

PERFECT PAIRINGS



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Go beyond cheese and crackers in these unique epicurean experiences at Livermore and Napa Valley wineries, where premium vintages and fine dining come together in scenic settings.
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Enjoy a guided garden tour, intimate olive-oil tasting, and multi-course meal during Round Pond Estate's Garden-to-Table Brunch.



The Vineyard Table pairs seasonal delights—such as steelhead trout—with Wente's lauded wines.

LOCAL TASTES

By Alejandra Saragoza



Sip and savor your way through delectable food and wine pairings without ever leaving the East Bay. Two esteemed wineries in Livermore Valley Wine Country offer relaxed yet refined tasting opportunities that are bound to please any palate.

WENTE VINEYARDS

Earlier this year, the country's oldest continuously operated family-owned winery unveiled several new tasting and touring experiences. The most delicious addition may be The Vineyard Table—an exquisite, 90-minute food and wine experience held Friday through Sunday at 11:30 a.m. at the venerable Restaurant at Wente Vineyards (\$65 per person, reservations recommended).

Situated near the end of a road that winds through Livermore's centuries-old vines, The Restaurant boasts a picturesque patio and a stately dining room. Both venues allow Vineyard Table diners to take in stunning views of the property as they indulge in a three-course food and wine journey. The meal showcases acclaimed, small-lot vinos specifically selected by Wente wine director Jorge Tinoco to complement creative dishes featuring sustainable, organic ingredients—most of which are grown on the estate's half-acre garden (even the beef is raised on-site). Master gardener Diane Dovholuk cultivates everything from peppers to eggplant to purple tomatillos on the property.

Executive chef Mike Ward and his culinary team use the fresh produce and meats to craft superb menus that change each month. This commitment to seasonality results in such standout dishes as crisp white truffle toast with basil aioli, whose bold flavors are beautifully elevated by the 135th Anniversary chardonnay; smoked duck breast topped with vibrant mole and sprigs of cilantro, particularly impeccable when paired with the 2016 Counoise red blend; and a rich chocolate pot de crème finished with a dollop of Chantilly cream, which knocks

your socks off when savored with the petite sirah port. (For an additional \$15, guests can also partake in a wine and cheese pairing following dessert.)

"We put a lot of thought and care into [The Vineyard Table]," Ward says. "We have an amazing team of people who spend a month trying to create six perfect dishes. ... When we put our heads together and think about what The Vineyard Table is—a celebration of [Wente's] harvest and top-tier wines that are ready to open—we focus on the fact that we are sourcing what we grow and putting it all together in a way that shows people how well our wines pair with food."

Bonus: Spice up your Sunday with another one of Wente's latest culinary offerings. The Sunday in the Caves experience (\$45 per person) is held in the sandstone caves of the sprawling estate on Arroyo Road, where guests enjoy various local cheeses along with carefully chosen Wente varietals and learn why the two go so well together. wentevineyards.com.

Class in Session

Have your wine—and study it too—at these spots offering interactive courses on all things vino.

Bay Grape: A boutique wine shop in Oakland, Bay Grape features easygoing wine courses—most of which are taught by certified sommeliers, who impart their knowledge each week in various programs. Try the Monday Blind Tasting Classes (demonstrating how to evaluate the sight, smell, taste, and structure of a wine), Wednesday Seasonal Pairings Tastings (teaching how to pair wines with food), or Sunday School Classes (covering everything from grape varietals to wine regions in themed sessions). baygrapewine.com.

Compline Wine Bar, Restaurant and Merchant: This downtown Napa hot spot is a favorite among locals and tourists alike—and for good reason. Compline boasts an impressive array of domestic and international wines (not to mention a collection

of bottles sold for \$35 or less in the shop) as well as seasonal, locally sourced fare. Wine education is also a key component of Compline, where co-owner and master sommelier Matt Stamp often leads lively wine classes—including World Tour, where guests learn about (and taste) wines from across the globe. complinewine.com.

The Vine at Bridges: With roughly 400 wines in its retail store and 40 boutique vinos by the glass in its bar, Danville's The Vine at Bridges is a popular destination for East Bay oenophiles. Certified sommeliers and wine specialists present fun, informative lessons throughout the year, focusing on such diverse topics as wine-tasting basics, wine appreciation, and region-specific tastings. Whether you want to gain wine-and-food-pairing tips or raise your level of knowledge so you feel confident purchasing and ordering wine, The Vine at Bridges has a class for you. thevineatbridges.com. —A.S.

Murrieta's Well honors the name of Joaquin Murrieta, a bandito who discovered an artesian well on the estate in the 1800s.



FROM LEFT, COURTESY OF WENTE VINEYARDS; MURRIETA'S WELL

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Tucked away in a pastoral fold of the Livermore Valley, this sophisticated and enchanting property is one of California's original wine estates. The winery was established in 1884 with plantings from the famed Château Margaux and Château d'Yquem vineyards in France. The descendants of those vines still grow on the land today and are used to craft exceptional estate-driven, small-lot wines.

In 2016, after completing an extensive renovation, the winery expanded its offerings and debuted the Wine and Food Experience (\$65 per person, reservations required). It begins with a tour of the grounds—glass in hand, of course—and ends in the iconic wood-beamed barrel room, where guests are guided through a sit-down tasting of four wines artfully paired with seasonal small plates created by chef Tony Glanville. With each course, guests delight in contrasting and complementary textures, explore interesting flavor combinations, and discover the synergy between food and wine.

Drawing inspiration from the vintages, Glanville creates new dishes every few months to reflect the changing of the seasons. A recent fall menu featured a first course of goat cheese gnocchi tossed in a Meyer lemon gremolata, a vibrant dish that paired superbly with the crisp 2017 sauvignon blanc. A subsequent plate showcasing a seared scallop atop pickled root vegetables was elevated by the 2017 dry orange muscat, while the accompanying quinoa croquette with cauliflower puree was especially delicious when savored with The Whip white wine blend. The meal ended on a flawless note, with fried pork belly and creamy polenta drizzled in a divine sour cherry gastrique—perfect when enjoyed with the expressive, rich 2016 merlot.

Bonus: Murrieta's Well allows guests to partake in another tasting experience out on the patio—an ideal spot for those who want to sit back and soak up the scenery. In addition to wine flights (\$25), visitors can purchase bottles of vino to sip as they munch on snacks. murrietasuwell.com.

A GRAPE ESCAPE

By Fran Endicott Miller



Want to get away? Head to the world-renowned Napa Valley.

While the region boasts hundreds of wineries, only a select few offer the ultimate experience: savoring acclaimed wines paired with farm-to-table fare in stunning environs. Here are two must-visit spots for those who relish the good life.

SEQUOIA GROVE WINERY

Aptly dubbed the Cambium Room, Sequoia Grove Winery's newest venue is a poetic reflection of its name. Just as *cambium* denotes a tree's "secondary growth," the Cambium Room marks an expansion of Sequoia Grove's offerings and is home to the winery's spectacular Chef's Table experience with chef Britny Maureze.

This 90-minute tasting rivals the best restaurant cuisine in the Michelin-starred-restaurant-heavy valley and features gorgeous views overlooking a grove of towering sequoias. Preceded by a welcoming pour of the 2015 Haire Vineyard chardonnay and a tasty Dungeness crab cake on our visit, Chef's Table comprises five courses paired with Sequoia Grove vinos. The wine and food experience is offered by reservation Thursday through Monday at 11 a.m. and 2 p.m. (\$125 per person).

During the meal, a wine specialist illustrates why certain vintages enhance specific flavors, but Maureze serves up a few surprises. Case in point: Alaskan black cod with garam masala, beluga lentils, and pickled plum sauce illuminated by a 2014

Guests at the intimate Chef's Table enjoy Sequoia Grove wines with a rotating menu of delicacies like succulent duck.



DARREN LOVELAND

FROM LEFT: DARREN LOVELAND, ROUND POND ESTATE



Round Pond Estate showcases seasonal flavors alongside its award-winning wines during the Il Pranzo lunch.

Tonella Vineyard cabernet franc. A more traditional pairing includes a cabernet-braised short rib with kohlrabi soubise, brown butter summer squash, and cabernet demi-glace complemented by the winery's showstopper, a 2013 Cambium red blend.

Maureze's impressive pedigree could have led her to one of Napa's most lauded eateries, but she enjoys the creativity granted at Sequoia Grove, where—as the winery's first chef—she's built the culinary program from scratch.

"I've had the opportunity to lay the groundwork for a truly special, elevated portfolio of culinary experiences that will distinguish [Sequoia Grove] as one of the most memorable properties for those visiting the Napa Valley," says the Culinary Institute of America at Greystone grad. "I'm able to have fun with different ingredients and wines, crafting playful, interesting dishes that satisfy guests."

Bonus: Pressed for time but need a nibble? Enjoy a wine tasting with a cheese and charcuterie board accompaniment (\$30-\$60 for the tasting and two-person board) on Sequoia Grove's serene, tree-canopied patio. Served with house-made jams and toasted baguettes, the varied assortment of local cheeses and meats showcases the wines beautifully. sequoiagrove.com.

ROUND POND ESTATE

The Instagram-worthy, Beverly Hills-like, palm tree-lined drive toward Round Pond Estate's elegant winery and tasting room in Rutherford provides reason enough to plan a visit. But when you add artisanal olive oils, flavorful citrus syrups, and red wine vinegars to the sampling of the property's award-winning varietals, the trip becomes more than wine tasting—it's a celebratory event.

Owned and operated by the second generation of the MacDonnell family, Round Pond comprises a state-of-the-art winemaking facility, 362 vineyard acres, five acres of sustainable gardens, 12 acres of olive orchards, and one of the only two olive mills in the region. As part of the Napa Green Certified Land program, the MacDonnells implement measures to preserve their land, conserve water, and restore wildlife habitats to protect biodiversity. Wine tasting for the greater—and greener—good? Sign us up.

With a farm-to-table philosophy, the MacDonnells and their estate chef, Jamie Prouten, enjoy nothing more than sharing the bounty of their farm with guests. One of the many tasting experiences they offer is the Il Pranzo lunch, available Monday through Saturday at 11:30 a.m. by reservation (\$125 per person). The afternoon kicks off with a tour of the winery's garden followed by an interactive, multicourse meal on the celebrated terrace overlooking the vineyards and the Mayacamas Mountains. Each course features seasonal ingredients from the on-site garden that are carefully chosen to showcase the beauty of each Round Pond wine and delight the senses.

Says Prouten: "Our goal is to pair the right wine with the right food in the right environment to create transcendent and memorable wine and food experiences."

Bonus: Round Pond also offers a Garden-to-Table Brunch at 10 a.m. on Sundays by reservation (\$175 per person). After a sensory garden tour led by chef Prouten, guests are treated to a sampling of wines, olive oils, and vinegars (and can even create their own vinaigrette). The morning concludes with a family-style feast on the terrace, which features a million-dollar view. roundpond.com.

Wine On

To indulge in more exceptional dining experiences in California Wine Country, head to these standout wineries.

Jordan Vineyard and Winery

During the Estate Tour and Tasting, guests embark on a three-hour adventure around the Healdsburg winery's expansive property. Along the way, enjoy tastings of Jordan's Russian River Valley chardonnay and Alexander Valley cabernet sauvignon, two library selections, olive oil, and culinary delights. \$125, jordanwinery.com.

The Prisoner Wine Company

Head to this brand-new spot in St. Helena for a unique experience that combines food, wine, and art. Visitors can shop for artisanal items, try limited-edition Prisoner wines in The Tasting Lounge, and savor epicurean treats out in The Yard. \$45-\$300, theprisonerwinecompany.com.

Ram's Gate Winery

Get a taste of this first-rate estate in Sonoma's Carneros district at the Palate Play wine and food experience. Guests sip vino as they tour the winery, then head into a chic private room for a meal of seasonal bites artfully paired with five single-vineyard wines. \$95, ramsgatewinery.com.

Seghesio Family Vineyards

Enjoy Italian hospitality at its finest during the intimate Chef's Table at this downtown Healdsburg winery. The four-course lunch features Seghesio's celebrated zinfandels, red blends, and Italian varietals—all deliciously harmonized with seasonal dishes. \$80, seghesio.com.

ZD Wines

The Vineyard View Tour and Tasting at this Napa Green-certified winery allows visitors to go behind the scenes in the cellar room and sample organic wines straight from the barrel. Afterward, partake in a pairing of reserve vinos with decadent chocolate truffles while overlooking the vineyards. \$115, zdwiners.com. —A.S. ■