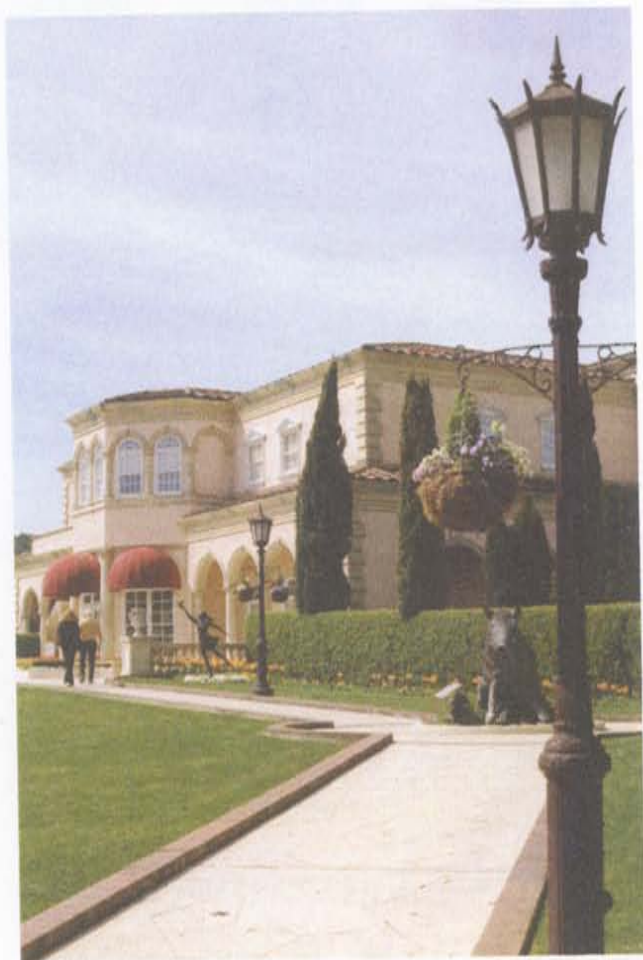


Wineries to Tour



Ferrari-Carano's visitors center, Villa Fiore, is situated on 5 acres of manicured grounds.

With nearly 200 wineries operating throughout the Alexander, Russian River and Dry Creek valleys, listing them all would require a book. Instead, we've selected a cross section from each region. The 12 wineries listed below represent a variety of wine types and offer experiences ranging from historic locales to luxurious showplaces to intimate mom-and-pop tasting rooms.

Ferrari-Carano Vineyards & Winery

8761 Dry Creek Road, Healdsburg **Telephone** (707) 433-6700 **Web site** www.ferrari-carano.com **Open** Daily, 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. **Cost** Tastings \$5-\$15

Extravagance is on display at Ferrari-Carano, and the showpiece is visitors center Villa Fiore, an opulent Mediterranean-style palace with faux marble floors and a mahogany- and black-granite tasting bar. Descend the limestone staircase to take in the well-appointed underground cellar with vaulted ceiling, or stroll the 5 acres of lush lawns adorned with dramatic fountains and colorful trees and flowers. The winery bottles more than 10 varietals, with Chardonnay and Fumé Blanc the stars.

Gallo Family Vineyards

320 Center St., Healdsburg **Telephone** (707) 433-2458 **Web site** www.gallofamily.com **Open** Daily, 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. **Cost** Tastings \$7; tour \$45

While the massive Gallo winery in Dry Creek isn't open to the public, there are tours offered by appointment of the company's Barrelli Creek Vineyard in Alexander Valley. The outing begins daily at 11 a.m. on Healdsburg Plaza at the Gallo tasting room, a handsome salon that pours a cross section of wines, then heads north for an in-depth exploration of grapegrowing before finishing with a tasting of limited-release wines and local artisan-made cheeses lakeside at the vineyard.

Hartford Family Winery

8075 Martinelli Road, Forestville **Telephone** (707) 887-8010 **Web site** www.hartfordwines.com **Open** Daily, 10 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. **Cost** Tastings \$5

Those who dream of growing grapes on a grand country estate should visit this winery tucked into the green canyons of west county. It's OK to pretend it's yours—just don't get too bossy as you sample wines in the tasting room, which has the atmosphere of a venerable private club. Hartford Family focuses on Chardonnay, Pinot Noir and Zinfandel from Russian River and Sonoma Coast, and all are deeply structured and intensely flavored wines.

Iron Horse Vineyards

9786 Ross Station Road, Sebastopol **Telephone** (707) 887-1507 **Web site** www.ironhorsevineyards.com **Open** Daily, 10 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. **Cost** Tastings \$10

There is something quintessentially Sonoma about Iron Horse Vineyards, set amid the undulating hills of Green Valley. Graceful in its simplicity, the winery stretches through a collection of wooden barns and is surrounded by vineyards and gardens. The tours by appointment offer a fine overview of the traditional

method of making sparkling wine, which the Sterling family has produced since 1980. The tasting room, when weather permits, operates alfresco, allowing visitors to take in the view while sipping a glass of bubbly or one of the winery's crisp and elegant Chardonnays or Pinots.

J Vineyards & Winery

11447 Old Redwood Highway, Healdsburg Telephone (707) 431-5400
Web site www.jwine.com **Open** Daily, 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. **Cost** Wine-and-food tastings \$20-\$45

A lot of wineries give lip service to pairing wine with food, but at J, it's the *raison d'être*: The Brut Rosé NV may come with blue crab claw, the Pinot Noir with a mushroom terrine. The tasting room is a stylish café, with angular concrete walls and bold modern art. Tours of the winery, available by appointment, traverse a catwalk that overlooks the entire winemaking process.

Jordan Vineyard & Winery

1474 Alexander Valley Road, Healdsburg Telephone (707) 431-5250 **Web site** www.jordanwinery.com **Open** By appointment **Cost** Tour and tastings free

With its gabled windows, stone quoins, formal gardens and manorly hilltop views of surrounding vineyards, this ivy-covered Alexander Valley property seems from another place and time. But if Tom Jordan styled his winery after a French château, the Cabernet it

produces is uniquely Californian: soft, supple and feminine. The winery also makes a steely Chardonnay. Both are available for tasting at the conclusion of the tour, which explores the grounds and winemaking facility.

Martinelli Winery

3360 River Road, Windsor Telephone (707) 525-0570 **Web site** www.martinelliwinery.com **Open** Daily, 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. **Cost** Tastings free

Some of Sonoma's most collectible wines are produced in an unassuming old red hop barn in Russian River Valley. The Martinelli family has been growing grapes for five generations, and with the help of consulting winemaker Helen Turley, they produce consistently outstanding Chardonnay, Pinot Noir and Zinfandel. One of the top bottlings is usually among the wines on the daily tasting menu (the Louisa and Giuseppe Zinfandel 2005 was poured on a recent visit). The tasting room is a homey country store chock full of gifts and gourmet food. There's plenty of room to picnic on the hillside behind the winery.

Ridge Lytton Springs

650 Lytton Springs Road, Healdsburg Telephone (707) 433-7721 **Web site** www.ridgewine.com **Open** Daily, 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. **Cost** Tastings free

To say that this Sonoma County outpost of the popular Santa Cruz Mountain winery is environmentally friendly is an understatement; its contemporary construction was completed with recycled lumber and hay bale-insulated walls. Solar panels produce up to 75 percent of the winery's energy. Ridge makes about 10 Zinfandels, depending on the vintage, but be sure to sip the Lytton Springs as you gaze out the window to the thick-knuckled, 100-year-old vines that produce it.

Seghesio Winery

14730 Grove St., Healdsburg
Telephone (707) 433-3579 **Web site** www.seghesio.com **Open** Daily, 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. **Cost** Tastings \$5

There's no better symbol for the history and evolution of the Sonoma wine industry than Seghesio. Founded by Italian immigrants before the turn of the 20th century, it pumped out jug wines for decades, before finding its footing in the 1980s with quality-wine production. Today, Seghesio consistently produces



Iron Horse Vineyards boasts an outdoor tasting room, where visitors can take in the view of Green Valley while sipping their wines.

some of Sonoma's best Zinfandels, as well as other personality-packed wines such as Arneis, Pinot Grigio and Barbera. Visitors can taste a selection of wines in the stylish Tuscan-style tasting room of the winery and afterward play bocce or have a picnic in the shade of an old cork oak tree.

Simi Winery

16275 Healdsburg Ave., Healdsburg Telephone (800) 746-4880 Web site www.simiwinery.com Open Daily, 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Cost Tastings \$5-\$8

For good, hi-tech wines, some history and a comprehensive tour, Simi is a sure bet when it comes to choosing a winery to visit, particularly if you're new to wine touring. Hidden in a copse just north of Healdsburg is the original stone winery built by Italian immigrants Pietro and Giuseppe Simi in 1890. The tour offers an extensive peek inside and explains all the current gadgetry used in modern winemaking. In the tasting room, sample Simi's specialties: Alexander Valley Cabernet Sauvignon and Russian River Valley Chardonnay.

Unti Vineyards

4202 Dry Creek Road, Healdsburg Telephone (707) 433-5590 Web site www.untivineyards.com Open By appointment Cost Tastings free

One of the great pleasures of driving along West Side or Dry Creek roads is discovering a small winery like Unti whose wines

Walkabout Wine Tasting

For those disinclined to drive hither and yonder, there are 14 tasting rooms within a block of shady Healdsburg Plaza, and at least two other tasting room collectives nearby. (Area wineries have found it easier to draw a crowd in town, and the local government now routinely places restrictions on public access within agricultural areas.)

On the plaza, there are well-known wineries such as Kendall-Jackson, Rosenblum and Gillo, along with others that are potential discoveries, like Toad Hollow, Mayo Family, Tandem, Lake Sonoma and Thumbprint Cellars. At one tasting room alone—World Wine Estate's Cellar 360—up to 16 different labels affiliated with parent company Foster's may be available for sampling, including the wines of Beringer, Chateau Souverain and Sbragia Family.

About a mile from the plaza, along the river on Front Street, is another collection of tasting rooms. There you'll find artisanal wineries such as Davis Family, Holdredge, Sapphire Hill and Huntington. Drive north of town on Dry Creek Road for yet one more congregation of tasting rooms, including those of Papapietro Perry, Dashe, Collier Falls and Mietz.

Not every wine you'll try will earn a 90-point score, but when it comes to one-stop tasting, experimenting is half the fun.

—T.F.



The historic Simi Winery has a great tour for novice wine travelers; it offers an extensive peek into and explanation of the inner workings of a winery.

may be seldom found on the retail shelves back home. The Unti family began growing grapes in 1990 and started making wine in 1997. The winery is utilitarian, and tastes are poured from a plywood counter topped by polished stainless steel, but the wines are authentic and passionately made. The Zinfandel is elegant in the classic Dry Creek Valley style, and the Grenache and Barbera are also not to be missed.

Robert Young Estate Winery

4960 Red Winery Road, Geyserville Telephone (707) 431-4811 Web site www.ryew.com Open Daily, 10 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Cost Tastings \$5

Robert Young became a pioneer in Alexander Valley's revival as a wine region when he planted a 14-acre Cabernet vineyard in an old prune orchard in 1963. Today, the Young family has 300 acres of vines, and in 1997—after watching wineries such as Chateau St. Jean win kudos with Robert Young grapes—it started making its own wine. The winery, appropriately, is in an old prune barn, and while the tasting room is little more than a modest counter, the Chardonnay and Cabernet usually feature impressive quality.