



WINE TASTING

BY HORSE & CARRIAGE AND AUTO TOO!

By Annie Sliman

In four nights and five days, my two girlfriends and I visited eight wineries and tasting rooms, as well as added to our wine collections.

Filled with anticipation, we flew into Oakland, California, dodged all the traffic while headed north out of Oakland and soon we landed in the breathtaking vineyards of Chateau St. Jean.

We belong to this vineyard's wine club, so my first sip was of my favorite red blend Cinq Cepages. It was the perfect sunny day with a light breeze. My girlfriends and I enjoyed an elegant yet simple lunch of charcuterie, cheese, crackers and of course crusty bread. We were off to a great start at this historic vineyard of Chateau St. Jean!

That night we ate at the famous Scopa Restaurant in the Healdsburg Square, named after an old Italian card game. The restaurant serves delicious food with a simple but creative menu. Scopa is known for chicken and their unusual specials, including my selection, the grilled octopus that was fantastic. Veggies and lettuces are grown and harvested locally making

them the freshest ever. The ladies enjoyed the recommended menu item of Nonna's braised chicken. Early in the evening, we were greeted by a visiting winemaker from Acorn Winery who offered a sampling of many of their wines. We tasted each varietal offered and settled on a bottle of the Acorn Cab Franc; it was amazing.



The following day we started at Hawkes Winery, a single vineyard known for their Cabernet Sauvignon. My favorite is the Pyramid Cab. They were just opening and had not enjoyed their coffee yet, so we toasted to their coffee with our first wine tasting of the day. This winery offers red wine lovers a variety of reds to choose from. They also have a long and fascinating family story to share, as well as wild flowers and fresh vegetable gardens to walk through.

Life is really great, especially when you get to combine two of your favorite things in one unforgettable adventure. For me, horses and wine are my passions. So imagine how excited I was to go to a wine tasting by horse and carriage. We started at Alexander Valley Winery in Healdsburg, California. The vineyard's long, rich history and the wine cave tour, accompanied by tasting many of their fine wines, was just the beginning of our five hours of bliss. We smiled and marveled at the sprawling vineyard views and the rich colorful hillsides while we enjoyed breathing in the clean, fresh air.

Brad, the wine horse carriage owner, greeted us shortly after noon. He explained the rules of the trail, how to approach the carriage and how to properly board on and off. Safety was first and seeing the size of the horses and the carriage up close clearly explains why. These are not my trail riding horses.

Brad also shared the history of the Alexander Valley family, their stories and farmlands evolution. We stopped along the way and were invited to lean over the carriage to pick the grapes right off the vines to eat. Never before in my three years of visiting wine country did we have this pleasurable of an experience. We tasted both red and white grapes of many varieties. The timing was just perfect. The fruit was plump and hanging low and ready for harvesting.

We arrived at Soda Rock tasting room; a very spacious and beautiful spot surrounded by rustic buildings and manicured grounds. We were there all alone enjoying the views, the wine and taking in all the quaintness and beauty of Healdsburg. From there we boarded our carriage and headed to Hannah Winery and tasting room. Hannah is tucked up on a mountainside with majestic, colorful flowers and trees.

Our driver Brad prepared a picnic lunch right under a tree for us to enjoy, accompanied of course, by a bottle of Hannah wine.

Concluding our ride, we slowly made our way to Bungalows 313 in Sonoma Square for the rest of the weekend. If you want a quiet but close five-minute walk to the Sonoma Square, I would recommend this place featuring full-size, spacious bungalows complete with kitchens, dining space and all the amenities we could want, including wine.

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The next day we made our way to the Hill Family Estate Tomato Ville event held at the Bardosonno Hotel. Imagine over two dozen different kinds of heirloom tomatoes, all grown locally. The colors and shapes alone qualify as art on a plate. Then imagine piles of bacon and other goodies to build your own ultimate BLT with your choice of breads and spreads.

In the evening, roasted pig was served to our amazement. This was an over the top event stacked with fun, delicious food and wine poured by the Hill Family Estate.

Sunday morning we made our way to a farmers market in Sonoma, California. We enjoyed the freshest and tastiest organic strawberries I have ever eaten.

Finally we stopped in Kunde Vineyards. Our tasting host was one of the great, great grandsons. His knowledge, coupled with his interesting family stories, made for a perfect ending to our trip. **LWW**

