

Day Trippin'

The best of Napa in one place: Yountville



Yountville Courtyard

Photos Fran Miller

By Fran Miller

The Napa Valley harbors many of the finer things in life: great wine, amazing restaurants and luxurious resorts, and one need not venture beyond the tiny and tony town of Yountville in order to experience it all. Choose your hotel, park the car, and enjoy the freedom provided within this walkable 1.5 square mile hamlet that features outdoor art, an abundance of wine tasting venues, iconic restaurants, and a choice of lodging options.

We love Napa Valley Lodge for its graceful Woodside Hotels hospitality (the same hotel group that owns Lafayette Park Hotel.) A Yountville mainstay for more than four decades, the Tuscan-inspired resort stays ahead of the wine country hospitality curve by offering a variety of amenities without charging an infuriating 'resort fee.' Standard are the offer of champagne at check-in, fresh-baked cookies in the afternoon, and a bountiful buffet breakfast each

morning. The large swimming pool is an ideal spot to unwind after a hectic day of winetasting.

At the other end of town, Hotel Villagio is another great choice. Newly refurbished and infused with a vibrant social undercurrent and a sumptuous contemporary vibe, Hotel Villagio's bucolic grounds surround the club-like lobby where a bar and pool table provide a central gathering spot.

From either hotel, stroll and sip to your heart's content. Fifteen winetasting rooms line the local streets: Hestan, Silver Trident, Girard, and Stewart, to name just a few. For an over-the-top experience, check out JCB Tasting Salon – the charismatic Jean-Charles Boisset's Baccarat crystal-bedecked lounge. For something more intimate, make an appointment with Kerrin Laz at her eponymous tasting room. This former Dean & DeLuca wine director has established personal relationships with nearly every California winemaker worth knowing, enabling her to se-

cure limited allocations from cult labels such as Screaming Eagle, Abreu Vineyards, and Dana Estate.

Be sure to check out newly opened RH Yountville, an exceedingly stylish compound on the former Masonry site. Lush courtyards with limestone fountains, massive fireplaces, and heritage olive trees flow seamlessly between the varied buildings which include two design galleries, a winetasting patio, and the breathtakingly beautiful, indoor-outdoor, chandelier-laden restaurant.

Culinary icon Thomas Keller continues to add to his Yountville portfolio with La Calenda, located on the former Hurley's site. Named after the traditional Oaxacan parade that celebrates community festivities, La Calenda's cuisine combines authentic Oaxacan flavors with fresh and artisanal ingredients presented in a family-friendly environment.

For something quick and casual, try Protea, a Caribbean cuisine fast casual restaurant that features a beautiful rooftop dining space. Owner and chef Anita Cartagena takes the exacting and strict standards of a Michelin Star quality restaurant and translates it to a causal, affordable, and back to basics menu of hand crafted sandwiches, soups and salads.

Finally, no visit to Yountville is complete without a visit to Pancha's – Napa's favorite dive bar and a Yountville institution favored by everyone from politicians, to golf pros, to the local labor force who gather for late night pool and '70s jukebox tunes. A sign on the wall reads, "Welcome to Pancha's, where the customer is always wrong." Don't worry; that gruffness is part of its charm.



Winetasting at Silver Trident

Catfish gets reprieve



Christopher Paganelli, 12, with his prize catfish Photo provided

By Jennifer Wake

At 12 years old, Christopher Paganelli has caught dozens of fish, but he never expected the beast he hooked recently at the Moraga Country Club golf pond. "I had the fish on for about three minutes," he said. "At first I thought I had gotten caught on a rock or

weeds, but then as I was reeling in I realized that there was something on my line." At the end of the line was a catfish, he said, weighing between 15-20 pounds. "This was my biggest fish I have ever caught; I had never even heard of catfish in the MCC pond."

Christopher saw that af-

ter he hooked it, it didn't look like the fish was doing very well and it looked like it needed help, so he jumped in the water to save it.

"It's hard to find the hook right away because I did not hook the fish directly; I had hooked it near his fin on the right side of its body," he said. "It was hard to take hold of the fish because it was really big and catfishes' bodies are slimy."

According to Christopher's father, the young fisherman stayed with the fish until he was confident the fish was OK before he released it.

Moraga Country Club General Manager Ron Haas doesn't encourage fishing at MCC and noted that fishing in the pond is only allowed when the golf course is closed and all fishing is catch and release only.

"I went back to the pond the next day with my family," Christopher said, "but have seen no traces of the catfish."

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