by appointment only.

Tastings Same.

Nestled atop a mountain plateau high above the valley, Cain would be worth visiting even if it didn't produce wine that merits serious consideration. The serpentine 20-minute drive from St. Helena offers impressive views, and the rustic stone winery itself does not disappoint. Inside, a quick tank and barrel room tour is followed by a tasting of new releases. The tasting is a cozy, casual affair that offers a welcome contrast to the sometimes tumultuous tasting-room scenes in less rarefied venues.

Freemark Abbey Winery

3022 N. St. Helena Highway, St. Helena

Telephone (707) 963-9694

Website www.freemarkabbey.com

Tours Daily, 2 p.m.

Tastings Daily, 10 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., \$5 fee.

Freemark Abbey is on the site of a winery that was founded in 1886. It began its current incarnation in 1967 and is best known for its benchmark Cabernet Sauvignon from Bosché Vineyard. The winery is located in a small plaza that is also home to Brava Terrace restaurant.

Charles Krug Winery

2800 St. Helena Highway, St. Helena

Telephone (707) 967-2200

Website www.charleskrug.com

Tours By appointment only.

Tastings Daily, 10:30 a.m. to 5:30 p.m., \$3 to \$5 fee.

Founded in 1861 by a Prussian immigrant, Charles Krug Winery succumbed to the ravages of phylloxera and Prohibition. In 1943, Cesare Mondavi purchased the winery, which is now owned by his son Peter and his family. (Peter's brother, Robert, left the Charles Krug winery in 1966 after a family dispute and started his own eponymous winery.)

Markham Vineyards

2812 St. Helena Highway N., St. Helena

Telephone (707) 963-5292

Website www.markhamvineyards.com

Tours By appointment for trade only.

Tastings daily, 10 a.m. to 5 p.m., \$3 to \$5 per glass.

Clint Hulse, hospitality director at Markham Vineyards, is an accomplished artist and coordinates all the art exhibited at the winery. "Showing contemporary and representational art here has afforded us a way to educate people and adds a very agreeable dimension to the public's experience here at Markham," says Hulse. Exhibits change every two months.

Merryvale Vineyards

1000 Main St., St. Helena

Telephone (707) 963-2225

Website www.merryvale.com

Tours By appointment only for trade only.

Tastings Daily, 10 a.m. to 6:30 p.m., \$3 to \$6 fee.

No visitor to St. Helena can complain about Merryvale's accessibility -- the large, ivy-covered building sits squarely at the edge of town. This winery is best known for its Cabernet blends and Chardonnay.

Joseph Phelps Vineyards

200 Taplin Road, St. Helena

Telephone (707) 963-2745

Website www.jpvwines.com

Tours By appointment only; tasting included.

Tastings By appointment only. \$5 fee.

Although it is only a short drive off the Silverado Trail, Joseph Phelps is nonetheless far removed from the hustle of Napa Valley's summer traffic. Secluded by a series of oak-topped hills, the attractive barnlike winery looks over sloping vineyards and the Mayacamas Mountains in the distance.

Rombauer Vineyards

3522 Silverado Trail, St. Helena

Telephone (707) 963-5170

Website www.rombauervineyards.com

Tours By appointment only: daily, 10 a.m. to 5 p.m.

Tastings Same.

The deceptively small, casual tasting room at Rombauer Vineyards, which sits atop a forested knoll off Silverado Trail, hides a busy nest of activity. An anthill-like complex is revealed as visitors descend catwalks through three levels of barrel and tank storage into a 25,000-square-foot network of caves. Rombauer's own brand is fairly small: 20,000 cases annually. The bulk of the winery, which effectively hollows out the hill, is dedicated to a thriving 80,000-case custom-crush business. After the tour, climb back up to the tasting room for a look at new releases and to peruse the inventory of older vintages and large-format bottles.

V. Sattui Winery

1111 White Lane, St. Helena

Telephone (707) 963-7774

Tours Groups over 20, Cellar Club members and Wine of the Month Club members only, by appointment.

Tastings Daily, 9 a.m. to 6 p.m. (summer); 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. (winter), no tasting fee.

V. Sattui, a family-owned winery since 1885, is located just south of St. Helena along Highway 29. Surrounding the stone winery building is a 2 acre tree-shaded picnic grove. V. Sattui also boasts a large gourmet cheese shop and deli featuring nearly 200 imported and domestic cheeses, meats, homemade salads and desserts. In the V. Sattui Winery gift shop the emphasis is on area artists and wine paraphernalia produced locally. The rear of the building is dominated by a long L-shaped bar where up to 30 people at a time can taste Sattui's wines at no charge. On a recent sunny day visitors were tasting mustard at the cheese counter, the tasting bars were humming and about 300 picnickers were happily lunching under the oaks at the many picnic tables Sattui provides.

St. Clement Vineyards

2867 St. Helena Hwy. (Route 29), St. Helena

Telephone (707) 963-7221

Website www.stclement.com

Tours By appointment only: daily, 10 a.m. & 2 p.m.

Tastings Daily, 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. (10 a.m. to 5 p.m. when Daylight Savings Time is in effect). \$5 fee (refunded with purchase).

The patio at the base of this 19th century Victorian mansion offers an impressive vista of the valley floor vineyards stretching east. Step through the front door, cross the sitting room and enter an intimate tasting bar where you can sample new releases and purchase wines. A charming stone winery, housing gleaming modern equipment, lies behind the house. Take one of the two short daily tours through the subterranean cellar that once doubled as a pre-Prohibition winery.

Spottswode Winery

1902 Madrona Ave., St. Helena

Telephone (707) 963-0134

Website www.spottswode.com

Tours and Tastings By appointment only, Tuesdays and Fridays at 10 a.m.

Spottswode's original stone structure, once known as the Kraft Winery, was built in 1884. Closed during Prohibition, the winery was reborn some 50 years later when Mary Novak and her late husband, Jack, purchased a vineyard and started their own label. A new, expanded winery facility has recently been constructed around the old barrel-building.

Wineries in Rutherford, Oakville & Yountville

S. Anderson Vineyard

1473 Yountville Crossroad, Yountville

Telephone (707) 944-8642

Website www.4bubbly.com

Tours Daily, 10:30 a.m. & 2:30 p.m. \$5 fee includes tasting.

Tastings Daily, 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. \$5 fee (or free with tour).

After visiting the big Cabernet producers and sparkling wine houses, check out one of Napa's smaller wineries that happens to produce both. S. Anderson may be a modest-sized operation, but its tour offers depth. After an introduction to the Anderson family's history and a brief stop in the garage-size winery, head to the deep hillside caves for a tasting. Chilled bubbly and the cool cave air help beat the valley's summer heat.

Cakebread Cellars

8300 St. Helena Highway, Rutherford

Telephone (707) 963-5221

Website www.cakebread.com**Tours** By appointment only.

Tastings Daily, 10 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., \$5 to \$10, includes glass.

Dolores and Jack Cakebread are dedicated to educating the public to wine-and-food pairing, and their winery hosts an array of special events and classes aimed at bringing out the best in food and wine. Check out their website and sign up for the quarterly newsletter to keep abreast of what's cooking. Tours include an introduction to Napa Valley viticulture with a stroll through the 82-acre estate, a step by step look at the winemaking process, and a guided tasting.

Domaine Chandon

1 California Drive, Yountville

Telephone (707) 944-2280

Tours Daily, hourly on the hour 11 a.m. to 5 p.m.

Tastings Daily, 10 a.m to 6 p.m., \$3 to \$5 per glass.

Because of local zoning laws, you will find only one restaurant located within a winery. But, oh, what a restaurant. Domaine Chandon, built in the late 1970's, is owned by Moët Hennessy-Louis Vuitton. Executive chef Robert Curry delights locals and visitors with a unique style of California-French cuisine. This sparkling wine producer also qualifies as a destination to view architecture and verdant gardens. The winery itself was designed to reflect both Napa Valley and Champagne, with native stone walls, arched entries and curved wooden rooftops.

Robert Mondavi Winery

7801 St. Helena Highway, Oakville

Telephone (707) 259-WINE or (800) MONDAVI

Website www.robertmondaviwinery.com

Tours Daily, 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. (May to October); 9:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. (November to April).

Tastings Free with tours or a variable fee.

Robert Mondavi Winery's Great Chefs program was begun in 1976 to reflect the Mondavi philosophy that food and wine must be enjoyed together. Over the years it has showcased giants such as Paul Bocuse, Julia Child and Wolfgang Puck. There are wine and food seminars, essence tasting, a reserve room and the To-Kalon Room, where visitors may try older vintage wines. Everyday visitors can enjoy the Mission-style architecture and Beniamino Bufano's sculpture, as well as changing exhibits of paintings, sculpture and photographs in the Vineyard Room.

Napa Wine Company

7830-40 St. Helena Hwy. (Route 29), Oakville

Telephone (707) 944-1710

Website www.napawineco.com

Tours None.

Tastings By appointment only. \$3 fee includes glass with company logo.

Napa Wine Company sits across the street from the Oakville Grocery. The valley's premier custom-crush facility makes wine for some 60 different labels, including a few of the hottest in the area. In its small tasting room, nine brands are available for tasting and purchase, though only four to five wines are open at any one time. Discover and stock up on wines from producers like Pahlmeyer, Larkmead and Fife Vineyards. Tasting is by appointment only, but if you stop by during a lull in the cellar activities, you may be able to set up an immediate appointment.

Oakville Ranch Vineyards

7850 Silverado Trail, Oakville

Telephone (707) 944-9500

Tours By appointment only.

Tastings Summer: daily, 11 a.m. to 6 p.m. Winter: Thursday to Sunday, 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. \$3 to \$5 fee.

There is much to see in this modern, no-frills winery on the eastern side of the Silverado Trail. Large windows that open onto the tank and barrel rooms reveal the guts of the winery. Rows of new stainless steel tanks and stacks of new oak barrels echo a semi-industrial theme. Cigar smokers will appreciate the small walk-in humididor that houses a wide selection of brands. Fine views across the valley can be savored from a second-story deck, with or without a cigar.

Opus One

7900 St. Helena Hwy. (Route 29), Oakville

Telephone (707) 944-9442

Website www.opusonewinery.com

Tours By appointment only.

Tastings Daily, 10:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. \$25 fee.

The stunning exterior of Opus One, which rises majestically from the valley floor, looks strangely like a cross between a rocket launchpad and a Mayan temple. Cofounded by Robert Mondavi and the late Baron Philippe de Rothschild (of Bordeaux's Château Mouton-Rothschild), the \$26.5 million winery reveals an interior conceived with an eye toward aesthetics. A gravity-flow system moves wine deep underground to a breathtaking semicircular barrel room. Opus' Bordeaux-style red wine is as outstanding as the architecture, as well it should be for the \$25 per-taste fee.

PlumpJack

620 Oakville Crossroad, Oakville

Telephone (707) 945-1220

Website www.plumpjack.com/pjwinery/index.html

Tours None.

Tastings Daily, 10:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. \$5 fee.

One of Napa's newest and hottest wine-making sites is PlumpJack winery. Part of the Getty family-and-friends-owned PlumpJack restaurant and resort portfolio, the winery, surrounded by whimsical, spiraling fences, displays a kind of planned disarray. The tasting room, which builds upon a theme of absurdity and elegance, pours current releases and winery-only bottlings for a small fee. Although the winery may look like a stage prop, the wines themselves have depth and carry a serious price tag.

Rutherford Hill Winery

200 Rutherford Hill Road, Rutherford

Telephone (707) 963-7194

Website www.rutherfordhill.com

Tours Daily, 11:30 a.m., 1:30 p.m., 3:30 p.m.

Tastings Daily, 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. \$5 fee includes glass with company logo.

Located on a lofty plateau above Napa Valley, Rutherford Hill Winery makes its home in a formidable redwood barn that could easily double as an airplane hangar. An airy tasting room features new releases and winery-only reserve wines, as well as cigars and gifts. There is history here, too, as this was once the old Souverain Winery, built in 1973 by then-builder-contractor Joseph Phelps. For a look at the winery and cave interiors, go on one of the three daily tours. The cave opens to reveal 40,000 square feet of high-ceilinged tunnels burrowed into the hillside. After a brief cave walk, taste barrel samples, on tap for quick pouring, in one of the dark passageways.

St. Supéry Vineyards & Winery

8440 St. Helena Highway, Rutherford

Telephone (800) 942-0809

Website www.stsupery.com

Tours Every half hour from 9:30 a.m. until 3:30 p.m.

Tastings \$2.50 one-time fee.

St. Supéry Vineyards & Winery educates entry-level wine drinkers with a self-guided tour of the winemaking process and an exhibit on wine aromas. The upstairs gallery, displaying new exhibits of contemporary art each month, also houses the seven-station wine education exhibit, which can be seen independently or as part of a guided tour. Particularly interesting is the bas-relief map of Napa Valley -- an excellent way to begin to understand the topography and microclimates of this region.

SmellaVision(TM) is actually two exhibits, one for Sauvignon Blanc and one for Cabernet Sauvignon, that have been designed to teach consumers about two important components in the appreciation of wine: appearance and aroma. Each stand displays four bottles of the varietal to illustrate that even within one varietal there are often variations in color, clarity and appearance. The "smell" part of the exhibit is activated when a visitor pushes any one of four levers at each stand and inhales through a long plastic tube to get a whiff of one of the many aromas often used to describe these wines. For Cabernet, for example, there are black pepper, bell pepper, cherry and cedar.

Silver Oak Cellars

915 Oakville Crossroad, Oakville

Telephone (707) 944-8808

Website www.silveroak.com

Tours By appointment only: Monday to Friday, 1:30 p.m.

Tastings Monday to Saturday, 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. Appointments required for Saturday afternoon tastings, which start at 12:30 p.m. \$10 fee includes glass with company logo.

Silver Oak's new Cabernet Sauvignon releases disappear from retail shelves virtually before they arrive. In fact, the winery is about the only place to taste, let alone purchase, current vintages. Now a stately stone building, the winery bears little resemblance to the old, run-down dairy farm purchased by founders Ray Duncan and former Christian Brothers winemaker-monk Justin Meyer a quarter-century ago. Silver Oak also maintains a winery and extensive vineyard holdings in Sonoma County's Alexander Valley. The Sonoma wines, as well as the Napa Valley Cabernet, are also sold at the Oakville facility. Collector sets, including verticals and large-format bottles, can be purchased here.

Wineries in and around the town of Napa

Chateau Potelle

3875 Mt. Veeder Road, Napa

Telephone (707) 255-9440

Website www.chateaupotelle.com

Tours None.

Tastings Thursday to Monday, 11 a.m. to 5 p.m.

Tucked in a hollow high on Mount Veeder, Chateau Potelle takes some effort to find, but the tranquil site and views of the surrounding vineyards are reason enough to make the trek. Outside the cozy, rustic tasting room, visitors are likely to be greeted by a friendly dog. Tastings for all but the winery's top V.G.S. wines are free. Picnic tables beckon tasters to stay and share a bottle of Chateau Potelle with lunch or a snack.

Chimney Rock Winery

5350 Silverado Trail, Napa

Telephone (800) 257-2641 or (707) 257-2641

Website www.chimneyrock.com

Tours By appointment only.

Tastings daily, 10 a.m. to 5 p.m., \$7 includes glass.

Hack and Stella Wilson spent a good portion of their lives in South Africa, and while there fell in love with the architecture of the area. In 1988, when they built their Chimney Rock Winery, they opted for a Cape Dutch theme, with Dutch gables and French Huguenot touches. The retail tasting area further reflects the Wilsons' desire to create a homey atmosphere. Stella's collections of trivets from England and blue and white Dutch ceramics decorate the walls near a large fireplace. She also oversees the gardens, and they don't disappoint, with fist-sized roses interplaying with wisteria and many annuals. Zimbabwe Shona sculpture tucked around the garden adds a nice touch.

Artesa

1345 Henry Road, Napa

Telephone (707) 224-1668

Tours 11 a.m., 2 p.m.

Tastings Daily, 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. \$2 to \$6 a glass.

Artesa's impressive bunkerlike, hilltop design offers perhaps the best views of Carneros anywhere. Beyond the rolling vineyards lies San Pablo Bay, and on a clear day you can see San Francisco. On blazing summer days, slip inside and admire the company's interesting collection of antique winemaking equipment, which contrasts neatly with the stark, modern glass-and-steel winery interior.

Domaine Carneros

1240 Duhig Road, Napa, Calif. 94559

Telephone (707) 257-0101

Website www.domaine.com

Tours 11 a.m. and 1 and 3 p.m.

Tastings Daily, 10:30 a.m. to 6 p.m., \$4 to \$5 per glass.

Champagne Taittinger's Domaine Carneros is a French-inspired palace gracefully perched on a hill in the Carneros district. It was designed to evoke the 200-year-old Château de la Marquetterie, a castle near Epernay built in the Louis XV style, which has been owned by Champagne Taittinger since before World War II. A painting of Madame de Pompadour, a gift from Claude Taittinger, dominates the foyer leading to the marble-floored, high-ceilinged tasting area.

The Hess Collection Winery

4411 Redwood Road, Napa

Telephone (707) 255-1144

Website www.hesscollection.com

Tours No winery tours, but self-guided art tour and audiovisual show.

Tastings Daily, 10 a.m. to 4 p.m., \$3 per person.

Taking the self-guided tour of The Hess Collection Winery is an engrossing experience. The 12-minute audiovisual show ably explains the winemaking process through the seasonal changes in the vineyard. Following the show, guests can wander the three floors of galleries and peruse 150 paintings and sculptures from Donald Hess' extensive art collection.

Hess is a savvy collector, who buys directly from artists and who loves contemporary modern art. Here's Hess on how he decides to buy a painting: "I only collect works by living artists, whose work has been known to me for some time ... Once I have reached the stage where the excitement is beginning to keep me awake at night ... I will soon be able to add it to my collection." The retail shop, next to the tasting room, juts out into the cellar and is a great resource for lovers of books on art, cooking or wine.

Pine Ridge Winery

5901 Silverado Trail, Napa

Telephone (707) 253-7500

Tours By appointment only: daily, 10:15 a.m., 1 p.m., 3 p.m. \$10 fee includes tasting.

Tastings Daily, 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. \$5 fee (without tour).

Surrounded by terraced vineyards and the steep, craggy hillsides of the Stags Leap District, Pine Ridge Winery is a veritable playground. The front lawn, which resembles a small city park, is shaded by pine trees and sprinkled with picnic tables, a barbecue pit and swings. Before tasting, explore the demonstration vineyard for a quick lesson in viticulture or step into the long, barrel-lined cave that stretches off the tasting room. Need a methuselah or two? The tasting room displays a variety of large-format bottlings and older vintages that are available only at

the winery.

RMS Distillery (formerly Carneros Alambic)

1250 Cuttings Wharf Road, Napa

Telephone (707) 253-9055

Website www.rmsbrandy.com

Tours Daily, 10 a.m. to 4:30 p.m, every 45 minutes. Brandies and specialty items available.

Tastings None.

After touring winery after winery, it can be interesting to visit a distillery. RMS Distillery, owned by the French Cognac house Rémy Martin, produces Cognac-style brandies. Housed in stone buildings reminiscent of architecture in Cognac, France, RMS sports a visitors center, still house and barrel room. An illuminating tour guides visitors through the distillation, barrel-aging and blending processes. Eight beautifully crafted pot stills, imported from Cognac, look more like museum pieces than functioning equipment for making spirits. The aromatic barrel room is filled with the heady aromas of aging brandy and the rich, deep tones of Gregorian chant, piped in for additional ambience. There is no tasting here, but the tour's finale features a "sniffing" worth the visit.

Truchard Vineyard

3234 Old Sonoma Road, Napa

Telephone (707) 253-7153

Website www.napavalley.com/napavalley/winetxt/truchard/truchard.html

Tours By appointment only: Monday to Saturday.

Tastings Same.

Located on a quiet stretch of Carneros off Old Sonoma Road, Truchard Vineyard is a mom-and-pop operation with a twist of elegance. Proprietors Tony and Jo Ann Truchard live a few steps from the winery and are surrounded by their 200 acres of rolling vineyards. With friendly enthusiasm, the couple lead visitors through their vineyards and the quaint, cramped redwood winery. An elaborate cave system, which will add another facet to the homespun atmosphere here, is in its final stages of construction. The winery offers a wide array of consistently outstanding wines for tasting and purchase.

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