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## 5 Essentials for a Sonoma Weekend Getaway

BY Robert Michael Poole | November 27, 2015



MacRostie Winery & Vineyards are local pioneers, one of the first to draw attention away from neighboring Napa Valley to make sure Sonoma became famous its own right for high quality Chardonnay and Pinot Noirs.

Nowhere else in the United States has the art of wine-making been perfected as much as in California, which accounts for 90 per cent of the country's entire output. To put that in perspective, if it were a country, California would be the fourth largest wine producer in the world.

400 of those wineries are located to Sonoma County, the quieter neighbor of Napa, north of San Francisco. Tapering in from the Pacific coastline, rolling over hills between the state's famous redwood forests, the wineries here – and the picturesque environment created around them – have become a weekend getaway destination for many locals in the nearby big cities. But increasingly, it's coming to world attention too.

Home of the [Sonoma International Film Festival](#), [The Sonoma Valley Museum of Art](#), and a wide range of accommodation options emanating from the main town's historic Mexican colonial-era center, Culture+Travel thought it's time to look more closely at what's on offer. Here's our top five essentials for a weekend in Sonoma County.

## **1 – Light your own Fire**

Nothing quite says “homely” as much as an authentic fireplace to throw logs on, and while in the modern world recreations can be equally visually charming, there is something about lighting one's own fire that feels more real. At [MacArthur Place](#), just a few blocks from the historic Sonoma Plaza, a 19th century estate boasting 300 hundred-acres of vineyard and a working ranch, offers 64 rooms, 29 of which are suites with working fireplaces.

Better still, ten of the rooms are actually located inside the Manor House, built in the 1850's and the heart of the property. Seven acres are dedicated to gardens filled with original sculptures, and the whole ensemble of two-level buildings surrounds a heated pool and whirlpool framed by hedgerows and fountains. Honestly, it's hard to find a reason to leave.

## **2 – Taste Michelin-star Farmhouse Dining**

Ah, but one essential reason to leave of course, is to taste the cuisine of the region, and nowhere does it better than the exquisite [Farmhouse Inn](#), rightly awarded a Michelin Star for its farm-to-table cuisine paired with local wines from a master sommelier.

The restaurant, run by Executive Chef Steve Litke, features ingredient's sourced from the Joe and Catherine's Bartolomei ranch, and presents a constantly changing menu depending on the season. Served within a dining room where wall paintings depict the history of the region, dishes like Atlantic Scallop, Bodega Bay Black Cod, and the famed Rabbit Rabbit Rabbit (of applewood smoked bacon wrapped loin, roasted rack and confit of leg) are all enhanced by the old barn feel of the stone and wood inn.

Found just south of Healdsburg in the Russian River Valley in the town of Forestville, the eaterie is essentially the perfect showcase of the agriculture and artisan producers of the region, utilizing the heritage of Mexican, French and Italian immigrants within its menu.

## **3 – Sip to your heart's content**

Many of the wineries in the region offer tasting sessions, but the variety is extraordinary, from simple outdoor barrels used as makeshift tables, to our favorite, the spectacularly situated [MacRostie Winery and Vineyards](#).

Founded in 1987, the vineyards here are locally-famed producers of Chardonnay and Pinot Noir, led by founder Steve MacRostie and winemaker Heidi Bridenhagen. Considered pioneers of Sonoma, MacRostie preferred the fog-shrouded vineyards of the area in order to make Burgundian-variety wines, in comparison to the Bordeaux varieties of Napa Valley.

Now with over 30 Chardonnay and 15 Pinot Noir vineyards, the winery opened this year its new estate on Westside Road in the Russian River Valley, with indoor and outdoor terrace tasting rooms overlooking Sonoma county, where in-house experts will gladly detail each offering to drop-in guests.

#### **4 – Do Let Sonoma Get your Goat... Cheese**

Only a mile from the town of Sebastopol, [Bohemian Creamery](#) overlooks the Laguna de Santa Rosa and the Mayacama mountains. But you'll want to come here not for the view, but for the animals – Alpine dairy goats. Fed on a diet of spring clover and wild blue rye, the goats enable the creamery to produce natural rind cheeses, produced in authentic artisanal tradition with vegetarian rennet and pasteurized milk.

Highly recommended are the vanilla-flavored Boho Belle wheels, each aged 6-8 weeks to create the thin layer of white mold casing, produced from Jersey cow milk. Or try the sweet and moist Capriago, made from goat milk and covered in a layer of wild blue mold. Sheep and water buffalo milk cheeses are also on offer.

#### **5 – See Sonoma through Artist's Eyes**

In an environment of elegant vineyards rolling over endless hills, its no wonder that locals have long sought to capture the region's beauty through art. Showcasing these works are a number of organizations and galleries, including [The Sonoma Valley Museum of Art](#), founded in 1998 as a non-profit to pull together musical, dramatic, culinary, visual, literary, and winemaking arts. The SVMA alone has held over 70 exhibitions, attracting over 130,000 visitors. It is currently showing Jane Baldwin's Kara Women Speak through December 6, 2015, a collection of portraits and film captured by the photographer in the Omo River Valley of Southwestern Ethiopia and Northern Kenya

Elsewhere, the [Arts Guild of Sonoma](#) presents the oldest artist cooperative in California with community outreach programs designed to enhance local opportunities. While [The Fairmont Gallery](#) holds fine art works by award-winning artist and founder Manette Fairmont, as well as Still life and landscape painter James McVicker, known for depicting 19th and 20th century traditions of the region.us on Twitter – @Cultravel

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