

PHIFER PAVITT
Date Night
Napa Valley

LOS ANGELES CONFIDENTIAL

Why You Should Visit Napa/Sonoma Wine Country This Fall

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BY ABBY TEGNELIA

An eco-friendly Napa/Sonoma wine country visit in fall is truly a trip to bountiful.



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Like an excruciating soccer match between two teams trying to ride out the clock, Napa and Sonoma were put through the ringer this year, muscling through the toughest drought in a century, summer wildfires, and even some early bud break. But now they've made it to the buzzer—it's harvest time! After the bullying they've triumphed over, the release parties that are coming early this year should be extra celebratory.

Between all of the excitement and the crisp Indian summer-like weather, fall is a magical time to visit wine country and take part in the harvest traditions, paying homage to Mother Nature for another great year. In fact, she is reigning supreme in Napa and Sonoma, which are ushering in an era of eco-conscious winemaking.

“Linking what we’re doing for the environment to what’s in the bottle is very important to me,” says the pioneering Mike Benziger, general manager and winegrower for Sonoma’s **Benziger Family Winery**, whose harvest will be in “full swing” by September 1. “Our job is to reconnect people to the land, which is very powerful. We get the customer out in the vineyard, teach them some farming techniques, and then get them back to the tasting room to show the [resultant] high-quality wine. It makes an impact on people.”



The Magnolia Courtyard at Yountville's LEED-Platinum-certified Bardessono hotel.

In 2000, Benziger became the very first winery in Napa or Sonoma to be granted a Biodynamic Certification—which means it takes an organic, holistic approach to winemaking that encompasses everything from the animals on the property to the moon's phases—but now the country's most famous

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wine region has an impressive array of LEED-certified wineries, Biodynamic vineyards, and “green” hotels.

The ultimate eco-resort in the area is Yountville's **Bardessono**, which confidently calls itself the “greenest luxury property in the world.” The 62-room LEED-Platinum-certified hotel (one of only three in the US) boasts 940 solar panels for electricity, auto blinds outside the rooms to efficiently lower the demand for heating and cooling, and “smart” thermostats that can tell when the room is vacant and power themselves down.

But the hotel, which is celebrating its fifth anniversary this year, is so deft at incorporating its green practices into its five-star operation, that many people remain unaware that their favorite luxe hotel is doing so much for the environment.



Fewer than 20 trees were removed from the 157-acre Calistoga Ranch property when it was built; guest rooms like this were constructed around the ones remaining.

“We’ve married green with luxury,” says Jim Treadway, Bardessono’s GM, who helped develop the hotel and relocated from Seattle to run it. “Anyone with strong environmental awareness who’s done their research settles on us, but only about 20 percent of our guests stay here for that. All guests, once they’re here, are made subtly aware.”

In a town where farm-to-table means that the vegetables are grown, literally, across the street (The French Laundry and its famous gardens are also in Yountville), Bardessono grows its own produce. There is no middleman for any of the proteins—eggs, fish, and poultry are purchased directly from farms.

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And room service does not carry brands from companies whose practices aren't deemed satisfactorily sustainable. (Budweiser, Coca-Cola, and Pepsi didn't make the cut, but the hotel proudly serves Peet's Coffee, whose roasting facility is LEED Gold certified).

About half an hour north, Napa's most rural town of Calistoga is host to the 157-acre **Calistoga Ranch**, a 50-room luxury Auberge resort. The GM there, Coni Thornburg, is so passionate about being kind to the earth that her nickname has become "Mother Nature."

At the hotel, farm-fresh eggs come right from an on-site chicken coop, and every single drop of water is recycled for irrigation. Hiking trails on the ranch were forged by hand so as not to disturb wildlife, and less than 20 trees were removed in order to build the resort, so there might be a tree growing right through the deck of your guest room. Spa products are made with honey from the property's beehives, and rooms smell of fresh rosemary and lavender from the garden. Calistoga Ranch also composts on-site, which most of the locals do in their homes, too. "This is how we live!" Thornburg says. "We're in it for all the right reasons."

For harvest, starting this month, Calistoga Ranch guests may get up at 5 am to join in the fun (there's a vineyard on property). "Forty guests harvested with us last year," Thornburg says. "They had beautiful Cabernet sticky fingers. Our guests are people wanting to reconnect with nature in a private setting."



The barn at Phifer Pavitt, which serves as a tasting room and, sometimes, a meditation center, was built with 100-year-old redwood. It features a 1,000-pound tasting table made from a single fallen walnut tree.

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Also in Calistoga, vintner Suzanne Phifer Pavitt, with her husband, Shane, has built a barn using repurposed wood that looks like it came right out of *Town & Country*. They used 100-year-old redwood from a barn five miles down the road, recycled blue jeans as insulation, chandeliers made from used wire, copper sheets from a shipyard in Georgia, and a 1,000-pound tasting table made from a single fallen walnut tree that now hangs from the roof as if by magic.

The barn, which opened in 2011, serves as the tasting room for **Phifer Pavitt's** wines—and will even be hosting a meditation workshop this fall. In many ways, the Pavitts represent the “new” eco-conscious stewards who move to wine country to live off the land and make wines that are stories unto themselves.

“It’s not about the money; it’s about minimizing our carbon footprint,” Phifer Pavitt says. “We have vegetable and fruit trees. We make our own olive oil and preserves. People come for the experience, to live vicariously through the owners. They want to know the story behind the wine.”

The scoop? A line of wine called Date Night that includes a yummy Cabernet Sauvignon, a brand-new sparkling white, and a narrative thread that connects the reds and the whites with being green.