

Come on in

Fancy a fusion of great scenery, culture and fine wine on your next holiday? Katie Kelly Bell finds biodynamics, vineyard hiking trails and historic wine caves, not to mention redwood forests, lavender gardens and sculpture as she picks out the 10 best cellar doors in California

CALIFORNIA IS AMONG America's most scenic states, and its wine tasting experiences are almost always accompanied by beautiful surroundings. Yet wineries aren't relying on beauty alone to attract visitors. Indeed, wineries are going far further than the extra mile to craft unrivalled tasting-room experiences accented with elaborate gardens, ultra-personal private tours, cooking experiences and exhibits. Vist any of the 10 cellar doors recommended here, and you are guaranteed a compelling mix of experience, scenery and wine.

Napa Valley

Schramsberg, Calistoga

Schramsberg sparkling wine is considered by many to be a standard bearer for New World bubbly. Yet, with more than two million bottles artfully stacked inside 3km of moss-covered, 125 year-old caves, this winery is as Old World as Napa gets. Tours are a full 90 minutes and include a mini-history on the property, plus tasting, cave tour and discussion of how sparkling wine is made. Schramsberg's sparkling wines also enjoy the distinction of having been served in the White House by every president since Richard Nixon. For additional sparkling experiences you won't find anywhere except in Napa, do visit the convivial, it's-a-party Frank Family tasting room, owned by former president of Disney, Rich Frank.

Tour/tasting, various times. \$50 per person, appointment required.

1400 Schramsberg Rd, Calistoga, CA 94515; +1 707 942 4558; www.schramsberg.com



Chappellet, St Helena

The scenic drive up Napa's Pritchard Hill features a *Who's Who* of the wine world, with residents such as Colgin Estates and Bryant Family, but the only tasting room you'll find open to visitors is Chappellet. Owners Donn and Molly Chappellet were the first to plant vines on this rocky hillside back in 1967. Today the unique, pyramid-shaped winery runs entirely on solar power and welcomes visitors by appointment. Not only are you invited to taste, but tours include a walk in the vineyard – all the better to appreciate the unique terroir.

Appointments daily, at 11am, 1pm & 3pm. Fees vary based on number of people tasting.

1581 Sage Canyon Rd, St Helena, CA 94574; +1 707 286 4219; www.chappellet.com

Inglennook Winery, Rutherford

Owned by filmmaker Francis Ford Coppola, this winery does a brilliant job of sharing the winemaking history of Napa through exhibits and displays. Tucked in along the way are fascinating bits of film memorabilia, including a Tucker 48 car from Coppola's own private collection, (pictured below).

The 90-minute tour is one of the longest on offer in the Valley, and in the course of it you'll get an insider peek into the original château (circa 1887), vineyards and the infinity caves. The

grand finale features a seated tasting in one of the caves, paired with a selection of artisan cheeses.

A variety of other seated tastings with food pairings are offered, or you can simply taste at the bar and enjoy the elaborately landscaped grounds. Shop in the boutique (where everything is hand-selected by the Coppolas) for one-of-a-kind antique wine and entertaining accessories.

Open daily, 10am to 5pm. Inglennook tasting & experience: \$50. 1991 St Helena Highway, Rutherford, CA 94573; +1 800 782 4266/707 968 1100; www.inglennook.com



Sonoma

Fort Ross Vineyard & Winery, Sonoma Coast

The drive to this remote, rustically beautiful tasting room takes some time, but you'll be rewarded with its lilted, elegant Pinot Noir and breathtaking, 50-mile views of the Pacific coastline. The surroundings are dense with wildflower meadows, redwood forest and sinuous, rolling vineyard hills; wild boar and deer sightings aren't uncommon. In fact, this area gets more rain than the Amazon jungle due to its proximity to the Pacific Ocean.

This winery was also the first winery in the Fort Ross-Seaview AVA. Enjoy its botanical garden and heirloom roses along with a glass of crisp rosé and cheese and charcuterie on the lovely patio. Swing by the Timber Cove Inn on your way home for a spectacular seaside dinner.



Open daily, Summer: 10am to 5pm; Winter: 10am to 5pm. \$15 per person. 15725 Meyers Grade Rd, Jenner, CA 95450; +1 707 847 3460; www.fortrossvineyard.com



Matanzas Creek Winery, Bennett Valley

This destination with its native grasses, olive trees and lavender fields (just over a hectare of organically farmed lavender, to be exact) is as much a lavender experience as it is winery tasting room. In fact, lavender is such a dominant part of the landscape that the winery hosts a wine and lavender event, Days of Wine and Lavender, every year in late June. Year-round visitors can bring in picnics, wander the estate gardens and taste through the selections including the award-winning Journey wines.

Open daily, 10am to 4:30pm. Tastings: \$10-\$15 per person (for four to six wines); tours daily, schedule an appointment for private tours.

6097 Bennett Valley Rd, Santa Rosa, CA 95404; +1 800 590 6464/707 528 6464; www.matanzascreek.com



Paradise Ridge, Sonoma Valley

This sliver of Sonoma paradise delivers a dose of art, history, nature and fine wine in one stop. Views are always spectacular, but make plans for the popular (they do sell out of tickets) Wednesday evening Wines & Sunsets events between May and mid-October. Enjoy the pizza and wine pairing, put together with popular local restaurant Rosso Pizzeria and Wine Bar. Arrive early and wander through Marijke's Grove, a 1.6-hectare sculpture garden (pictured above) shaded by ancient oaks; you might even spy a red-tailed hawk or two during your visit. And history lovers will thoroughly enjoy the fascinating exhibit honouring the life of California's 'Wine King', Kanaye Nagasawa, who presided over a large Sonoma estate in the early 1900s and was the first to introduce California wines to England, Europe and Japan.

Open daily, 11am to 5pm. Tasting fee: \$10, refundable with purchase. 4545 Thomas Lake Harris Dve, Santa Rosa, CA 95403; +1 707 528 9463; www.prwinery.com

Mendocino

Saracina Vineyards, Mendocino County

Located in the Upper Russian River Valley, this boutique small-lot winery owned by John Fetzer, former CEO of Fetzer Vineyards, and his wife, Patty Rock, boasts gorgeous wine caves, the first in Mendocino. It is a true ranch-style atmosphere with vineyards planted on only half of the estate's 240ha. Vines share space with myriad hiking trails that weave through a grove of 100-year-old olive trees, pomegranate orchards, ponds and bamboo stands populated with sheep and goats.

Open daily, 11am to 5pm. Wine cave tours by appointment; book 24 hours in advance on tastingbar@saracina.com. \$7 tasting fee, waived with purchase. 11684 South Highway 101, Hopland, CA 95449; +1 707 744 1671; www.saracina.com



The Madrones, Anderson Valley

Offerings such as a wood-fired bread-making class, mushroom foraging expedition or birding adventure are emblematic of Mendocino's groovy, live-off-the-land mindset, and you'll find all these at The Madrones.

The complex includes Madrones Inn and four small winery tasting rooms: Bink!, Drew, Knez and Signal Ridge. Each tasting room keeps individual hours and days, but you're sure to find at least two open, if not all four. Make plans (well in advance) so that, after sampling the wineries' small-lot, distinct selections, you can participate in one of the hotel's scheduled activities. If you're having a splendid time, why not consider making a night of it and book a room.

9000 California 128, Philo, CA 95466; +1 707 895 2955; www.themadrones.com



Central Coast

Tablas Creek, Paso Robles

Paso Robles is California's Rhône country and nowhere else do Rhône varieties show better than in the hands of biodynamic winery Tablas Creek. The winery is the product of a smart partnership between the Perrin family of Château de Beaucastel and importer Robert Haas of Vineyard Brands. Tours are free and can be adapted to suit your interests. Notes winemaker Jason Hass, 'If someone is particularly interested in biodynamics, we're happy to go as deeply as they want, and will even pull in our vineyard staff as necessary.'

You'll enjoy the full biodynamic experience with a visit to the vineyard, grapevine nursery and cameo appearances from the winery's menagerie of chickens, sheep, donkeys, goats, pigs, alpacas and llamas. Bring a picnic or browse the shop's selection of books, Provençal linens and food and wine gifts.

Open daily, 10am-5pm. \$10 tasting fee, waived with purchase. 9339 Adelaida Rd, Paso Robles, CA 93446; +1 805 237 1231; www.tablascreek.com



Santa Barbara

The Funk Zone

Just a mere ocean breeze from the coast, this upscale urban wine district brings several interesting wineries together in a single two- to three-block radius.

Taste the highly acclaimed wines of legendary winemaker Jim Clendenen at the **Au Bon Climat** tasting room. Just next door you can sip the luscious Bordeaux blends from Happy Canyon winery, **Grassini Family Vineyards**. Break for lunch at Wine Cask and resume the hard work of tasting at **Margerum Wine Company** - try the small-lot Pinot Gris, Riesling and Rhône blends.

With over 17 different tasting rooms complemented by a selection of art galleries, boutiques and restaurants, it's easy to understand how spending a day wine tasting on America's riviera is easy to do.

Tasting room times and fees vary, call ahead for specifics. www.funkzone.net

Katie Kelly Bell covers wine food and travel for a number of publications, including Forbes and USA Today