



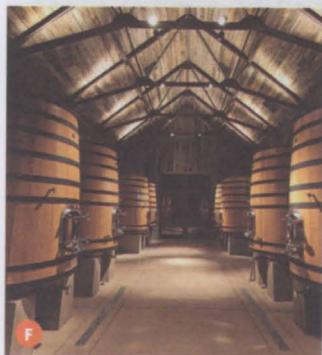
InFocus

Fodor's | TRAVEL INTELLIGENCE

NAPA & SONOMA

WINERIES | FABULOUS FOOD | SPAS | COOL TOWNS

TOP SONOMA WINERIES



Benziger Winery

(A) It's best to visit Benziger in fine weather so that you can enjoy a tram ride through the vineyards before tasting wines—most notably the Chardonnays, Cabernet Sauvignons, and Pinot Noirs—made from grapes grown using biodynamic farming methods. A great stop for a midday picnic, this winery in Glen Ellen is close to Jack London State Historic Park.

Copain Wines

(B) The emphasis at this hillside winery outside Healdsburg is on European-style Pinot Noirs whose grapes come from neither Napa nor Sonoma County, but rather from a series of vineyards to the north in Mendocino County. Winemaker Wells Guthrie, a master at crafting complex wines from cool-climate grapes, also makes Char-

donnays and Syrahs, some from fruit grown about 100 miles south of San Francisco in the hilly Chalone appellation.

Merry Edwards Winery

(C) Serious lovers of Pinot Noir make pilgrimages to this winery in Sebastopol to experience wines that celebrate the singular characteristics of the Russian River Valley appellation. Tastings at Merry Edwards are offered several times a day—appointments are advised but walk-ins are welcome if there's space—and usually include several Pinots followed by a sultry Sauvignon Blanc that's lightly aged in oak.

Iron Horse Vineyards

(D) Proving that tasting sparkling wine doesn't have to be stuffy, Iron Horse pours its bubblics (and a few still wines) at an outdoor tast-



ing bar, where tremendous views over the vine-covered hills make the top-notch sparklers taste even better. Especially on fair days, it's well worth the drive down a winding one-lane road on the outskirts of Sebastopol.

Matanzas Creek Winery

(E) A sprawling field of lavender makes the grounds of Matanzas Creek especially beautiful in May and June, when the plants are in bloom. But the Santa Rosa winery's Asian-inspired aesthetic makes it delightful year-round, especially if you're a fan of Sauvignon Blanc, Chardonnay, or Merlot.

Ram's Gate Winery

(F) One of the flashiest tasting experiences in the entire Wine Country takes place a mere 30 miles north-east of the Golden Gate Bridge—you can leave San Francisco and

be sipping in splendor in less than an hour if there's no traffic. The ultramodern yet rustic Ram's Gate, perched grandly on a windswept hill in southern Sonoma, specializes in Chardonnays, Pinot Noirs, and Syrahs made from grapes sourced from some of Napa and Sonoma's finest vineyards.

Ridge Vineyards

(G) Oenophiles will be familiar with Ridge, which produces some of the best Cabernet Sauvignon, Chardonnay, and Zinfandel in California. Although some of the Geyserville winery's most highly regarded wines are produced in the Santa Cruz Mountains, the tasting room in the Dry Creek Valley is a great place to sample these coastal wines, along with the Zinfandels and other vintages made from grapes grown nearby.

Best Bets for Carneros District Wineries

WINE TASTING

Anaba Wines, Sonoma: This boutique winery's stalwarts are the Burgundian varietals (Chardonnay and Pinot Noir) that made the Carneros famous, but Anaba also makes single-vineyard Rhône wines.

Saintsbury, Napa. The straightforward tasting sessions at this Pinot Noir pioneer focus on the Carneros region's *terroir* and climate and how they combine to produce grapes that yield well-balanced wines.

Truchard Vineyards, Napa. Top-drawer Napa Valley wineries purchase grapes from family-owned Truchard, which produces worthy Chardonnays and Pinot Noirs of its own, along with Zinfandels, Syrahs, and several other varietals.

WINERY TOURING

Bouchaine Vineyards, Napa. On this winery's self-guided walking tour you're apt to see squirrels and other wildlife scurrying through the vineyards and hawks and other birds soaring high above.

Gloria Ferrer Caves and Vineyards, Sonoma. The sparkling-wine maker's tour takes in the aging caves and covers the

winery's history and its contributions to wine science.

SETTING

Artesa Vineyards & Winery, Napa. The winery's high-style tasting room blends so discreetly into the surrounding landscape that visitors often gasp upon encountering the fountains, sculptures, and other contemporary artworks that flank the entrance.

Ram's Gate Winery, Sonoma. Wherever you perch yourself at ultracool Ram's Gate—at the tasting bar, several lounging spaces, or strategically positioned outdoor areas—you'll take in sweeping (and often windswept) vistas.

FOOD-WINE PAIRING

Domaine Carneros, Napa: The winery's sparklers are made in the classic style, and the tasting menu strikes a classic note: cheese and charcuterie plates, caviar, smoked salmon, and European-style pastries.

Etude Wines, Napa: At one of the region's most enlightening food-pairing seminars, you'll learn how sweetness, acidity, and other elements of food alter the tastes of the wines they accompany.

office, near Meadowcroft, has coupons for free or discounted tastings in the western Carneros. ☎23570 Arnold Dr./Hwy. 121, across from Gloria Ferrer winery, Sonoma ☎707/933-3010
 Ⓞwww.cornerstonesonoma.com ☎Free ☺Daily 10-5, gardens daily 10-4, sometimes later in summer.

- ★ **Fodor's Choice Ram's Gate Winery.** Stunning views, ultrachic architecture, and wines made from grapes grown by acclaimed producers make a visit to Ram's Gate an event. The welcoming interior spaces—think Restoration Hardware with an extra dash of high-style whimsy—give you a sense of the entire western Carneros, and on many days you'll experience (in comfort) the cooling breezes that sweep through the area. The attention to detail at this newcomer extends to the wines, mostly Pinot Noirs and Chardonnays, but also Sauvignon Blanc, Cabernet Sauvignon, Syrah, late-harvest Zinfandel, and even a sparkler. With grapes from the high-profile Sangiacomo and Lee Hudson vineyards and other noteworthy growing spots, the focus of winemaker Jeff Gaffner is on creating balanced vintages that express what occurred in nature that year. Jesse Fox, the affable assistant winemaker, conducts one-on-one tours on Thursday morning. ☎28700 Arnold Dr./Hwy. 121, Sonoma ☎707/721-8700 Ⓞwww.ramsgatewinery.com ☎Tasting \$15-\$125; winemaker tour \$85 ☺Thurs.-Mon. 10-6; tour Thurs. at 10 by appointment.

WORTH NOTING

Anaba Wines. With the greatest hits of Burgundy (Chardonnay, Pinot Noir) and the Rhône (Grenache, Mourvèdre, Syrah, Viognier), along with several blends, this relative newcomer tries to be all things to most wine drinkers—and generally succeeds. The Sonoma Coast and Gap's Crown Vineyard Pinot Noirs are the standouts, as is the Sun Chase Vineyard Chardonnay, but all the wines—Anaba also makes a white and a red Port and a late-harvest Viognier—are thoughtfully crafted. The bungalowlike tasting room sits at the intersection of highways 121 and 116 (turn west at the blinking red light). A side patio faces the vineyards; if you don't mind a little highway noise, on a sunny day it's not a bad spot for a picnic put together at the deli across the street. ☎Bonneau Rd., off Hwy. 116/121, Sonoma ☎707/996-4188, 877/990-4188 Ⓞwww.anabawines.com ☎Tasting \$10 ☺Daily 10:30-5:30.

DID YOU KNOW?

Howard Backen, one of the Wine Country's most acclaimed architects, designed Ram's Gate Winery.

