

BRUNELLO AND OREGON TASTING REPORTS • DRC PURITY • SPARKLING WINE ROUNDUP

# Wine Spectator

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## Sonoma WINE COUNTRY WEEKEND

HEALDSBURG,  
RUSSIAN RIVER VALLEY,  
DRY CREEK VALLEY  
AND MORE

FLOWERS VINEYARDS  
AND WINERY, HEALDSBURG







*Healdsburg has been a California wine destination since the 1990s, when winery tasting rooms began to open in the town plaza. Since then, the options for visitors and locals alike have grown significantly in and around this Sonoma County hot spot.*



34 Travel to Sonoma

## COVER STORY

**34 The Healdsburg Scene** At heart a small town, Healdsburg has transformed into one of wine country's most fashionable destinations. This once-seedate farming village in Sonoma County now rivals Napa Valley as a go-to place for exciting food, wine and lifestyle experiences. Our editors guide you to the best places to visit, including day trips into the surrounding countryside • *Tim Fish, with Aaron Romano, Maryann Worobiec and Chris Cardoso*

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# Welcome to Sonoma Wine Country

**M**uch has changed in Sonoma County since our last expansive cover story on the wine region, in June 2018. And the epicenter of that evolution is the small town of Healdsburg, our focus for this issue. We've been covering Healdsburg for more than 30 years, ever since the first winery tasting rooms appeared downtown.

A little more than 20 years ago, chef Charlie Palmer brought his culinary vision to the newly opened Hotel Healdsburg with Dry Creek Kitchen, a *Wine Spectator* Best of Award of Excellence winner, offering exclusively Sonoma County wines. If you have not visited in a while, you'll be impressed with the recently completed remodel. In our August 2022 cover story, we profiled Palmer and shared his plans for Appellation Healdsburg, among the first of his new collection of upscale resorts to break ground.

Today, Palmer is joined in Healdsburg by an array of new fine dining options, including Sonoma County's only *Wine Spectator* Grand Award winner: SingleThread. You will find a handy list of all of our award-winning restaurants in Sonoma wine country on page 44.

Despite the wealth of luxury dining and accommodations popping up, Healdsburg retains its small-town charm. Furthermore, its location at the intersection of three of Sonoma's top wine appellations—Alexander Valley, Dry Creek Valley and Russian River Valley—makes it the perfect jumping-off point for wine country excursions. Beginning on page 48, our Napa bureau editors highlight some of their favorite destinations for day-tripping, including not only wineries, but also hospitable bakeries, farms and country stores that deliver a taste of Sonoma County.

**T**he first of two wine reports in this issue comes from senior editor Bruce Sanderson, who reviewed more than 100 Brunellos di Montalcino from the 2019 vintage. Every one of them scored 90 points or higher. How's that for consistency?

Brunello has been enjoying a surge of popularity in the U.S. and this vintage delivers both quantity and quality, with beautiful wines appearing from across the Montalcino zone. Sanderson rates the overall vintage a classic at 98 points.

The news from Oregon is similarly bright. Senior editor Tim Fish was already optimistic about the state's 2021 Pinot Noirs in his previous tasting report, and having sampled hundreds of additional wines from the vintage since then, he rates it 95 points overall. Initial reviews of the first 2022 Pinots from Oregon are also very encouraging. In addition to his top wines, reaching as high as 96 points for both vintages, Fish has identified a nice selection of solid-scoring Oregon Pinots and Chardonnays priced \$25 or less. All can be found listed on page 89.



**A**s we step into the summer season, our thoughts turn toward casual sipping and refreshment. Senior editor Kristen Bieler has the fascinating backstory behind a new Provençal rosé with the seal of approval from former president of France Nicolas Sarkozy, who, along with his wife, actor and musician Carla Bruni, is a partner in the enterprise. Bubbly lovers will discover bottles to suit every occasion, from celebrations to cocktails, with our roundup of well-priced sparkling wines from around the globe. And finally, we have suggestions for crafting your perfect Italian spritz, the popular and colorful cocktail that's now trending across America as warm days arrive.

Marvin R. Shanken  
Editor and Publisher

# Home Sweet, Huh?

**H**ometowns are delicate things. When you love them, as I do with my hometown of Healdsburg, Calif., and you return, there's an innate longing to visit all the places and faces that resonate as being "home." Of course, time goes by, businesses and people come and go, and towns change.

When I tell people I grew up in Healdsburg, they often think I spent my days rubbing elbows with acclaimed chefs and winemakers. But it wasn't long ago that Healdsburg was a quiet, unpolished agricultural town with no plans to become a destination.

The turning point came in 2001, with the opening of Hotel Healdsburg and its restaurant, Dry Creek Kitchen, from renowned chef Charlie Palmer. The southwest corner of the hotel used to be empty and the annual site for a Christmas tree lot. The complex undoubtedly added value. Its arrival was exciting, but there was already a question of what might come next. Thanks to a few intrepid citizens with inspired ideas for casual fine dining restaurants, the town quickly showed signs of finding itself.

Fast-forward: Healdsburg has become inextricably linked with fine wine and food and is undoubtedly the heartbeat of Sonoma County. However, the town has also changed dramatically. Two mixed-use developments that will debut in the coming years will offer shopping and dining, boutique hotels, and luxury apartments priced at \$1 million to \$8 million. They tout a lavishness that 30 years ago the folks of Healdsburg could have never envisioned.

Locals experience towns differently, and some argue that Healdsburg has become overly curated for visitors. Evolution is inevitable and often necessary. I'm not anti-development, but seeing million-dollar condos and luxury resorts enter a town that has already experienced rapid gentrification is eyebrow-raising. Where is the line between a thriving tourism destination and a monoculture? I can't help but feel that Healdsburg is riskily teetering between those two directions.

With changes came concern. Recognizing that Healdsburg was awash in places to drink, in 2017, the city council approved an ordinance limiting the number of downtown tasting rooms to slow the rapid growth. The following year, a survey revealed that 70%



*Healdsburg has been transformed. But I share in the inherent charm and beauty I fell in love with as a child.*

of residents believed the development of hotels was happening too fast. Nearly 500 hotel rooms were built or approved for construction in the subsequent years.

Of course, the reality is that lumber, hops and prunes (Healdsburg's commercial businesses of yesteryear) are no longer economically sustainable. The draw is food and wine, and the dizzying array of hotels, restaurants and tasting rooms support a healthy local economy.

Part of Healdsburg's novelty in the early 2000s was that there was enough space for everyone, local and newcomer, to try something. And, after all, Healdsburg's evolution was partially responsible for my interest in food and wine. As long as it doesn't become overly dependent upon tourism and balances the needs of locals, Healdsburg can be both a destination and a place to call home.

Despite its changes, I still love visiting Healdsburg. During a recent trip, I met with longtimers like Sarah Quider of the newly opened Healdsburg Bubble Bar, who saw a need for a gathering place for locals, and Preston Farm and Winery founder Lou Preston, a model Healdsburgian (see page 52). Their passion for the community reminds me that Healdsburg's heart, soul and people are still prevalent.

Ultimately, the people, not Michelin stars, are the stitching that holds together a small town. Plenty of the multigenerational families I grew up with are still here. Their devotion and enduring stories, no matter how much development, will keep Healdsburg grounded for years to come and give me a reason to return "home."

Healdsburg's boon is that it feels like something other than a tourist town. This is also a win for locals, allowing them to enjoy a quiet meal at their favorite restaurant or community pastimes such as the annual FFA parade and fair and Prune Packers baseball games under the twilight at Rec Park.

My time as a local has ended, and a new generation has further polished Healdsburg's shine. Sure, the hotel's valet parking reception area has replaced the Christmas trees, and I may recognize fewer faces and storefronts. Still, Healdsburg's transformation is a massive step up from the rustic town I rode my bicycle through. I'm lucky enough to share the inherent charm and beauty I fell in love with as a child and proudly endorse it as one of the most unique and exciting destinations for food and wine anywhere.

Senior editor Aaron Romano has been with Wine Spectator since 2012.



# HEALDSBURG'S

Best of Award of  
Excellence-winning  
the Matheson in  
downtown Healdsburg  
offers nearly 90 wines  
by the pour.

PHOTOGRAPHS BY  
PAIGE GREEN





# BIG MOMENT

Small-town  
America meets wine  
country luxury in this  
vibrant village in  
Sonoma County

BY TIM FISH







Healdsburg Plaza

**H**ealdsburg Plaza is the picture of small-town America. Children play in the fountain and chase around the gazebo, shaded by old redwoods and towering palms. The 19th-century storefronts that encircle the plaza are bustling with people. A church bell calls out the time. • Healdsburg remains a small town, at heart, but it has also become California wine country's most fashionable destination. The once sedate farming village in Sonoma County is generating more excitement than Napa Valley as the new go-to place for exciting food, wine and lifestyle experiences.

Healdsburg's location perfectly positions it for wine country expeditions. Situated on a bend of the Russian River, it's about 70 miles north of San Francisco and is the epicenter of three of Sonoma's top winegrowing regions: Alexander Valley, Dry Creek Valley and Russian River Valley. About 62 square miles of vines, nearly 100 wineries and a range of pristine mountains surround the village of 11,000.

While Healdsburg has been a West Coast wine destination since the 1990s, when winery tasting rooms first opened their doors

around the plaza and drew crowds, the town has blossomed in the past decade, accepting gentrification while striving to preserve what makes it a genuine small town in the first place.

The culture and community revolves around wine and food. Winemakers and growers socialize, and their kids go to school together. Odds are good that the person seated at the next table at a restaurant works at a winery or in a vineyard. "It's a wonderful blend of tourists

and locals," says native Pete Seghesio, who launched Journeyman Meat Co. after his family's Seghesio Family Vineyards was sold in 2011. "You go to tourist towns like Aspen and there's not much of a local community. Healdsburg has a strong contingent of locals who were born and raised here."

There are few chain stores, and community leaders encourage young entrepreneurs and home-grown businesses. There's still room for young chefs and businesses to give it a shot. "That's totally out of reach in Napa," Seghesio says. "That's what keeps

Healdsburg fresh and growing and alive.”

Food has been a catalyst in the rise of Healdsburg as the selection of fine dining restaurants and artisan food shops expands. SingleThread Farms raised the standard in 2016 when it opened just off the plaza. Today, SingleThread has three Michelin stars and *Wine Spectator's* Grand Award, matched in Northern California wine country only by the French Laundry.

There are also five Best of Award of Excellence winners and three Award of Excellence holders in the area (see page 44 for a full list).

There are artisan food shops, places like Noble Folk Ice Cream and Pie Bar, Quail & Condor Bakery and Ciao Bruto!, an Italian wine and food specialist. There are wine bars like Maison Healdsburg and Healdsburg Bubble Bar and hip cocktail bars like Lo & Behold. Add to that chic clothing boutiques, art galleries and a growing number of intimate hotels and resorts like the Montage, the Ruse and the upcoming Appellation.

More than two dozen tasting rooms are scattered around the



Healdsburg circa 1892

plaza, allowing visitors to leave their car behind and make a day of it just roaming around the charming downtown to taste wine. Healdsburg is a city for walking. Tasting rooms include Hirsch, Rockpile, Aeris by Rhys Vineyards, Hartford Family, Siduri and Longboard, plus co-op boutiques such as Alpha Omega Collective and Foley Society.

Venture out of the village and onto the wine

roads, and visitors can let their wine passions be their guide. If you love Pinot Noir and Chardonnay, head southwest to the shady Russian River Valley; if it's Zinfandel and Sauvignon Blanc you seek, cruise through scenic Dry Creek Valley to the northwest. Cabernet Sauvignon and Merlot country is north of town in Alexander Valley. (Day trip recommendations begin on page 48.)

With all that to offer, it's obvious why Healdsburg is the talk of wine country. As Healdsburg native chef Dustin Valette puts it, “We live in a place that 99.9% of the world wants to visit and would kill to live in.”

#### LOCAL VOICES

## PETE SEGHESESIO

The Seghesio family has grown grapes and made wine in northern Sonoma County since 1895. The Italian immigrant families of that era are the backbone of communities like Healdsburg generations later. Pete Seghesio, the former CEO of the family winery that sold in 2011, is an active community leader. At age 59, he continues to grow grapes for his wine labels: Journeyman and San Lorenzo. With his wife, Cathy, he also owns Journeyman Meat Co., an artisan butcher and retail shop. —Tim Fish

#### WINE SPECTATOR:

What do you like about Healdsburg?

**PETE SEGHESESIO:** It's just a nice, vibrant town that hasn't gotten too big. Right now, it's a perfect

balance between local farming families, strong entrepreneurs, local merchants, local restaurateurs. It's a wonderful blend of tourists and locals. And it's an amazing, amazing food town and the culinary choices are wonderful. There's still room for young chefs or young businesses to come in to Sonoma County and give it a shot. That's totally out of reach in Napa. That's what keeps Healdsburg fresh and growing and alive.

**WS:** What was Healdsburg like when you were young?

**PS:** It's not the same town it was when I was growing up. When I was going to school at St. John's, it was called Deadburg. There were three bars and a hardware store and not much

else in the early 1970s. The Hell's Angels would hang around in the summer, and mom wasn't too keen on me going to the plaza.

**WS:** What distinguishes Healdsburg from other tourist destinations?

**PS:** You go to these towns like an Aspen and there's not much of a strong, local community. Healdsburg has a strong contingent of locals who were born and raised here. The town has resisted chain stores coming in. I mean, we have a Starbucks and McDonald's, but they're not on the plaza, and we don't have the same luxury chain stores that are in Aspen or Monterey or wherever.

**WS:** Is Healdsburg getting too gentrified?



**PS:** That's one of the challenges. It's one of the challenges for all of the attractive towns across the West Coast. It's the labor pool,

it's the cost of living, it's managing growth, it's the water. I think Healdsburg now has had a strong focus on affordable housing.





Alan and Claire Ramey (left) of Ramey pour for guests

It wasn't always like this. When Seghesio was growing up in the 1970s the town endured a less than flattering nickname: Dead-berg. "There were three bars on the plaza and the old Garrett's hardware store and not much else," recalls Seghesio. The plaza was a biker hangout back then, with the Hell's Angels coming through every summer, taking over the bars and plaza. "Mom wasn't too keen on me hanging out at the plaza," Seghesio says.

Sonoma's modern wine industry was just establishing itself at the time. Most of the grape crop went into jug wines by Gallo and the long-gone Italian Swiss Colony. Healdsburg was a farm town, not yet a wine town. It had been that way since the first European immigrants settled in the region during the California Gold Rush.

Among the first settlers was Cyrus Alexander, who in 1846 reportedly planted the first grapes in what today is Alexander Valley. By 1867, Harmon Heald had painstakingly plotted out the Healdsburg town grid, complete with the Spanish-style plaza, and sold lots for the whopping price of \$15 each.

Just as the Sonoma wine industry hit its stride in the early 1900s, it took a one-two punch.

First came phylloxera, an insect that devours grapevine roots. Then Prohibition in 1920. Under the watchful eye of the government, wineries such as Foppiano dumped thousands of gallons of wine into area creeks. To survive, growers planted more peaches, apples, prunes and hops. Prohibition lasted only 13 years, but its impact was felt for decades.

It wasn't until the early 1970s that a new wave of family-owned wineries began to arrive, with producers such as Dehlinger, Dry Creek Vineyard and Silver Oak, which upped the ante on quality and

helped establish the region's wine reputation. "There was excitement about this new industry, which wasn't really new," vintner Lou Preston, founder of Preston Farm and Winery, remembers. "It was just kind of waking up again."

The Healdsburg we know today began to take shape in the 1990s. The plaza was still sleepy in the early 1990s when Barbara Banke, owner of Jackson Family Wines, moved to the area with her late husband, Jess Jackson. "The plaza had those kinds of antiques stores that were not really antiques, but just sort of junk. And some of the storefronts were empty. There weren't

that many restaurant choices either." The west side of the plaza, where Hotel Healdsburg is today, was an empty lot after the city condemned the previous buildings in the 1980s.

A handful of chefs and other visionaries blazed a trail forward. Former Chez Panisse pastry chef Kathleen Stewart opened Downtown Bakery & Creamery on the plaza in 1987. People thought she was crazy. Chef Ralph Tingle followed in 1992, opening Healdsburg's first white-tablecloth restaurant, Bistro Ralph. At the same time, just up the highway, chef Gary Danko made his name at Chateau Souverain, which is now Francis Ford Coppola Winery. Perhaps the single most significant development came in 2001 with the arrival of Hotel Healdsburg. Bed and breakfasts were plentiful, but the town needed a first-class hotel.



Bites at Little Saint Second Story

## DUSTIN VALETTE



**Chef Dustin Valette, 43, was born and raised in the Healdsburg area, and his family has roots in the community that go back nearly a century. He graduated from the Culinary Institute of America in Hyde Park, N.Y., and worked in top kitchens around the country before returning home. He was executive chef of Charlie Palmer's Dry Creek Kitchen before opening his first restaurant, Valette, in 2015. He followed that in 2021 with the Matheson.** —*Tim Fish*

What's more, chef Charlie Palmer, who owned restaurants in New York and Las Vegas, brought star power to the hotel's restaurant, Dry Creek Kitchen, which recently finished an elegant redesign. "Hotel Healdsburg and Charlie Palmer changed dramatically the landscape and direction of Healdsburg," says Valette, who was executive chef at Dry Creek Kitchen before opening his own restaurant, Valette, in 2015. He followed that in 2021 with the Matheson.

The wave of fine dining restaurants has only grown in recent years, with stalwarts such as Barndiva, Willi's Seafood & Raw Bar, the Madrona and Spanish restaurant Bravas Bar de Tapas, plus relative newcomers like Little Saint Second Story, Hazel Hill at the Montage resort, and Roof 106 and Sushi by Scratch, which are both located inside the Matheson. A short drive away are Farmhouse Inn & Restaurant and Cyrus, the latter of which shuttered in Healdsburg in 2012 but reopened in nearby Geyserville 10 years later.

Wine lists at these restaurants are stocked significantly with Northern California wines. Dry Creek Kitchen's Best of Award of Excellence list is exclusively Sonoma County wines, and while SingleThread has an impressive collection from the region, there is also an extensive selection of the best of Bordeaux, Burgundy and Champagne. The Matheson distinguishes itself with a high-tech "wine wall" that allows guests to personally tap 88 wines by the taste or glass.

Corkage fees vary, and most dining rooms don't mind if you bring a favorite bottle, although make sure it's not on the wine list. That's considered bad manners. Many places waive the corkage fee if you also buy a bottle, standard practice when you live in a town populated by winemakers.

**H**ealdsburg continues to look to the future. A long-anticipated roundabout on the south edge of downtown eased navigation, and there are two major developments underway at both the north and south gateways to the city.

Mill District is a 10-acre, \$500 million complex on the south side that will include restaurants, retail shops and a hotel, plus more than 200 homes, many of which will be affordable housing. It is expected to be finished by 2028. North Village is an ambitious 32-acre project that will include Charlie Palmer's new luxury hotel, Appellation, as well as his second restaurant in town. An open promenade will feature shops, cafés, and senior and affordable housing.

In recent years, city leaders have required new developments to include workforce housing. "We want people to be able to live here who work here," Valette says, echoing a common concern in the local wine and food industry.

While some argue that Healdsburg is becoming too gentrified, Seghesio is hopeful. "It's just a nice, vibrant town that hasn't gotten too big. Right now, it's a perfect balance between local farming families, strong entrepreneurs, local merchants, local restaurateurs."

Valette agrees. "We need to remember that Healdsburg is still an agricultural-based community. We grow grapes, we grow vegetables, we raise lamb, we raise cattle and poultry. So, I believe that we need to balance the economic drivers of tourism and agriculture with the

**WINE SPECTATOR:**

What was Healdsburg like when you were growing up?

**DUSTIN VALETTE:**

It was not the cute, quaint little town it is now. I remember Healdsburg Plaza as being a little rough around the edges. It was a biker hangout. Back then a lot of the grapes went to lower price point wines, and there was really no culinary scene.

**WS:** When did that start to change?

**DV:** I think Hotel Healdsburg, which opened in 2001, was a catalyst to make Healdsburg what it is today. Charlie Palmer and his restaurant in

the hotel, Dry Creek Kitchen, changed the landscape dramatically.

**WS:** What are the challenges facing Healdsburg?

**DV:** I think we've done a great job of limiting the amount of growth, limiting the amount of hotels, new businesses. We're not growing too fast. I do think that housing is probably the biggest challenge we have, especially affordable housing, workforce housing, because we want people to be able to live here who work here. We also have to balance the quality of living for residents like myself and still make visitors feel warm and welcome.

**WS:** What will the future bring? What will Healdsburg be like in 30 years?

**DV:** We need to remember that Healdsburg is still an agricultural-based community. We grow grapes, we grow vegetables, we raise lamb, we raise cattle and poultry. It's also important to understand the fact that we live in paradise. We live in a place that 99.9% of the world wants to visit and would kill to live in. So, I believe that we need to balance the economic drivers of tourism and agriculture with the ability to have a slice of paradise for all to share.

ability to have a slice of paradise for all to share."

What follows in these pages is our insider guide to Healdsburg and the surrounding wine country to help you plan your next trip, focusing on what's new as well as restaurants and wineries that have achieved classic status.



## TASTING ROOMS

### Alpha Omega Collective

241 Healdsburg Ave. **Telephone** (707) 723-7142 **Website** [alphaomegacollective.com/visit/healdsburg](http://alphaomegacollective.com/visit/healdsburg) **Open** Thursday to Monday, noon to 7 p.m. by appointment **Cost** \$50–\$100

Alpha Omega Collective offers wine experiences by reservation only at its tasting lounge in downtown Healdsburg. Wines are available by the flight, bottle and glass. Experience Bordeaux-inspired releases from Alpha Omega in Napa Valley, Burgundian varietals Pinot Noir and Chardonnay from Tolosa on the San Luis Obispo Coast, and Mediterranean reds from Perinet in Spain's Priorat, all in one place. —Tim Fish

### Bacchus Landing

14210 Bacchus Landing Way **Telephone** (707) 395-0697 **Website** [bacchuslanding.com](http://bacchuslanding.com) **Open** Thursday to Monday, 10 a.m. to 5 p.m.

This collective of seven boutique wineries is modeled after an old Mediterranean village, with a wide piazza and shady verandas. Tasting rooms include Dan Kosta's Pinot and Chardonnay project Convene, Montagne Russe, which doubles as a record shop, Smith Story and Cabernet specialist Aldina. Guests can take a glass outside to enjoy the day. Plus, there are bocce courts and live music, and food trucks are frequently on hand. —T.F.



Montagne Russe tasting room and record shop at Bacchus Landing

### Jeff Cohn Cellars

34 North St. **Telephone** (707) 938-8343 **Website** [jeffcohncellars.com](http://jeffcohncellars.com) **Open** Thursday to Tuesday, 11 a.m. to 6 p.m. **Cost** \$35–\$60

Few people have a knack for Syrah and Zinfandel like Jeff Cohn, who has carried the torch for those cultish varietals since his days at Rosenblum nearly 20 years ago. Harvesting from top vineyards around the state, he crafts full-flavored but harmonious and stylish wines. The tasting room is just off the piazza, and it's an inviting space decorated with old vines and a comforting fireplace. Several tasting options are available. —T.F.

### Foley Society

325 Center St. **Telephone** (707) 433-1944 **Website** [foleyfoodandwinesociety.com/winery/healdsburg-the-society](http://foleyfoodandwinesociety.com/winery/healdsburg-the-society) **Open** Monday to Wednesday, 10 a.m. to 6 p.m., Thursday to Sunday, 10 a.m. to 7 p.m. **Cost** \$35–\$75

California vintner Bill Foley has built a small empire of wineries and many of the wines are poured at this salon just off the piazza. His labels include Chateau St. Jean, Ferrari-Carano, Chalk Hill Estate and Sebastiani and there's an array of tastings available, everything from a glass of wine to tasting flights with curated food pairings. The storefront salon is a comfortable, elegantly modern space. —T.F.

### Healdsburg Bubble Bar

134 North St. **Telephone** (707) 395-4434 **Website** [healdsburgbubblebar.com](http://healdsburgbubblebar.com) **Open** Wednesday, Thursday, Sunday, noon to 8 p.m., Friday and Saturday noon to 10 p.m.

Nestled in a 1906 Queen Anne Victorian behind popular restaurants Valette and SingleThread, the Bubble Bar opened early this year and brought a taste of Paris to Healdsburg. Owner Sarah Quider set the atmosphere with rich blues and yellows, a tin ceiling and fleur-de-lis tiles. Bubbly is sold by the glass and bottle, and about half of the list is devoted to Champagne. There's a small menu of bites, from potato chips to charcuterie and caviar. —T.F.

### Ramey Cellars

25 Healdsburg Ave. **Telephone** (707) 433-0870 **Website** [rameywine.com](http://rameywine.com) **Open** Daily by appointment **Cost** \$50

Tasting rooms abound in Healdsburg, but there are few working wineries in town. This is an exception. David Ramey is one of the most respected winemakers in California, with a long and influential career. His vineyard sources are impeccable, and Chardonnay and Cabernet are the house specialties. They are handsome, refined wines. A seated tasting is offered, and guests overlook all the action in the cellar as they sip. —T.F.



Healdsburg Bubble Bar owner Sarah Quider

# RESTAURANTS

## Cyrus

275 CA-128, Geyserville **Telephone** (707) 723-5999 **Website** [cyrusrestaurant.com](http://cyrusrestaurant.com) **Open** Dinner, Thursday to Sunday **Cost** Prix fixe \$295, plus optional wine matches **Corkage** \$100

Chef Douglas Keane and partner Nick Peyton resurrected Cyrus from its original location in Healdsburg, moving it to Geyserville in 2022, and after a 10-year hiatus it's better than ever. The interior is contemporary in design, with sleek angles and handsome wood, steel and stone tones that exude effortless sophistication. The prix fixe menu offers more than 15 courses, many of which are small bites, and it's a migrating feast, starting in the bubble lounge, then moving to the chef's table in the kitchen and finally the dining room.

Keane's cuisine is seasonal and takes influence from Asia and beyond, and there's attention to detail, from presentation to taste and texture. The wine list is a savvy selection of 800-plus bottles, strong on Champagne, Burgundy and California. You'll find gems like Méo-Camuzet Clos de Vougeot 2016 (\$1,400) and Roederer Estate L'Ermitage Anderson Valley 2015 (\$130). —T.F.

## Dry Creek Kitchen

317 Healdsburg Ave. **Telephone** (707) 431-0330 **Website** [drycreekkitchen.com](http://drycreekkitchen.com) **Open** Dinner, Wednesday to Sunday **Cost** Prix fixe \$75–\$135 **Corkage** \$30

Star chef Charlie Palmer paved the way for Healdsburg's dining scene when he opened this restaurant in Hotel Healdsburg in 2001. Yet Palmer is not resting on his laurels, just completing a stylish makeover of the dining room and hiring a executive chef Shane McAnelly. The dining room is large yet has an intimate feel thanks to columns that flair dramatically up to the vaulted ceiling and a glass-encased showpiece wine cellar adjacent to the kitchen.

What distinguishes Dry Creek Kitchen is its devotion to Sonoma County: Most ingredients hail from the region and the wine list's 655 selections are exclusively from Sonoma. The menu evolves with the season and includes the likes of miso-marinated King salmon, coffee-crusted pork tenderloin and slow-roasted leg of lamb.



Hazel Hill's striped bass with cardioons



Chef Douglas Keane of Cyrus

Wine director Jon Macklem oversees a list that focuses on three nearby regions: Alexander, Dry Creek and Russian River valleys. It's a Pinot Noir lover's dream, with deep verticals of Rochioli and Williams Selyem, as well as older vintages of Jordan Cabernet Sauvignon. Chardonnay, Sauvignon Blanc and Zinfandel are also bountiful. Gems include Arista Chardonnay Russian River Valley 2018 for \$124 and Rochioli Pinot Noir West Block Russian River Valley 2014 (\$375). —T.F.

## Hazel Hill

Montage Healdsburg, 100 Montage Way **Telephone** (707) 979-9000 **Website** [montagehotels.com/healdsburg](http://montagehotels.com/healdsburg) **Open** Daily, breakfast, lunch and dinner **Cost** Entrées \$28–\$85 **Corkage** \$40

Hazel Hill is the main dining room at Montage, and while it's open for three meals a day, it's heads above the typical hotel restaurant. Chef de cuisine Sean Koenig focuses his menu on local ingredients prepared with French flair. Delicate black cod is served with sunchoke, quince and lardo, while rich coq au vin is paired with pearl onions, carrots and spätzle. Local duck and

### WINE SPECTATOR RESTAURANT AWARD LEVELS

🏆 Grand Award 🏆 Best of Award of Excellence 🏆 Award of Excellence





Wagyu steaks are menu regulars.

Wine director Paul Coker oversees a list of about 500 bottlings that is focused on Northern California, with nods to Italy and France. Selections range from Carlisle 2021 Dry Creek Valley Zinfandel for \$95 to collectibles such as Harlan Estate Napa Valley 2018 (\$3,500). The dining room has a casual luxury with wide views of the countryside. The kitchen is on full display, and foodies can sit at the counter to watch the action or dine outside in a truly serene setting.

—T.F.

## Little Saint Second Story

25 North St. **Telephone** (707) 433-8207 **Website** [littlesainthealdsburg.com/second-story](http://littlesainthealdsburg.com/second-story) **Open** Dinner, Friday to Sunday **Cost** Prix fixe \$120 **Corkage** \$30 ☞

Best of Award of Excellence restaurant Little Saint, a plant-based, farm-to-table focused eatery, has been a celebrated since its opening in 2022. Last year, its upstairs was renovated, ushering in an elevated dining experience to accompany the existing downstairs all-day café. Executive chef Stu Stalker, who worked as a sous chef at Noma in Copenhagen, embraces the company ethos of mindful and sustainable practices, creating a plant-based tasting menu with particular attention to seasonal produce from the restaurant's 8-acre garden. The atmosphere is cozy, relaxed and unrushed and mimics the food, which is similarly unfussy, with simple but beautiful presentations showcasing clean flavors of the season. Complementing the food is the 500-plus-bottle wine list focused on wines from sustainable practices. In addition to an optional wine pairing, there are also low and nonalcoholic beverage pairings.

—Aaron Romano

## The Matheson

106 Matheson St. **Telephone** (707) 723-1106 **Website** [thematheison.com](http://thematheison.com) **Open** Dinner, daily **Cost** Entrées \$27–\$195 **Corkage** \$30 ☞

Sonoma native Dustin Valette worked in top kitchens around the country before returning home and opening his first restaurant, Valette, in 2015. He followed that in 2021 with the Matheson, just a few blocks away. The three-level interior actually hosts three restaurants. The Matheson anchors the first floor, and the third floor is Valette's more casual Roof 106, a lounge and patio bar that serves pizza and shareable plates. Sushi By Scratch is tucked in the mezzanine between.

The Matheson's decor pays tribute to Valette's Sonoma roots with murals of local historic agricultural figures, and the dining room, with its towering ceiling, has an open, warm atmosphere. The high-tech "wine wall" allows guests to personally tap 88 wines by the taste or glass, with gems such as Kistler, Schrader and Yquem. Wine director Jon McCarthy maintains a list of about 500 wines, with an emphasis on Northern California, in keeping with Valette's upscale farm-to-table cuisine. The menu is seasonal, with the likes

of local salmon, duck and lamb; wild mushrooms risotto with whipped mascarpone and crispy garlic; or Wagyu beef with smoked brisket, winter root vegetables and Pinot Noir jus.

—T.F.

## Multi Amici

330 Healdsburg Ave. **Telephone** (707) 756-3169 **Website** [multiamici.com](http://multiamici.com) **Open** Lunch and dinner, Thursday to Monday **Cost** Entrées \$27–\$55 **Corkage** \$40

Inhabiting the space of a former beloved neighborhood restaurant doesn't come without its vacillation. But Multi Amici, which loosely translates to "many friends" in Italian, has successfully fulfilled the void left by its predecessor, Campo Fina, as a gathering spot for a relaxed and delicious meal. The draw is the bright and cheery covered patio, ideal for lingering on a warmer summer night. The menu, curated by alumni from Grand Award-winning SingleThread Sean McGaughey and Melissa Yanc (who are also behind Quail & Condor and Troubadour in downtown Healdsburg), spotlights seasonal Italian-inspired favorites, like house-made pastas, pizzas and salads, with creative culinary twists here and there. The wine list enjoys a good mix of food-friendly wines from around the globe but, not surprisingly, leans into Italy and local offerings.

—A.R.

## SingleThread Farms, Restaurant & Inn

131 North St. **Telephone** (707) 723-4646 **Website** [singlethreadfarms.com](http://singlethreadfarms.com) **Cost** Prix fixe \$475 **Corkage** \$150 ☞☞

It's easy to understand why SingleThread, run by husband-and-wife duo Kyle and Katina Connaughton, is considered one of the most exciting restaurants in the world. Farm director Katina heads up the nearby 24-acre farm where their olive oil, honey, eggs, herbs, flowers and produce are meticulously sourced. Chef Kyle puts together a 10-course menu through the lens of a chef deeply inspired by Japanese culinary traditions. It's a truly unique experience.

When you arrive, a nonalcoholic beverage is served from a window in the foyer that looks into the kitchen, where you can observe the meal prep for a moment before sitting down. The first course is waiting for you when you get to your table. A stunning arrangement of branches, greenery and flowers from the farm are the setting for a spread of amuses-bouches—most of it is artful sashimi topped with fresh garnishes—that you forage for in and among the greenery. From there, the meal goes in a somewhat more traditional direction, with plenty of savory courses and creative desserts. While there are many surprises and unusual textures, presentations and combinations, there is strength in some of the more soulful, comfort elements like potatoes that melt in your mouth, fragrant rice, perfectly cooked meats and rich broths.

Everything here has a story, including the handmade pottery that the food is both cooked and served in. If you have a question about any of the details about your meal—from the earthenware to esoteric ingredients or how a dish is prepared—you'll find the team more than happy to explain. But this is a place where a copy of the menu isn't offered until the end of the meal, giving you a rare chance to just put your faith in the beautiful and delicious dishes served without overthinking it. Enjoy the ride.

Under wine director Christopher McFall the wine list has grown to 3,400 selections from around the world, making it one of the top lists in Sonoma County and the first there to earn a Grand Award. There is also an inn on-site, with five guest rooms.

—MaryAnn Worobiec

## Sushi by Scratch

The Matheson, 106 Matheson St. **Telephone** (707) 579-7916 **Website** [sushibyscratchrestaurants.com](http://sushibyscratchrestaurants.com) **Open** Daily, three sittings a night **Cost** Prix fixe \$185

Husband-and-wife chef team Phillip Frankland Lee and Margarita Kallas-Lee describe their cuisine as "new wave" sushi. They're perfected their approach in Los Angeles and now have 10 Sushi by Scratch restaurants around the country. It's certainly not your typical Japanese restaurant, tucked away speakeasy-style on the second floor of the Matheson.



Dry Creek Kitchen is helmed by chef Charlie Palmer (center)

## SONOMA COUNTY WINE SPECTATOR RESTAURANT AWARD WINNERS

### SINGLETHREAD FARMS

317 Healdsburg Ave., Healdsburg **Telephone** (707) 723-4646 **Website** [singlethreadfarms.com](http://singlethreadfarms.com) **Menu prices** Expensive **Corkage** \$150 **Wine strengths** California, Burgundy, Bordeaux, France 🍷🍷

### DRY CREEK KITCHEN

317 Healdsburg Ave., Healdsburg **Telephone** (707) 431-0330 **Website** [drycreekkitchen.com](http://drycreekkitchen.com) **Menu prices** Moderate **Corkage** \$30 **Wine strengths** California 🍷

### FARMHOUSE INN

7871 River Road, Forestville **Telephone** (707) 887-3300 **Website** [farmhouseinn.com](http://farmhouseinn.com) **Menu prices** Expensive **Corkage** \$50 **Wine strengths** California, Sonoma, France, Germany 🍷

### LITTLE SAINT

25 North St., Healdsburg **Telephone** (707) 433-8207 **Website** [littlesainthealdsburg.com](http://littlesainthealdsburg.com) **Menu prices** Inexpensive **Corkage** \$30 **Wine strengths** France, California, Burgundy 🍷

### THE MATHESON

106 Matheson St., Healdsburg **Telephone** (707) 723-1106 **Website** [thematheson.com](http://thematheson.com) **Menu prices** Expensive **Corkage** \$30 **Wine strengths** California, France, Italy 🍷

### WIT & WISDOM

1325 Broadway, Sonoma **Telephone** (707) 931-3405 **Website** [witandwisdomsonoma.com](http://witandwisdomsonoma.com) **Menu prices** Expensive **Corkage** \$35 **Wine strengths** California, Burgundy, France, Italy 🍷

### SALT & STONE

9900 Sonoma Highway, Kenwood **Telephone** (707) 833-6326 **Website** [saltstonekenwood.com](http://saltstonekenwood.com) **Menu prices** Moderate **Corkage** \$20 **Wine strengths** California 🍷

### SWEET T'S RESTAURANT + BAR

9098 Brooks Road S., Windsor **Telephone** (707) 687-5185 **Website** [sweettssouthern.com](http://sweettssouthern.com) **Menu prices** Inexpensive **Corkage** \$25 **Wine strengths** California 🍷

### VALETTE

344 Center St., Healdsburg **Telephone** (707) 473-0946 **Website** [valettehealdsburg.com](http://valettehealdsburg.com) **Menu prices** Moderate **Corkage** \$25 **Wine strengths** California 🍷





Drewish Deli owner Drew Ross

It's an intimate affair with just 10 seats at the chef's table, and the dinner is traditional omakase. There 17 courses. Fresh seafood is flown in from Tokyo's famous Toyosu Fish Market. Lee's creations include roasted bone marrow nigiri and hamachi topped with sweet corn pudding, sourdough bread-crumbs and house-made soy sauce. There are a handful of wines on the beverage menu, but Japanese beer, sake and whisky are the focus. —T.F.

## PROVISIONS

### Drewish Deli & Healdsburg Bagel Co.

11 Mitchell Lane **Telephone** (707) 955-0600 **Website** drewishdeli.com

Jewish delis and good bagels are rare in wine country, so this small shop was a welcome addition when it opened last year. Drew Ross takes his craft seriously, and his menu features all the classics: chopped liver mousse, hot pastrami, house-cured lox, knishes, matzo ball soup and, of course, bagels with schmear. Grab breakfast or lunch to go. —T.F.

### Journeyman Meat Co.

404 Center St. **Telephone** (707) 395-6328 **Website** journeymanmeat.com

Pete Seghesio's family has made wine and artisan salumi in Sonoma County

since the late 1800s. When his family sold their winery in 2011, Seghesio and his wife, Cathy, started Journeyman Meat. The animals are born and raised in Sonoma County under Seghesio's supervision, and the meat is processed at his nearby facility. The shop multitasks, offering a butcher counter, a wood-fired oven and a limited menu of burgers, pizza, salumi and cheese boards. —T.F.

### Noble Folk Ice Cream and Pie Bar

116 Matheson St. **Telephone** (707) 395-4426 **Website** thenoblefolk.com

Leave your diet at the door. Christian Sullberg and Ozzy Jimenez make all their treats in-house. The ice cream menu revolves, but includes the likes of blood orange and raspberry, peanut butter brownie and corn flake and maple. There are cookies, macarons and designer cupcakes, plus indulgent pies like maple chocolate walnut and strawberry-blueberry crumble. —T.F.

## HOTELS

### H2hotel

219 Healdsburg Ave. **Telephone** (707) 922-5251 **Website** h2hotel.com  
**Rooms** 28 **Rates** \$299–\$799

This hotel was built to be environmentally friendly, and the green theme is evident in all aspects of its design, from tables made of reclaimed wood to an undulating "green roof" planted with native California succulents. Rooms are urban and minimalist but elegant, with recycled bamboo-wood floors, custom cabinetry and intimate balconies. —T.F.

### Harmon Guest House

227 Healdsburg Ave. **Telephone** (707) 922-5262 **Website** harmonguesthouse.com **Rooms** 33 **Rates** \$399–\$849

This boutique hotel offers hip sophistication with a dash of country charm. The slatted redwood facade is visually striking, creating the impression of a posh treehouse. Rooms offer sleek simplicity with floor-to-ceiling windows, custom furniture and private balconies. The rooftop bar is an ideal perch from which to watch the sunset and sip a cocktail. —T.F.

## LOCAL VOICES

# BARBARA BANKE

Barbara Banke is the chairman of the board and proprietor of Sonoma County-based Jackson Family Wines, which owns 39 wine brands around the world. Banke and her late husband, Jess Jackson, moved from nearby Marin County to the Healdsburg area in 1990.

—Tim Fish

community, and it's somewhat of a throwback. It's not one of those places where you have to drive everywhere. It seems like people are walking around and enjoying the town. The kids bicycle and there's a lot of activity. I think the plaza certainly helps. It gives the town a real heart.

of the storefronts were empty. And there weren't that many restaurant choices, either. There was Adel's, which just closed, and there was a steak house. I forget its name, but it was good. Jess and I could bring the kids there, and no one minded if they were rambunctious.

**WS:** What about the future? What are the challenges?

**BB:** I think the lack of housing for workers is a problem, and it's just getting worse. That's the big issue, and it's an issue we face everywhere in California. It's all workers,



like your doctor and the people who work in the schools. People will notice if they're trying to get a medical appointment or they can't staff the local school. I'm hopeful

that some of these developments that have apartments or townhouses or homes can be available to the people who work in and around Healdsburg.

## Hotel Healdsburg

25 Matheson St. **Telephone** (707) 431-2800 **Website** [hotelhealdsburg.com](http://hotelhealdsburg.com)  
**Rooms** 50 **Suites** 6 **Rates** \$599–\$1,399

Located on Healdsburg's historic plaza, this hotel offers understated luxury in addition to its ideal location. Rooms are sleek and modern in design, yet warm and inviting. Bathrooms are spacious and feature soaking tubs, and most rooms include French doors that open to a private balcony. Guests can enjoy the hotel spa or relax in chaise lounges by the secluded pool. The hotel's handsome lobby, outfitted with a fireplace lounge and bar, is great for a nightcap after a day of wine tasting.

—T.F.

## Hotel Les Mars

27 North St. **Telephone** (707) 433-4211  
**Website** [hotellesmars.com](http://hotellesmars.com) **Rooms** 18  
**Rates** \$399–\$1,299

This intimate hotel, a few steps from the plaza, deftly combines Old World luxury with modern amenities. The hotel reflects the design of a French château. Guest rooms are decorated in warm cream tones with 17th- and 18th-century antiques and reproductions such as chaise lounges and armoires. Appointments include canopy beds and gas fireplaces.

—T.F.

## The Lodge at Healdsburg

1261 Grove St. **Telephone** (707) 433-1300 **Website** [theloh.com](http://theloh.com) **Rooms** 60 **Rates** \$179–\$699

Weaving lodging with the tapestry of its community, the Lodge is owned by Hilton Tapestry. In the front lobby, which doubles as a café, they provide local pastries from Healdsburg bakeries and coffee from Black Oak Coffee as well as local wine (Dry Creek Vineyards, Seghesio and MacRostie) and beer (Cooperage, Barrel Brothers, Moonlight, Fogbelt). The Lodge is an embodiment of California-Tuscany, with the architecture and courtyards taking you to coastal Italy. Each room has a king bed, fireplace, pull-out sofa and oversized bathroom. There is plenty of conference space here, too, which offers great meeting opportunities for local businesses. You can also relax in the steam room and sauna on the property.

—Chris Cardoso

## The Madrona

1001 Westside Road **Telephone** (707) 395-6700 **Website** [themadronahotel.com](http://themadronahotel.com) **Rooms** 17 **Suites** 6 **Rates** \$450–\$1,600

This Victorian manor with its broad porch and striking mansard roof was built in 1881 and had a complete makeover in 2022. The Victorian bones remain, but a touch of modern flair and panache have superseded its once ornate hues. Located on a hilltop glade, the hotel offers a peaceful respite from Healdsburg's bustling downtown.

—T.F.

## Montage Healdsburg

100 Montage Way **Telephone** (707) 979-9000 **Website** [montagehotels.com/healdsburg](http://montagehotels.com/healdsburg) **Rooms** 130 **Rates** \$1,200–\$10,000

An oasis sheltered in 258 wooded acres on the northern edge of Healdsburg, Montage is an escapist dream. The resort's 130 bungalow-style guest rooms, scattered amid rolling hills and old oak and madrone trees, were built to have minimal impact on the original landscape.

The decor is modern, casual and elegant, with hardwood floors, calming



color tones and light wood accents. Windows are floor to ceiling. Bathrooms, done in marble, have soaking tubs and many have outdoor showers. For large groups, there's a 4,635 square-foot guest house, which has three bedrooms and a fully equipped kitchen. Forty residences are being built; three are currently available, with a private clubhouse and pool also being built.

The grounds include a family pool and a zero-edge adult pool with cabanas and a bar and grill. Nearby is the spa, which has 11 treatment rooms and a fitness room. Yoga classes are set in a vineyard at the heart of the resort. Fifteen acres of grapes are on the land, with winemaker Jesse Katz making a label named Surveyor. (Its first vintage was released this year.)

The resort also planted 450 hazelnut trees and have hopes of having truffles on the property. There are five aviaries for the cultivation of honey used in the restaurant and spa.

Food and drink feature prominently in Montage's main building. Just off the lobby is the handsome Scout Field Bar, with a fireplace and views of Mount Saint Helena; it's been reimagined, with the bar direction now facing the outdoor patio and firepits. Hazel Hill is the main dining room, open for three meals a day. *Wine Spectator* is one of three magazines in every room.

—C.C.

## The Ruse

891 Grove St. **Telephone** (707) 569-2800 **Website** [theruse.com](http://theruse.com) **Rooms** 11 **Cottages** 7 **Rates** \$395–\$895

The Ruse is a golf aficionado's ideal wine country lodging, just 1 mile from downtown Healdsburg on busy Grove Street. Owned by the Mayacama Golf Club, there is an 18-hole putting green on the property. Guests can have a tee time booked for them at the Mayacama Golf Club as well. After putting, you can keep the activities going on six pickle ball courts or two bocci courts.

Built in a Victorian style, there are 11 rooms and a side cottage. Each room is designed for couples, featuring a king bed, barn doors, tiled baths and tub, with two suites for couples with children and some rooms featuring a fireplace. An in-house chef provides a plated breakfast and offers charcuterie boards (including house-made pickles) upon request, and the dining pavilion doubles as an event space, with floor-to-ceiling sliding doors in front of the pool and hot tub.

—C.C.



# ALEXANDER VALLEY

Discovering Sonoma County's Cabernet Country

WITH **TIM FISH** {YOUR GUIDE}



Silver Oak

There's a calm to Alexander Valley that's like no other Sonoma County wine region. Twenty miles from north to south and 8 miles at its widest, it is sparsely populated, with only a few dozen wineries to visit. Russian River Valley is three times the size, yet Alexander Valley has just as many acres in vineyards.

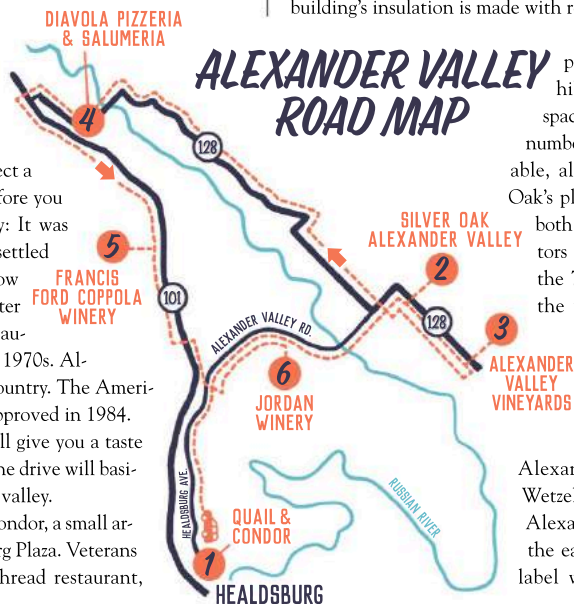
Yes, there are more vines there than people, so when you set out from Healdsburg for a day trip, expect a tranquil and scenic experience. Before you hit the road, take in some history: It was named for Cyrus Alexander, who settled there in 1840 and was the first to grow wine grapes, but wheat, cattle and later prunes dominated until Cabernet Sauvignon took hold in the 1960s and 1970s. Alexander Valley is Sonoma's Cab Country. The American Viticulture Area (AVA) was approved in 1984.

Here's a plan for the day that will give you a taste of what Alexander Valley is like. The drive will basically be one long loop through the valley.

Start your morning at Quail & Condor, a small artisan bakery just south of Healdsburg Plaza. Veterans of Healdsburg's heralded SingleThread restaurant,

the valley since 1972 and in 2018 they opened this impressive high-tech, eco-friendly winery. Electricity is 100% solar, and every drop of water—even rain—is recycled three times. Old redwood wine tanks were reclaimed to create the winery exterior, and the building's insulation is made with recycled blue jeans.

## ALEXANDER VALLEY ROAD MAP



chefs Melissa Yanc and Sean McGaughey, opened Quail & Condor in 2020, tempting locals and tourists alike. Choose from fresh bread, scones and cinnamon rolls, or try a Morning Bun, a fluffy construction of croissant dough filled with cream. Of course, there's good coffee.

Head north on Healdsburg Avenue and turn onto Alexander Valley Road just outside town. After a few miles, you'll see a stop sign, and from there Alexander Valley Road becomes Highway 128. Follow that to your first winery stop: Silver Oak Alexander Valley.

The Duncan family has been making Cabernet in

The tasting salon, open by appointment only, is located on a hill above the winery. It's a chic space that overlooks the valley. A number of different tastings are available, allowing you to sample Silver Oak's plump and polished Cabernets, both recent and older vintages. Visitors also can take a path through the 75 acres of vineyards and into the winery, where catwalks take them above the barrel room and beyond.

A few miles south on Highway 128 is another longstanding family-operated winery, Alexander Valley Vineyards. The Wetzels helped pioneer the revival of Alexander Valley grapegrowing in the early 1960s and launched their label with the 1975 vintage. The

tasting room is old-school Sonoma County at its best: casual, friendly, with lovely views, a wide porch and a fireplace. It's open without appointment for groups of six or fewer.

The wines are well-crafted and fairly priced. Despite the accessibility of the Cabernets when they're young, they age well. Zinfandel and Merlot are also specialties. Several tastings are offered, with new and older releases, plus tours of the cave and vineyard.

As the drive continues, you'll need to backtrack a couple of miles and follow Highway 128 north and into the heart of Alexander Valley. The two-lane road meanders between the Mayacamas Mountains to the east and Russian River to the west. Vineyards stretch



Diavola Pizzeria & Salumeria



Jordan Winery

for miles on the valley floor as you drive, and increasingly in recent decades winemakers have planted in the benchlands and mountaintops.

After about 15 minutes of serene views out the car window, you'll find yourself in Geyserville, named for the hot springs common in the area. The healing waters were popular with Native Americans, and by 1847 the city was founded. It's an offbeat little town with a few tasting rooms and restaurants.

Your lunch destination is Diavola Pizzeria & Salumeria. Located in a historic storefront, the dining room has high tin ceilings, wood floors and brick walls. The heart of the dining room is chef-owner Dino Bugica's wood-fired oven.

The menu blends old-fashioned Italian fare like pasta fazool, pappardelle with lamb sugo and hearty pizzas with hamburgers, fish tacos and spicy fried chicken. It's all yummy, just the thing after a morning of wine tasting. Diavola's wine list is small and mixes local selections with Italian; it's reasonably priced with a good offering by the glass. Corkage is a modest \$25.

After lunch, hop on Highway 101 south and a five-minute drive to Francis Ford Coppola Winery. The famed director sold the winery in 2021 but the experience he built remains. There's a restaurant, tasting room and even an outdoor pool with cabanas you can rent for the day, but the main attraction for your visit is the collection of memorabilia from Coppola's storied film career.

Mementos include Oscars for *The Godfather*, artifacts from *Apocalypse Now*, costumes from *Bram Stoker's Dracula* and an original Tucker car from *Tucker: The Man and His Dream*. It's a jovial 30 or 40 minutes for movie buffs.

The day ends at Jordan Winery, which brings you back to where you started, Alexander Valley Road, just outside Healdsburg. The handsome, ivy-covered manor was established by the Jordan family in 1972 and styled after a French château. The interior finished a multiyear makeover in 2023, lending it a more open and elegant atmosphere. Cabernet is the star at Jordan and it captures the supple richness common to the best Alexander Valley reds. Multiple tours, tastings and food experiences are available by appointment.

Healdsburg and Highway 101 are a brief drive, and while you're heading back to the hotel or elsewhere, you can reflect on a memorable day.

## DAY TRIP DETAILS

### 1 Quail & Condor

149 Healdsburg Ave., Healdsburg; (707) 473-8254; [quailandcondor.com](http://quailandcondor.com)

### 2 Silver Oak Alexander Valley

7300 CA-128, Healdsburg; (707) 942-7082; [silveroak.com/visit/alexander-valley](http://silveroak.com/visit/alexander-valley)

### 3 Alexander Valley Vineyards

8644 CA-128, Healdsburg; (707) 433-7209; [avvwine.com](http://avvwine.com)

### 4 Diavola Pizzeria & Salumeria

21021 Geyserville Ave., Geyserville; (707) 814-0111; [diavolapizzeria.com](http://diavolapizzeria.com)

### 5 Francis Ford Coppola Winery

300 Via Archimedes, Geyserville; (707) 857-1471; [francisfordcoppolawinery.com](http://francisfordcoppolawinery.com)

### 6 Jordan Winery

1474 Alexander Valley Road, Healdsburg; (707) 431-5250; [jordanwinery.com](http://jordanwinery.com)



# DRY CREEK VALLEY

Where the Past Is Still Present

WITH **AARON ROMANO** {YOUR GUIDE}



Dry Creek General Store

Among Dry Creek Valley's many charms is that it has remained largely unchanged while the rest of the wine world has shifted in size and extravagance. The narrow valley northwest of downtown Healdsburg hasn't undergone the commercialization of many other prominent wine regions, or even downtown Healdsburg, for that matter. As a result, there's still a serene, pastoral, undiscovered quality about the area.

Grapegrowing here dates back 140 years, making Dry Creek Valley among the longest-established viticultural areas in California. Farmers were drawn to the area after the California Gold Rush for its beautiful and fertile landscape. Early crops included hops, wheat, prunes and wine grapes. At the turn of the century, a handful of wineries were in operation, and fewer than 1,000 acres were planted, predominantly to Zinfandel, the grape now synonymous with the region. Today, nearly 9,000 acres are farmed, most of which are tended to by multigenerational families.

The best way to discover Dry Creek Valley is through its tight-knit community of family farmers, exploring wineries that have a throwback vibe. Although you generally have to make an appointment, the experience eschews the formality of a typical

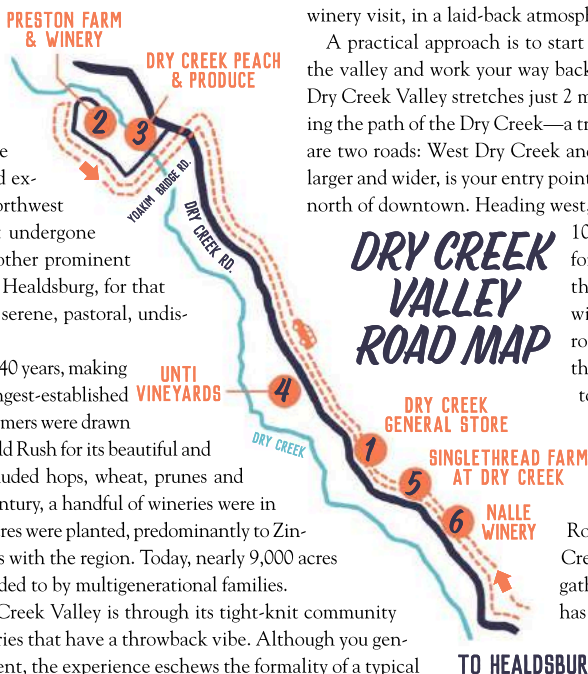
winery visit, in a laid-back atmosphere, with warm hospitality.

A practical approach is to start your exploration at far end of the valley and work your way back to Healdsburg. At its widest, Dry Creek Valley stretches just 2 miles. Running parallel, following the path of the Dry Creek—a tributary of the Russian River—are two roads: West Dry Creek and Dry Creek roads. The latter, larger and wider, is your entry point into the valley, accessible just north of downtown. Heading west, after you pass under Highway

101, the valley stretches out before you, and you will quickly see the allure: benchlands, often with gnarly old-vine Zinfandel rooted in striking red clay soils to the right and a lush valley floor to the left.

After about 3 miles, the first stop sign you come to will be at the intersection of Dry Creek and Lambert Bridge Roads. To your right is the Dry Creek General Store, a longtime gathering place for locals, which has been in operation since 1881.

It's a great place to stop and grab provisions for a picnic



TO HEALDSBURG

now or to keep in mind as you wind your way back later.

At the next stop sign, another 4 miles down, turn left onto Yoakim Bridge Road, which runs into West Dry Creek Road. Take a right and navigate the narrow lane to the entrance to Preston Farm & Winery. You'll wonder if you're lost as you bump along an unpaved road, but after about 1/4 mile, you'll reach the winery. Owner Lou Preston purchased his first parcel here in 1973. Over the years, the property has expanded to 125 acres of organic and biodynamically

farmed vineyards, fruits and vegetables and livestock.

Tastings are by appointment, but if you've managed to find your way to this remote winery, they'll often warmly welcome you. Visiting here is like spending the day with friends at their country farmhouse. Find a spot that suits your comfort, inside or out; pet the cats as they meander by and enjoy a relaxed tasting of six estate-grown wines, including Sauvignon Blanc, Zinfandel, Carignane, Barbera and more. Linger and enjoy a picnic if you'd like,

#### LOCAL VOICES

## LOU PRESTON

**Longtime resident Lou Preston, founder of Preston Farm and Winery, got to know Healdsburg as a young person, spending weekends and summers on his family's dairy and farm on East Side Road south of town. But it wasn't until after time in the military that he returned with a question: What do I do now? "I knew almost nothing about viticulture, but it was clearly the future for this area," recalls Preston. Preston audited some viticulture and winemaking classes at the University of California, Davis, and began looking for a place to plant grapes. In the early 1970s, he found a patch of land in a quiet northwest corner of Dry Creek Valley, and that was the beginning of what would become a nearly 50-year-old, 125-acre organic farm and winery.**

—Aaron Romano

#### WINE SPECTATOR:

What was the wine industry like in Healdsburg when you arrived?

**LOU PRESTON:** There was beginning excitement about this new industry, which wasn't really new. [Wine] had been here before; it was just kind of waking up again. Most of us [in the wine industry] didn't know what we were doing. But we had this passion to figure it out. How do you do this? Do

you have a machine that will do this? We started in 1975, three years after David Stare started Dry Creek Vineyards. A year later, Americo Rafanelli started his winery. And we would share not just knowledge but tools and machinery. The most appropriate word is family. It was like a big extended family.

**WS:** What has it been like watching Healdsburg evolve?

**LP:** When I first came here, there was no idea that Healdsburg would become anything special. There was a feeling that maybe Healdsburg was going to

find itself. I hate seeing so many fancy hotels, restaurants and boutique shops. On the other hand, the city is doing pretty well financially. However, some of the new money in town is very distant. It would be wonderful if the people who are these new professionals were more interactive. I've gotten to know a number of them, and there's still a healthy interactivity [within the community], so we haven't lost that yet.

There is an underlayment of real people in this town. They tend not to make themselves as visible, but there are a lot of multigenerational families with a

commitment to the land. Healdsburg [and Dry Creek Valley] is a place that grows on you, and land becomes part of you. It's corny to say, but when people visit here, they feel that. When we talk to our visitors, it imparts the feeling of the family farm of the neighborhood.

**WS:** What are the big issues facing Healdsburg today? And what do you hope the future will bring?

**LP:** I would say there's a high risk of [Healdsburg] losing its identity. On one end [of town], you've got the Mill District; on the other, Montage and North Village [coming soon]. The

periphery is going to hell and appeals only to outsiders and a very small element within our community. But the middle [of town] can be saved. We need to be more inclusive.

At my age, what can I do to make a difference? I guess talking helps. More and more, there's interest in a healthy community. Not just wealthy, but healthy. Food and environmental sustainability and more concern about the river and protecting aquifers. There are enough people who care enough to do something to maintain the basics of our community. And so I'm very hopeful.



PAIGE GREENE



or stroll through the farm store, where seasonal produce and other edibles, estate olive oil, and sourdough made from estate-grown and milled wheat and grains are available for sale.

Backtrack to Yoakim Bridge Road. If you're visiting June through early September, there's a good chance the Dry Creek Peach farmstand is open, offering a juicy taste of summer with dozens of peach varieties, other seasonal produce, jams and more. If it's offseason, keep moving and turn right to go back onto Dry Creek Road.

The next stop is Unti Vineyards less than a mile away. This family winery opened in 1997, but the Untis embody the Dry Creek spirit, and in many ways, it feels like they've always been here, tending to their 60 acres of organic vineyards and making soulful wines. Like most wineries in Dry Creek, Unti makes a gutsy yet zesty Zinfandel, but the Untis are avid lovers of wines from Italy, southern France and Spain. Thus, the vineyards are peppered with 16 different grapes, including common varieties like Syrah and Sangiovese and lesser-known Picpoul Blanc and Aglianico. A visit to the intimate tasting room overlooking the vineyard includes six wines. Behind the bar you'll occasionally find Mick Unti, who's happy to chat your ear off about the numerous wines they make or the intricacies of baseball.

Before you know it, you'll be back at the Dry Creek Store. Keep right on going if you don't need to break for food. In less than a mile, on the right-hand side, you'll see some black rectangular buildings with garden patches surrounding them. This farm supplies most fruits and vegetables for *Wine Spectator* Grand Award-winning restaurant SingleThread. The small farm store is a fun detour from wine, offering fresh produce, florals, pantry items, artisanal pottery, cookbooks and more.

If you plan ahead, you can sign up for a field walk that gives you an inside look into their regenerative 24-acre farm or one of their



Nalle Winery

seasonal workshops, ranging from floral arranging and pumpkin carving to cyanotype printing and lip-balm making.

The last stop of the day is just 1/2 mile away at Nalle. Keep your eyes peeled for a small wooden sign on the left, adjacent to nearly 100-year-old vines on land owned by the family since 1917. This boutique winery is in its fifth generation and is celebrating its 40th year. It has always been a no-frills, all-about-the-wine sort of place, and tastings are conducted at a small makeshift bar inside the cellar or on colorful patio furniture just outside. April Nalle, viticulturist and wife of winemaker Andrew, or another family member, like founder Doug Nalle, are likely to host you for an intimate exploration of the family's small-production wines, including a throwback-style Zinfandel, refined, low in alcohol and built to age.

## DAY TRIP DETAILS

### 1 Dry Creek General Store

3495 Dry Creek Road, Healdsburg; (707) 433-4171; drycreekgeneralstore1881.com; Open daily 7 a.m. to 4 p.m.

### 2 Preston Farm & Winery

9282 W. Dry Creek Road, Healdsburg; (707) 433-3372; prestonfarmandwinery.com

### 3 Dry Creek Peach

2179 Yoakim Bridge Road, Healdsburg; (707) 433-8121; drycreekpeach.com; Open June to September, Wednesday to Sunday

### 4 Unti Vineyards

4202 Dry Creek Road, Healdsburg; (707) 433-5590; untivineyards.com

### 5 SingleThread Farm Store

2836 Dry Creek Road, Healdsburg; (707) 723-4646; singlethreadfarms.com/farm; Open Friday to Sunday 11 a.m. to 5 p.m.

### 6 Nalle Winery

2383 Dry Creek Road, Healdsburg; (707) 433-1040; nallewinery.com



SingleThread Farm Store

# RUSSIAN RIVER VALLEY

The Pinot Noir and Chardonnay Center of Sonoma

WITH **MARYANN WOROBIEC** {YOUR GUIDE}



MacRostie

Visiting Healdsburg means you're close to one of the most exciting regions for Chardonnay and Pinot Noir: Russian River Valley. The entire appellation encompasses about 10,000 vineyard acres, 50 wineries and hundreds of growers—too much to explore in one day. But using Healdsburg as a base, set your sites on Westside Road, one of the most iconic stretches in the region.

Many vintners see Russian River Valley as a Goldilocks spot,

where the cooling Pacific Ocean interacts with inland Sonoma County; just a few miles in each direction might be too warm to grow Pinot Noir or Chardonnay. Westside Road has a wonderful concentration of outstanding wineries and famous vineyards. Plus, it's a gorgeous drive—winding roads and beautiful scraggly oak trees, many covered in moss and dripping with lichen.

Start your day with a cup of coffee from Black Oak Coffee Roasters, a charming café just off the Healdsburg square. Then,



plan ahead for lunch on the road by stopping around the corner at Troubadour Bread & Bistro for their grab-and-go sandwiches. They are all delicious—my favorite is the baguette with jamón, brie, butter and a drizzle of honey. I also love the sumac roasted carrot with pesto, burrata and arugula. Chocolate chip cookies, or one of their stellar loaves of bread are a must for later, if not sooner.

Heading out of town is simple. Just south of the square you'll find Mill Street, which turns into Westside Road after you pass under Highway 101. Almost immediately, you'll start to see the wild scenery, vineyards and old barns that define the landscape. The road winds and twists, but for the most part, you'll be heading south. Keep in mind that at any point the Pacific Ocean is just 20 to 30 miles due west.

Take note of the sign for the Madrona as the road takes you on a sharp turn to the left. It's a beautiful Victorian inn that's had a recent makeover, making it a lovely place to stay, but it's also a terrific place for lunch, dinner or drinks. The caviar and onion dip served with warm potato chips, the kimchi deviled eggs and one of their signature cocktails would be a perfect refresher after a day of wine tasting.

Just five more minutes down the road and you're at your first stop, Flowers. This winery is known for its estate Pinot Noirs and Chardonnays from the rugged Sonoma Coast—a dizzying drive more than an hour up the coast. But thankfully they brought the Sonoma Coast closer to wine lovers in the form of this tasting room. As the staff rightfully points out, the Russian River Valley is a gateway to the wilder and harsher setting where their grapes grow.

The Estate Vineyard Immersion experience (\$125 a person) pairs four wines (including a library wine) with four curated food pairings; I've never enjoyed winemaker Chantal Forthun's wines more than during one of these presentations.

Less than a mile down the road is MacRostie Winery. Steve and Thale MacRostie founded their winery in 1987, and I've been a fan of their single-vineyard and regional blends of Chardonnay and



The Madrona Martini

Pinot Noir for as long as I can remember. Now in the hands of head winemaker Heidi Bridenhagen, the wines remain stunning, and the tasting room is a great spot to enjoy them. Modern, airy and minimalist, the focus here is the view of the hilly vineyard planted around the tasting room.

Just a mile and a half farther along Westside Road is Rochioli Winery, founded by one of the pioneering families (and most recognizable names) in the region. Now fourth-generation farmers, they first planted Pinot Noir back in the 1960s, selling grapes to other pioneers in the region—including Davis Bynum and Williams Selyem. The family started making its own wines in the 1980s.

The Rochioli tasting room is among the more modest in the region but no less exciting to visit, surrounded by immaculate gardens and with views of acres of their estate Pinot Noir and Chardonnay. Plus, a visit there means you're tasting Rochioli wines—a huge win in my book.

Practically across the street is Arista, another family-owned property. I love this peaceful,



The hamlet of Forestville

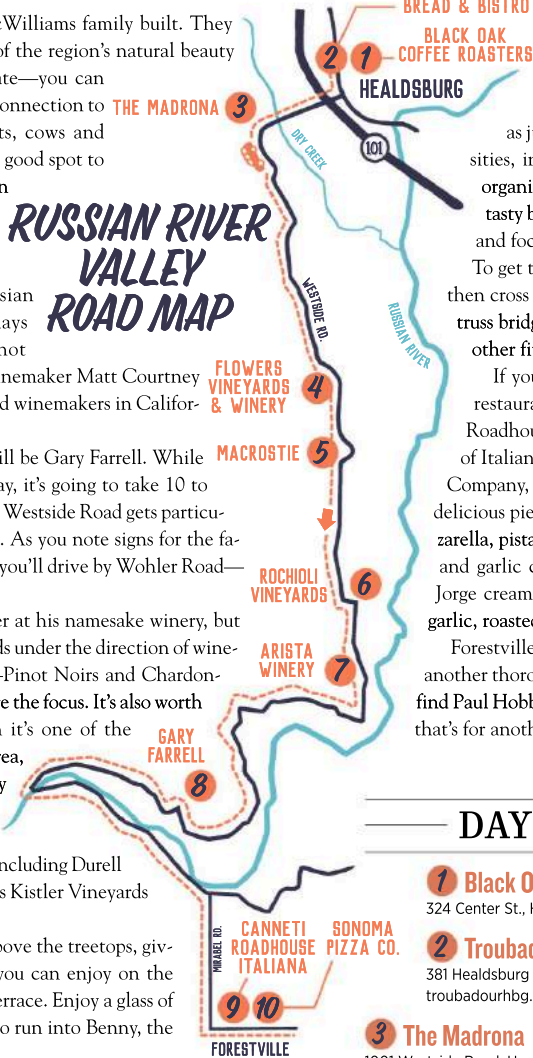
low-key spot that the McWilliams family built. They intentionally left plenty of the region's natural beauty when planning their estate—you can really get a sense of their connection to the land. There are goats, cows and sheep around and this is a good spot to stroll with a glass of wine in hand—and perhaps nibble on that sandwich from Troubadour. This brand's focus is on Russian River Valley Chardonnays and Pinot Noir—I'm not alone in believing that winemaker Matt Courtney is among the most talented winemakers in California today.

Your last winery stop will be Gary Farrell. While it's just a 4-mile drive away, it's going to take 10 to 15 minutes to get there, as Westside Road gets particularly curvy on this stretch. As you note signs for the famous MacMurray Ranch, you'll drive by Wohler Road—note that for later.

Gary Farrell is no longer at his namesake winery, but the wines are in good hands under the direction of winemaker Theresa Heredia—Pinot Noirs and Chardonnays from Russian River are the focus. It's also worth noting that even though it's one of the larger operations in the area, the winery is owned by vintner and entrepreneur Bill Price, who owns iconic Sonoma vineyards including Durrell and Gap's Crown as well as Kistler Vineyards and Three Sticks.

The tasting room sits above the treetops, giving it tremendous views you can enjoy on the newly opened Overlook terrace. Enjoy a glass of wine out there and hope to run into Benny, the extremely cool winery cat.

## RUSSIAN RIVER VALLEY ROAD MAP



After that, you could head back to Healdsburg, but if you feel like pushing on with your exploration of the area, take a detour to Forestville. It's not so much a town as just a couple of blocks, but it has all the necessities, including an organic coffee spot (Sunshine), organic ice cream (Angela's) and an adorable and tasty bakery (Nightingale Bread) with terrific bread and focaccia.

To get there, backtrack slightly to Wohler Road and then cross over the Wohler Bridge, a one-lane, historic truss bridge that crosses the Russian River. It's just another five minutes from there to Forestville.

If you need a longer pit stop, Forestville has two restaurants that are easy to recommend: Canneti Roadhouse Italiana, which serves up comfort versions of Italian food in a friendly setting, and Sonoma Pizza Company, which is a cheerful, wood-fired pizza spot with delicious pies. Check out the Tati, with mortadella, mozzarella, pistachios, frisee, chives, parsley, oregano, lemon and garlic confit, or the Mushroom Mycopia, with St. Jorges cream, mixed local mushrooms, mozzarella, green garlic, roasted onions and chimichurri.

Forestville will also get you to Highway 116, which is another thoroughfare of Russian River Valley, where you'll find Paul Hobbs, Merry Edwards and Dutton-Goldfield. But that's for another day.

## DAY TRIP DETAILS

### 1 Black Oak Coffee Roasters

324 Center St., Healdsburg; (866) 390-1427; [blackoakcoffee.com](http://blackoakcoffee.com)

### 2 Troubadour Bread & Bistro

381 Healdsburg Ave., Healdsburg; (707) 756-3972; [troubadourhbg.com/cafe](http://troubadourhbg.com/cafe)

### 3 The Madrona

1001 Westside Road, Healdsburg; (707) 395-6700; [themadronahotel.com](http://themadronahotel.com)

### 4 Flowers Vineyards & Winery

4035 Westside Rd., Healdsburg; (707) 723-4800; [flowerswinery.com](http://flowerswinery.com)

### 5 MacRostie

4605 Westside Road, Healdsburg; (707) 473-9303; [macrostiewinery.com](http://macrostiewinery.com)

### 6 Rochioli Vineyards

6192 Westside Road, Healdsburg; (707) 433-2305; [rochioliwinery.com](http://rochioliwinery.com)

### 7 Arista Winery

7015 Westside Road, Healdsburg; (707) 473-0606; [aristawinery.com](http://aristawinery.com)

### 8 Gary Farrell

10701 Westside Road, Healdsburg; (707) 473-2909; [garyfarrellwinery.com](http://garyfarrellwinery.com)

### 9 Canneti Roadhouse Italiana

6675 Front St., Forestville; (707) 887-2232; [cannetiroadhouse.com](http://cannetiroadhouse.com)

### 10 Sonoma Pizza Co.

6615 Front St., Forestville; (707) 820-1031; [pizza@sonomapizzaco.com](mailto:pizza@sonomapizzaco.com)



Gary Farrell