

play

## tasting: wineries worth a visit



Bud break is in full swing in the vineyards, and the days are growing longer. In some tasting rooms, the coming of spring ushers in barrel sampling and new releases. Special annual events include the Wine Road Barrel Tasting (March 2-4 and 9-11) and the Savor Sonoma Valley barrel tasting on March 17-18, focusing on wineries in Glen Ellen and Kenwood. Signature Sonoma Valley, an "immersive" wine experience sponsored by the Sonoma Valley Vintners & Growers Alliance, is set for April 6-8. Closing out that month is Passport to Dry Creek Valley (April 28-29), which showcases wine, food and fun at more than 40 wineries. **JEAN SAYLOR DOPPENBERG** recommends visiting the tasting rooms listed here; some may participate in one of more of these spring events. Call or check their websites for the latest information.

**Blanchard Family Wines, 109 W. North St., Healdsburg, 630-606-4389, blanchardfamilywines.com.** Two brothers named Blanchard — Mark and James — began making wine together several years ago. Today they operate a no-frills tasting room and production facility in Healdsburg for visitors to sample their limited production portfolio of reds (Cabernet Sauvignon, Zinfandel, Malbec and a blend called Red Scarf), along with rosé and Chardonnay. The \$20 tasting fee includes five or six wines and a tour; call ahead to make an ap-

pointment. Mark Blanchard is your host ("I'm the entire hospitality department," he remarks with a laugh). Blanchard Wines is a short walk west of the Healdsburg Plaza.

**B.R. Cohn Winery & Olive Oil Company, 15000 Sonoma Highway, Glen Ellen, 707-938-4064, brcohn.com.** Bruce Cohn established his namesake winery more than 30 years ago, perched on a hillside dotted with imported Picholine olive trees. Cohn has since retired but his exceptional estate wines are still being produced:

Cabernets, Zinfandels, Merlots, Malbecs and a Cabernet Franc. Try five tastes for \$20, or a food-and-wine pairing offered weekdays for \$50. The tasting room is a slice of rock 'n' roll history, with photographs and gold records from the long career of the Doobie Brothers (Cohn is the group's manager). Next to the tasting room is the Gourmet Shop, for purchasing the premium olive oils made from the trees onsite.

**Bump Wine Cellars, 521-A Broadway, Sonoma, 707-228-9214, bumpwine.com.** This family-owned, boutique producer of single-vineyard wines focuses on Sauvignon Blanc, Zinfandel, Chardonnay and Syrah. A favorite wine of visitors is Fortune, a light blend of Rhône varietals made from grapes grown nearby. Bump also harvests grapes from vineyards across Sonoma County. Tastings start at \$15, and wines are also available by the glass. While sipping, drink in the rotating art exhibit in this cozy space right off the Sonoma Plaza.

**Dry Creek Vineyard, 3770 Lambert Bridge Road, Healdsburg, 707-433-1000, drycreekvineyard.com.** David Stare founded his winery in 1972 and was the first to plant Sauvignon Blanc grapes in Dry Creek Valley, against the advice of other farmers. His tenacity paid off. The Stare family continues to operate the winery, which gets high marks for its 2016 Sauvignon Blanc, 2016 Fumé Blanc and 2014 Cabernet Sauvignon. A walk-in tasting of single-vineyard wines is available for \$15. Enjoy the expansive outdoor picnic area and make time to stroll through the Insectary Garden, if weather permits.

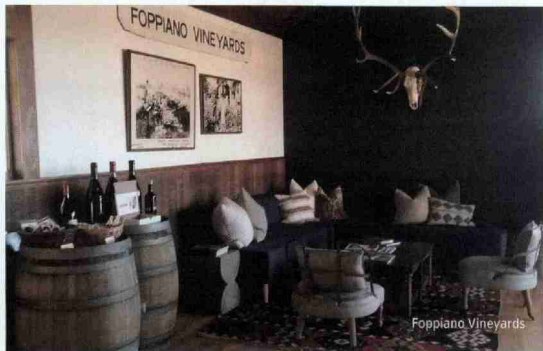
**Eric Ross Winery, 14300 Arnold Drive, Glen Ellen, 707-939-8525, ericross.com.** Located across Arnold Drive from the Jack London Village collection of shops and restaurants,

Eric Ross Winery produces Viognier, Tempranillo, Merlot, Cabernet, Pinot Noir, Syrah and Zinfandel, among others. Ask to try the Struttin' Red, a mix of Tempranillo and old vine Zinfandel (expect five tastes for \$20). Winemaker Eric Luse is a former San Francisco Chronicle photographer, and he shares some of his prized images on the tasting room walls. This small producer sells his wine exclusively through the tasting room and wine club.

**Fisher Vineyards, 6200 St. Helena Road, Santa Rosa, 707-539-7511, fishervineyards.com.** For 45 years, the Fisher family has been producing Cabernet and Chardonnay from their vineyards located in the Calistoga AVA and on the western slopes of Spring Mountain overlooking Sonoma Valley. The Fishers farm approximately 75 planted acres. The winery was designed by architect William Turnbull and is tucked into a quiet spot along St. Helena Road. Tastings are \$40 (for four estate wines), by appointment only (closed Sundays). The tasting also includes a vineyard tour when the weather cooperates.

**Foppiano Vineyards, 12707 Old Redwood Highway, Healdsburg, 707-533-7272, foppiano.com.** One of the pioneers of the Sonoma County wine industry, Foppiano was founded in 1896 and is still run today by members of the Foppiano family. It's old-school here: a simple tasting room that's comfortable and inviting and packed with history. It's a pleasant stop just off the road to savor the winery's signature Petite Sirah and other varietals (five tastes for \$10). A Reserve Block tasting is \$15 for a flight of small-production wines available only at the tasting room.

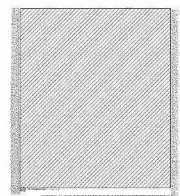
**Friedeman Wines, 180 Morris St., Sebastopol, 707-634-4604, friedemanwines.com.** One of the newest



Foppiano Vineyards



Passaggio Wines



tasting rooms in Sonoma County, located in The Barlow, spotlights small-scale Pinot Noir and Chardonnay production by Brooks and Jessica Friedeman. Now making a bit more than 1,800 cases annually, the Friedemans' goal is to build a lasting brand and family legacy. All Pinot is fermented in ¾-ton bins, and the Chardonnay is barrel fermented. Two wine lines are represented here — the vineyard-designated namesake label and the Dichotomy label. A tasting (\$20) includes five to six wines.

**Hartford Family Winery, 8075 Martinielli Road, Forestville, 707-887-8030, hartfordwines.com.** This winery is known for its Chardonnay, Pinot Noir and Zinfandel, from grapes sourced in and around the Russian River Valley. A signature tasting (\$15) is a selection of six wines, and a more involved experience, called the Vineyard Education & Exploration, is \$35. It's a sit-down tasting that goes in-depth into growing techniques and the history of the Hartford family.

**Kastania Vineyards, 4415 Kastania Road, Petaluma, 707-763-6348, kastaniavineyards.com.** With the Petaluma Gap now officially Sonoma County's newest AVA, attention is turning to many of the wine producers in this region who have wanted to add the words "Petaluma Gap" to their labels for a long time. Members of the Smith family, owners of this winery,

make Pinot Noir, Cabernet Franc and a red blend sourced from the grapes grown on land they have farmed for generations. The terrace off the tasting room offers views of the Petaluma River. The tasting fee is \$10 for seven tastes. Kastania is open Saturdays and Sundays for walk-ins, and weekdays by appointment.

**Keller Estate, 5875 Lakeville Highway, Petaluma, 707-765-2117, keller-estate.com.** As wineries go, Keller is relatively new, having bottled its first wines in 2000. This facility opened shortly after. The grapes are all grown in the Petaluma Gap AVA, and the winery bottles Chardonnay, Pinot Noir, Pinot Gris, and a rosé sparkler. An estate tasting (\$25) includes five wines paired with estate-grown olive oil and freshly baked bread. A one-hour winery tour and tasting (\$35) includes six wines and a stroll through the wine cave and production facility.

**La Crema at Saralee's Vineyard, 3575 Slusser Road, Windsor, 707-525-6200, lacrema.com.** Perched just off Slusser Road, La Crema's tasting facility is a restored four-story barn that was once the home of grape-growing pioneers Richard and Saralee Kunde. The building has been reimagined as an elegant tasting lounge, but with down-home nods to the legacy of the Kundes in the community, along with rotating artwork. A \$15 signature tasting is available at the main bar or on

the patio; a \$30 vineyard tasting gives access to private VIP areas. As the weather warms up, a vineyard tour is offered (\$65) that includes a private tasting with a personal concierge and multiple stops via golf cart along a mile-long loop.

**Lake Sonoma Winery, 134 Church St., Sonoma, 707-721-1979, sfewine.com.** Tucked between a kitchen store and a gallery, down a short alley on the west side of Sonoma Plaza, is this inviting tasting room with indoor and outdoor seating. As many as 26 wines are offered for tasting, encompassing the portfolios of Lake Sonoma Winery and its sister property Valley of the Moon at Madrone Estate, both owned by Stewart Family Estates. Varietals poured include Cabernet, Chardonnay, Pinot Noir and Sauvignon Blanc. Tasting fees range from \$15 for a flight to \$35 for an artisanal cheese-and-wine pairing.

**MacRostie Winery & Vineyards, 4605 Westside Road, Healdsburg, 707-473-9303, macrostiewinery.com.** The elegant Estate House has three patios and indoor seating for tasting single-vineyard designated Chardonnays and Pinot Noirs, most sourced from Russian River Valley fruit, with fees from \$20-\$25. Two stars of MacRostie's portfolio are the 2015 Bacigalupi Vineyard Chardonnay and 2015 Thale's Vineyard Terrace Block Pinot Noir. An elevated tasting (\$75) available on weekends includes a tour and wines paired with bites of cheese and chocolate. Reservations are required on weekends and strongly encouraged for weekdays.

**Mauritson Wines, 2859 Dry Creek Road, Healdsburg, 707-431-0804, mauritsonwines.com.** This stretch along Dry Creek Road has some of the prettiest scenery in the valley. That makes it an especially pleasant place to sip Zinfandel, Cabernet, Syrah and Petite Sirah (\$30 for a customized flight, \$40 for a private tour and tasting). The Mauritson family has been farming in this region since 1868, and many of their wines are made from grapes grown in the Rockpile AVA. Wine critic Robert Parker has called Mauritson's Zinfandel some of the best made in Sonoma County.

**McEvoy Ranch, 5935 Red Hill Road, Petaluma, 707-769-4100, mcevoyranch.com.** Perhaps best known for its premium olive oil, McEvoy

also produces wines from grapes grown within the newly designated Petaluma Gap AVA. Varietals include Cabernet, Pinot Noir, Sangiovese and Chardonnay, among others. Tasting fees begin at \$15 and take place at an indoor bar overlooking the olive mill, or on the outdoor terrace. An extensive two-hour "walk-about" takes visitors throughout the ranch, along with food-and-wine pairings (\$95). All tastings and tours are by appointment.

**Passaggio Wines, 25-C E. Napa St., Sonoma, 707-934-8941, passaggiowines.com.** Look for the fountain in the Sonoma Court Shops and you've found Passaggio, which translates to "passage" or "pass through" in Italian. Owner and winemaker Cindy Cosco produces a full line of whites and reds, including an unoaked Chardonnay from Carneros-sourced fruit, Pinot Noir and Syrah, and a blend called GSM (made from Grenache, Syrah and Mourvedre grapes). Taste four wines for \$20; six wines for \$30. Passaggio also serves wine by the glass.

**Paradise Ridge Winery, 8860 Sonoma Highway, Kenwood, 707-282-9020, prwinery.com.** Though its winery in Santa Rosa was destroyed in the Tubbs fire last October, Paradise Ridge continues to welcome visitors to its Kenwood tasting room to enjoy the excellent wines it creates from grapes grown at its Russian River Valley estate and also in the Rockpile AVA. Expect to try Cabernet, Zinfandel, Pinot Noir, Chardonnay and Sauvignon Blanc. Tastings start at \$15. More enhanced options include an herb-and-wine sensory experience (\$25); wine and chocolate (\$30); and wine, chocolate and "guided education" (\$40).

**Ravenswood Winery, 18701 Gehricke Road, Sonoma, 707-933-2332, ravenswoodwinery.com.** Winemaker Joel Peterson has been at it for a long time, living up to his "no wimpy wines" motto by producing stellar Zinfandel while also providing a fun tasting room experience. Peterson first crushed grapes in 1976 and then built Ravenswood into one of the largest producers of premium Zinfandel in the world. The vibe here is laid-back and light-hearted, with several tasting experiences offered (from \$30 to \$75). 🍷

