

HIGHROADS

NA WINE COUNTRY

ECO-WINE TOUR

CRUISING PREVIEWS



JANUARY/FEBRUARY 2009
www.AAA.com

Paradise Found



WHILE MOVIES LIKE *SIDEWAYS* HAVE HELPED root the Napa Valley firmly in pop culture, for visitors interested in really relaxing, a few extra

minutes spent driving beyond Napa to the Russian River Valley section of Sonoma County will be the best investment they can make in themselves. Where other regions are populated by large corporate wineries, establishments in Healdsburg and the surrounding communities are primarily family-run, and the personal investment shows in every bottle of wine and plate of food.

With roots going back before the California Gold Rush, the Russian River Valley and the northern reaches of Sonoma County hearken back to traditional California family farming culture. Old red pickups piled high with produce get chased by the winery dog, who you'll get to meet if you stop in for a tasting. More than likely the master vintner himself — or one of his siblings — will be the one to care for you. They're more than happy to answer your questions, and will gladly

give you suggestions about where to stay, or where to eat. Quite often, they will have gone to high school with the innkeeper or chef.

HEALDSBURG

Located 70 miles from downtown San Francisco off of Highway 101, the shopping and dining Mecca of Healdsburg sits at the confluence of the Dry Creek, Russian River and Alexander valleys, and is the region's de facto dining and lodging hub. For any visit to this part of wine country, Healdsburg is the place to start relaxing and letting go.

If you believe that spa treatment is more than just hands on shoulders, and should truly get to the heart of how and why we relax, then Honor Mansion, a perennial AAA Four Diamond Award winner, is the place to immerse yourself in comfort. With just 13 rooms and suites, numerous amenities, massage therapy and spa treatments all on site, it is quite possible to do everything on your vacation list and never leave the grounds. But when you are ready to experience some of California's famed wine country, innkeepers Steve and

Cathi Fowler (who fell in love and were high school sweethearts not far from Healdsburg) will point the way.

It's just a short walk from Honor Mansion to the Seghesio Family Winery. When you step through the ornate wooden doors into the tasting room, you'll see everything you need to know about Seghesio, which has been family owned and operated since 1895. Timeless black-and-white photos adorn the shop walls. Behind the well-appointed tasting counter, massive windows look in on racks filled with barrels that have not yet reached their prime. This is a place where patience, dedication and family are the things that matter.

Amidst the boutique shops of downtown Healdsburg, you'll find lunch and dinner offerings that are more than a match for the local varietals.

With just a faint hint of French country cottage, Costeaux, a family-owned bakery, has been a Healdsburg staple since 1923, and is known for award-winning sourdough breads. But whether you are looking for a loaf to go or a sit-down lunch with flare, their menu runs the gamut from French onion soup, crab cakes, and salads to pastry and tiramisu.

To be this close to the coast, in a region known for food and wine, and not have a great seafood restaurant would be unpardonable. In Healdsburg the place to go for surf (and turf) is Willi's Seafood and Raw Bar. With a menu of ceviches and tartares, skewers from the grill and small plates, Willi's is more of a secret find among friends with great food than your typical raw bar.

OUT & ABOUT IN THE VALLEYS

Set on a lonely stretch of two-lane in the Alexander Valley, Jintown Store is a one-of-a-kind gourmet (from kitch to kimchi) attraction. Terrific wines, sandwiches, juices, pastries, candies and a wealth of unusual edibles and collectibles line the shelves of this unique grocery in the middle of farm country. It's the perfect spot for a winter warm up or a cold drink to slake your summer thirst.

A father and son winery, Porter Creek Vineyards has been making excellent wines along a major tributary of the Russian River since the

early 1980s. Their pinot noir is particularly well regarded in a region that has won numerous awards for that varietal.

For a colorful nighttime excursion, try Santi in nearby Geyserville. Bountiful, artfully prepared plates are the rule of the day here. But be prepared for a small town experience. There is almost nothing to downtown Geyserville, but Santi is usually packed with "locals" who know where to go (in a community of top restaurants and well-stocked cellars) for a quality meal and a wine list that won't disappoint.

Visitors return to Healdsburg year after year for the relaxed feeling that the area is about something larger than competition and commerce. It's about family, and doing things right. This includes helping you relax and enjoy yourself. **H**

GLENN KAUFMANN is a freelance writer and photographer who lives in Bloomington, Indiana. He can be reached through his website, glennkaufmann.com.

if you go

Honor Mansion
14891 Grove St.
Healdsburg, CA 95448
800-554-4667
honormansion.com

Seghesio Family Winery
14730 Grove St.
Healdsburg, CA 95448
866-734-4374
seghesio.com

Costeaux
417 Healdsburg Ave.
Healdsburg, CA 95448
707-433-1913
costeaux.com

Willi's Seafood & Raw Bar
403 Healdsburg Ave.
Healdsburg, CA 95448
707-433-9191
willisseafood.net

Jintown Store
6706 State Highway 128
Healdsburg, CA 95448
707-433-1212
jintown.com

Porter Creek Vineyards
8735 Westside Rd.
Healdsburg, CA 95448
707-433-6321
portercreekvineyards.com

Santi
21047 Geyserville Ave.
Geyserville, CA 95441
707-857-1790
tavernasanti.com



Honor Mansion is a perennial AAA Four Diamond award winner.

BOTTOM PHOTO BY ELAINE WARNER