

Oxbow Public Market.



COURTESY: OXBOW PUBLIC MARKET

Ledson's family traces its Sonoma winemaking roots to 1860, and his inn is a gorgeous spot.

Herb Caen, the late Pulitzer Prize-winning *San Francisco Chronicle* columnist, had great affection for the area. "Heaven,"

he once wrote, is "a place that is said to resemble Sonoma in the spring."

When we're ready to go from Sonoma to Napa Valley, we take one of the winding roads that cross over the Mayacamas Mountains that separate the two valleys. It's then that my husband laments that his 1979 124 Spider is sitting in the garage in Seattle. Cheer up, I tell him—we can fit many more bottles of cabernet in the trunk of our rental car than in the Fiat.

DETAILS

UPCOMING EVENTS

The 5th Annual Sonoma Jazz + festival, May 21–24—This Memorial Day Weekend event is pure bliss for jazz aficionados and benefits a great cause—music education. This year, Joe Cocker and Big Bad Voodoo Daddy will perform, along with a host of other jazz legends. Visit www.sonomajazz.org.

MORE INFORMATION

Sonoma County Tourism Bureau: 800-576-6662; www.sonomacounty.com.

Napa Valley Destination Council: 707-226-7459, www.napavalley.com.

Now in its fourth edition, *The California Directory of Fine Wineries* (Wine House Press, 2008) is an invaluable resource: It includes maps, photos and detailed descriptions of 62 Napa and Sonoma wineries. www.tenspeedpress.com.



This restored Queen Anne farmhouse in Napa is home to the Nickel & Nickel winery.

COURTESY: ADRIAN GREGORUTTI

NAPA

In the city of Napa, a fabulous collection of artisans, restaurants, food purveyors and farms stands under one roof at Oxbow Public Market—a favorite stop.

We're fond of staying at the Napa River Inn, located in the circa-1884 Historic Napa Mill on the Napa Riverfront. This plush boutique hotel is a member of the National Trust for Historic Preservation's Historic Hotels of America, and rooms are furnished in period detail, with fireplaces and bathrooms with huge claw-foot tubs.

The moment we enter the cozy Angèle Restaurant and Bar, next door to the Napa River Inn, we feel transported to the French countryside. Here, we're graciously served some of the most delicious and authentic French bistro food we've ever tasted, with a great wine selection to choose from. After dinner, we walk to Silo's Jazz Club, where the highly accomplished jazz vocalist Wesla Whitfield and her composer husband, Mike Greensill, perform several nights a week.

There are now about 400 wineries in Napa Valley, and while we love new tasting experiences, there are a few outstanding spots where we often return.

In 2004, we were delighted that—after 25 years of being open to the trade only—Far Niente opened its magnificent Great Hall, which is on the National Register of Historic Places, for tours and tastings. The winery has a beautiful Southern-style garden with a collection of 8,000 pink and red azaleas—a fabulous sight in late spring.

But that's not all. Touring 40,000 square feet of caves and an extraordinary collection of rare and classic automobiles made my Fiat-owning husband swoon.

Down the road, on the 42-acre Nickel & Nickel estate, a restored Queen Anne farmhouse is the site of a state-of-the-art winery dedicated to single-vineyard wines. It's a rare peek into what life was like before Napa Valley was developed for visitors.

The 13,000-square-foot gallery of contemporary art at The Hess Collection Winery is well worth the drive up a winding road to a forested mountainside location. The wines are as inspiring as the art in this ivy-clad stone estate built in 1903 that was also owned for a time by the Catholic evangelical Christian Brothers organization.

We always return from California wine country relaxed and rejuvenated. Now, if we could just figure out how to put the Fiat on the flight to California, it would be a perfect world. ▲

Robyn Roehm Cannon writes from Seattle.

GETTING THERE



Alaska Airlines offers daily flights to the Bay Area and to Sonoma County via sister carrier Horizon Air. Book reservations to California wine country at alaskaair.com or call 800-ALASKAAIR.