

A DRIVE THROUGH LIVERMORE VALLEY

Spend a day exploring Livermore Valley's bucolic wine country by car—far from the throngs of thirsty tourists and traffic jams you might find in Napa. Picturesque roads? Check. Easy-to-navigate region? You bet. An intimate and relaxing wine-tasting experience? Livermore Valley's got it all. Bring along your sweetheart or some friends for a leisurely day of visiting wineries. Make sure to leave plenty of room in the car to stock up on all your favorite vintages—straight from the source.

BY ALEJANDRA SARAGOZA

11:00 A.M. THE WINEMAKERS STUDIO AT WENTE VINEYARDS

Renowned for its world-class wines, the iconic Wente Vineyards also offers interactive workshops at The Winemakers Studio on Tesla Road. In this chic space, educators walk guests through a tasting experience featuring studio-exclusive wines. But the real fun



takes place in the backroom, where you can play vintner for a day with the Winemakers Blending Experience class. Take a seat at the wooden community table, where an instructor guides you through samples of wine from seven different estate blocks, evaluating their aroma, flavor, body, and acidity. Then, blend, label, and cork your own bottle to take home.

EXTRA CREDIT: Continue your viticultural education by signing up for the Wine Aroma Discovery seminar, Black Glass Blind Tasting class, or Wine and Cheese Pairing class. wentevineyards.com, wentewinemakers.com.

1:00 P.M. MURRIETA'S WELL

This sophisticated estate has an intriguing history that pays homage to Joaquin Murrieta, a bandito who discovered an artesian well here in the 1800s. Murrieta's Well also honors the vision of Louis Mel, who purchased the land in 1884 and planted cuttings from the famed Château d'Yquem and Château Margaux vineyards in France.



(The descendants of those vines still grow on the estate today.) The recently remodeled tasting room preserves the winery's history, displaying original timber beams and historic photos. Savor estate-sourced wines, and munch on flatbreads made by the in-house culinary team for a late lunch.



BUY: The Spur 2013. This blend of Petite Sirah and Bordeaux boasts aromas of black cherry, oak, and spice. murrietaswell.com.

3:00 P.M. 3 STEVES WINERY

Drive about four miles to this popular winery owned by a trio of friends who, yes, are all named Steve. Perched on a hillside with 360-degree views of Livermore Valley, the boutique winery offers award-winning wines that are as delightful as the Steves behind the bar. There's a wall of San Francisco 49ers paraphernalia to peruse between tastes and a cozy patio where you can sit back and drink in the view.

BUY: The 2014 Interino. This robust blend of Cabernet, Carmenère, Malbec, and Syrah incorporates grapes from Chile's Cachapoal Valley. 3steveswinery.com.

4:30 P.M. ECKERT ESTATE WINERY/ARTISAN SPIRITS DISTILLERY

Sneak in one last tasting at this spot tucked away in an unassuming building, in a court off South Vasco Road. Inside, you'll be treated to a unique tasting experience: Eckert Estate is the only Livermore winery that doubles as a distillery. In addition to award-winning blends and lesser-known varietals, there's an array of spirits available for sampling, including vodka, gin, brandy, and absinthe.

BUY: The orange spice brandy. This sweet liqueur, created by infusing orange peel and mulling spices (cinnamon, allspice, and cloves) in neutral spirits, makes a perfect holiday treat. eckertestate.com, artisanspiritsbrandyworks.com.

6:00 P.M. UNCLE YU'S AT THE VINEYARD

Drive downtown for dinner at Uncle Yu's at the Vineyard, a gourmet Chinese restaurant that will leave you in foodie bliss. The Mongolian beef with tender wagyu is a burst of flavor, and the prawns with honey walnuts are a rich treat; make sure to ask the sommelier for the perfect glass of wine to pair with your meal. The modern decor invites guests to sit back and indulge. Reservations are recommended. uncleyusvineyard.com.



Wine Country Fun

Your wine-tasting trip doesn't have to end at the wineries. Here are a few great ways to pair vino and fun in Livermore.

Bocce

Roll your way to victory at **Campo di Bocce**. Living up to its name, this Italian restaurant boasts eight bocce ball courts; try your hand at the leisurely game while sipping on some of Livermore's finest wines. Reservations are recommended. campodibocce.com.

Paint Night

Paint a masterpiece at **Pinot's Palette**, where local artists guide you through a unique painting for each class. Wine is available for purchase by the glass or bottle in case you need some liquid inspiration. pinotpalette.com/livermore.

Movies

At **Vine Cinema and Alehouse**, dinner and a movie has never been so easy. Catch the latest indie hit, or experience a classic all over again at the two-screen cinema, pairing your screening with a perfect glass of wine and food made at the theater or the Zephyr Grill and Bar next door. Come early to grab a seat on one of the theater's comfy couches. vinecinema.com.

Live Music

Featuring live jazz along with blues, funk, and more, **Double Barrel Wine Bar** is a must-visit for music and wine lovers. Or head over to **Swirl on the Square** and catch some rock 'n' roll. For the late-night music fan, **Sanctuary Ultra Lounge** keeps the beat going into the wee weekend hours with some of the best DJs in the Bay Area. doublebarrelwinebar.com, swirlonthesq.com, sanctuaryultralounge.com. —Casey Cantrell

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP RIGHT: COURTESY OF WENTE VINEYARDS (2); STACIE FLINNER

COURTESY OF 3 STEVES WINERY

Opposite page, clockwise from top right: grapevines at Wente Vineyards; The Winemakers Studio at Wente Vineyards; Murrieta's Well. This page: 3 Steves Winery.