



SONOMA & NAPA COUNTIES

By Renee Brincks

● An animated weekend crowd fills the Gundlach Bundschu Winery courtyard as my friend and I search for seats on a sun-drenched Sonoma County afternoon. We've just sampled a crisp Gewürztraminer and a light, dry Rhinefarm Rosé in the tasting room, and

we've checked out posters from past concerts held at the winery's open-air amphitheater and its historic barn. The sixth-generation family operation, casually known as Gun Bun, blends time-honored winemaking traditions and a laid-back California attitude. Fascinating cave tours (of the winery's barrel-aging caverns) share top billing with playful vineyard excursions in an Austrian-made Pinzgauer all-terrain vehicle. Gundlach Bundschu's social media feeds spotlight informative winemaking facts beside images of lively and entertaining special events.

Out on the patio, we pass groups of friends swirling and sipping wines, and we settle in at a table near the pond, not far from a DJ who is setting up for an afternoon set.

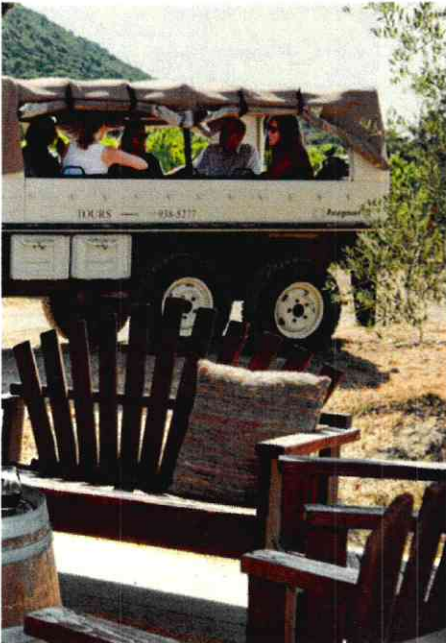
Gundlach Bundschu is part of a diverse Sonoma County winery scene

that's home to more than 425 producers, ranging from nearby Meadowcroft Wines, which in 2020 celebrates 25 years of making wine, to Passalacqua Winery, near Healdsburg, in the Dry Creek Valley area. Passalacqua Winery releases its popular Italian white, Lago di Merlo Fiano, in the spring (generally in April), as wild mustard blooms between the vineyard rows.

Travelers planning additional wine-tasting adventures in Sonoma County will find maps and other resources via the Wine Road organization at wineroad.com. The association of nearly 200 Dry Creek Valley, Alexander Valley and Russian River Valley wineries offers a free concierge service that shares customized itinerary recommendations from Wine Road team members. During the 43rd-annual Barrel Tasting events, March 6–8 and



THIS PAGE: GUNDLACH BUNDSCHU WINERY (3); FACING PAGE, FROM TOP: DERRICK STORY; MAURITIUS IMAGES GMBH/ALAMY STOCK PHOTO



Clockwise from top of facing page: Gundlach Bundschu Winery features epic vineyard scenery and distinctive all-terrain-vehicle and cave tours.

March 13–15, participating Wine Road members will preview their upcoming releases straight from the barrel. Attendees are invited to purchase future releases that will be bottled in the next 12 to 18 months.

The Charles M. Schulz Sonoma County Airport, in Santa Rosa, is a convenient gateway to the wineries of Sonoma County, and to wineries in neighboring Napa County. More than 400 wineries operate in Napa County, and venues throughout the area offer tastings. The Alpha Omega Collective and Mayacamas Vineyards are among the recent tasting-room additions in the city of Napa's downtown. Farther afield, The Prisoner Wine Company and Ashes & Diamonds have opened modern new tasting rooms in recent years. All of these new openings are welcome additions; they complement the numerous

MORE TO DO

SONOMA COUNTY

● **California Artisan Cheese Festival** (artisancheesefestival.com): Guests sample limited-production cheeses and take behind-the-scenes tours of local farms and creameries during this gathering, March 27–29. Cheesemakers, chefs and producers also lead cooking demonstrations, seminars and pairing events across Sonoma and Marin counties.



California Artisan Cheese Festival.

● **Healdsburg** (healdsburg.com): The city of Healdsburg is a popular stop for wine enthusiasts, thanks to its prime location among the vineyards of Sonoma County's Dry Creek Valley, Alexander Valley and Russian River Valley appellations. The city's newest tasting rooms include those of Walt and Baca Wines, and Roald Wine Company. Outside of tasting hours, visitors explore the boutiques and galleries clustered near Healdsburg Plaza, or head to the Healdsburg location of Oakville Grocery for picnic supplies, gifts and gourmet items by California purveyors. For a more adventurous option, pedal back roads and pause for samples at wineries on the Healdsburg Sip 'N Cycle day tour from Getaway Adventures.

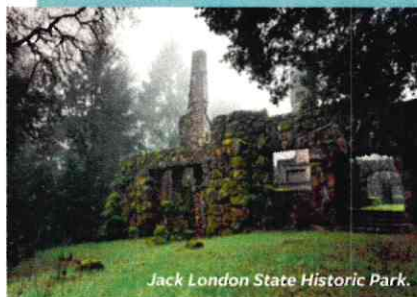
● **Ramekins Culinary School** (ramekins.com): Set a few blocks from the city of Sonoma's central plaza, this education hub and event space offers public and private cooking classes for various skill levels. March workshops share the secrets of seasonal French flavors and Parisian cafe classics, plus instructions for gluten-free dishes, South American tapas, and sweet and savory crêpes.

● **Jack London State Historic Park** (jacklondonpark.com): Nearly 30 miles of trails wind through redwood groves, orchards, meadows and wildflower fields at this 1,400-acre natural playground outside of Glen Ellen in Sonoma County. Exhibits in the park's House of Happy Walls museum showcase the novelist's life and work. Visitors can also explore London's former cottage and view the site where he was laid to rest in 1916.

● **Russian River Brewing Company** (russianriverbrewing.com): This respected craft-beer institution opened a brewing facility, brewpub and beer garden in the Sonoma County town of Windsor in 2018, with guided tours and tastings of the iconic Pliny the Elder IPA, Blind Pig IPA (my personal favorite), Belgian-inspired brews and more (all of which are also available at the company's original Santa Rosa location). Head south from Windsor to the city of Rohnert Park to visit the lake-view brewpub outpost of **Bear Republic Brewing** (bearrepublic.com), which serves—among other celebrated beers—the company's signature Racer 5 IPA.

NAPA COUNTY

● **The CIA at Copia** (ciaatcopia.com): Cooking classes, tastings, edible gardens, culinary-arts exhibits, chef events and multiple restaurants grace the menu of attractions at this branch of The Culinary Institute of America in the city of Napa. Next door at the **Oxbow Public Market** (oxbowpublicmarket.com), I like picking up new travel books at Napa Bookmine before I order a scoop of a favorite flavor—Lemon Cookie—at Three Twins Ice Cream. →



Jack London State Historic Park.



A Wine Road Barrel Tasting event.

well-established wonders of this famed wine region. ✈

Renee Brincks writes from the San Francisco Bay Area. To learn more about Sonoma County, see sonomacounty.com. To learn more about Napa Valley, go to visitnapavalley.com.

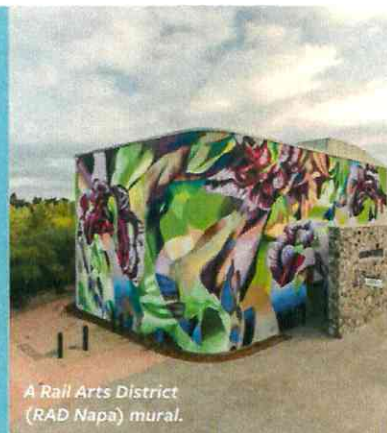
Alaska Airlines (alaskaair.com) provides regular service to Santa Rosa (STS) from cities such as Los Angeles (LAX) and Seattle (SEA).

California

- **Connolly Ranch** (connollyranch.org): Located in the city of Napa, this engaging ranch welcomes visitors with hands-on, all-ages activities related to food, agriculture and the environment. Farm tours introduce the ranch's resident animals, gardens and outdoor experiences.

- **Napa Valley Opera House** (nvoh.org): When I first visited this refurbished structure several years ago, I marveled at the acoustics and 1880s architecture. The downtown Napa venue buzzes with live music, local food and wine, and cultural events. It houses the JaM Cellars Ballroom at the Margrit Mondavi Theatre and the **Blue Note Napa** (a California outpost of the original Blue Note in New York).

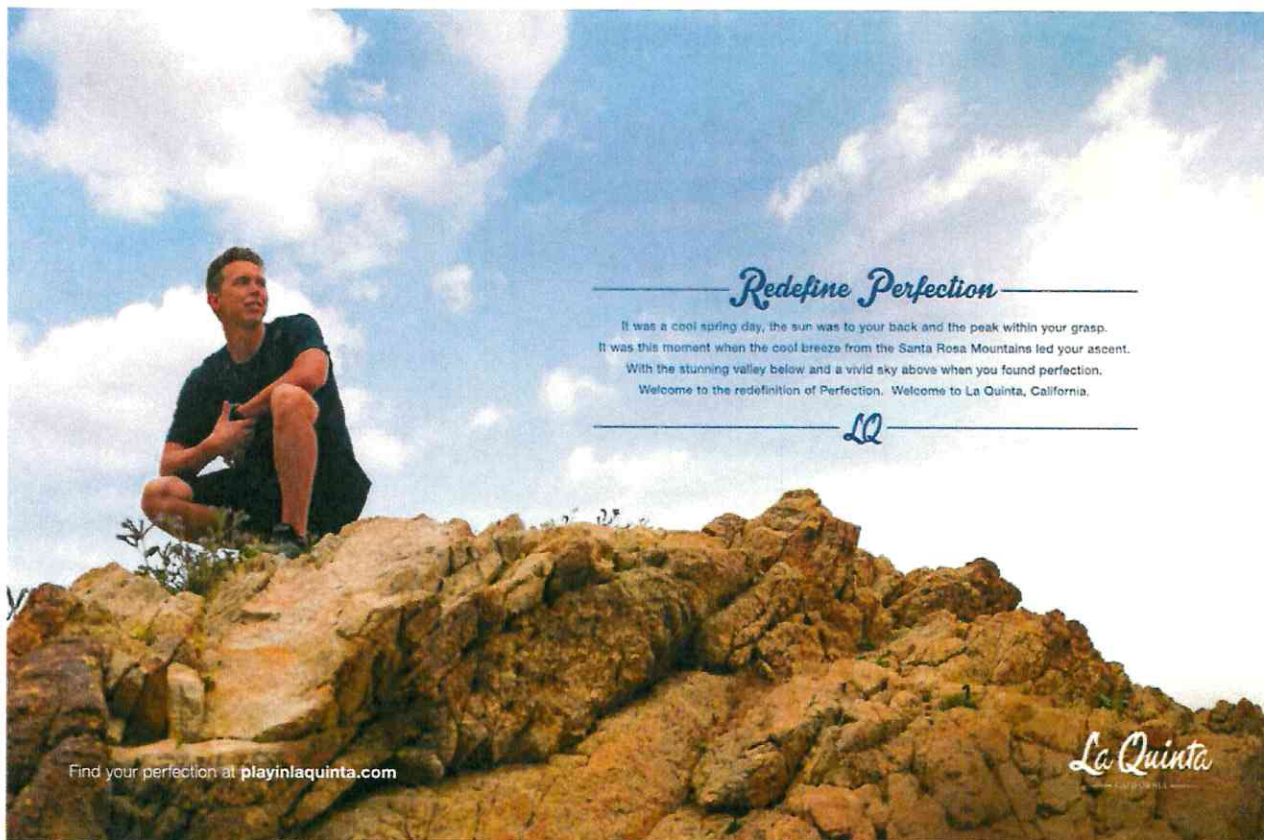
- **Paper Napan Walkabouts** (paper-napan.com): Discover the murals and installations of the city of Napa's emerging



A Rail Arts District (RAD Napa) mural.

Rail Arts District (RAD Napa) along a 2-mile outdoor arts trail via guided tours and custom outings. Or, embark on a three-hour downtown walk that spotlights the city's urban wineries and elegant old homes. —R.B.

BARREL TASTING: STEVE KNUDSEN; MURAL: HJEMAN (ART) / BIRDMAN (PHOTO)



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