

 UNITED

HEMISPHERES

THREE PERFECT DAYS: SONOMA
THE OLYMPIC SKI HOPEFUL...FROM GHANA?
YOUTUBE GOES BACK TO SCHOOL
UPGRADE!
THE 18 TECHNOLOGICAL INNOVATIONS
WE'LL BE MARVELING AT THIS YEAR



A STAR ALLIANCE MEMBER 

(Three Perfect Days)

SONOMA

with vineyards and rugged valleys that are now just tame enough to conquer. // BY SARAH HORNE



71 DAY ONE
Sipping pinot at
Ridge Winery

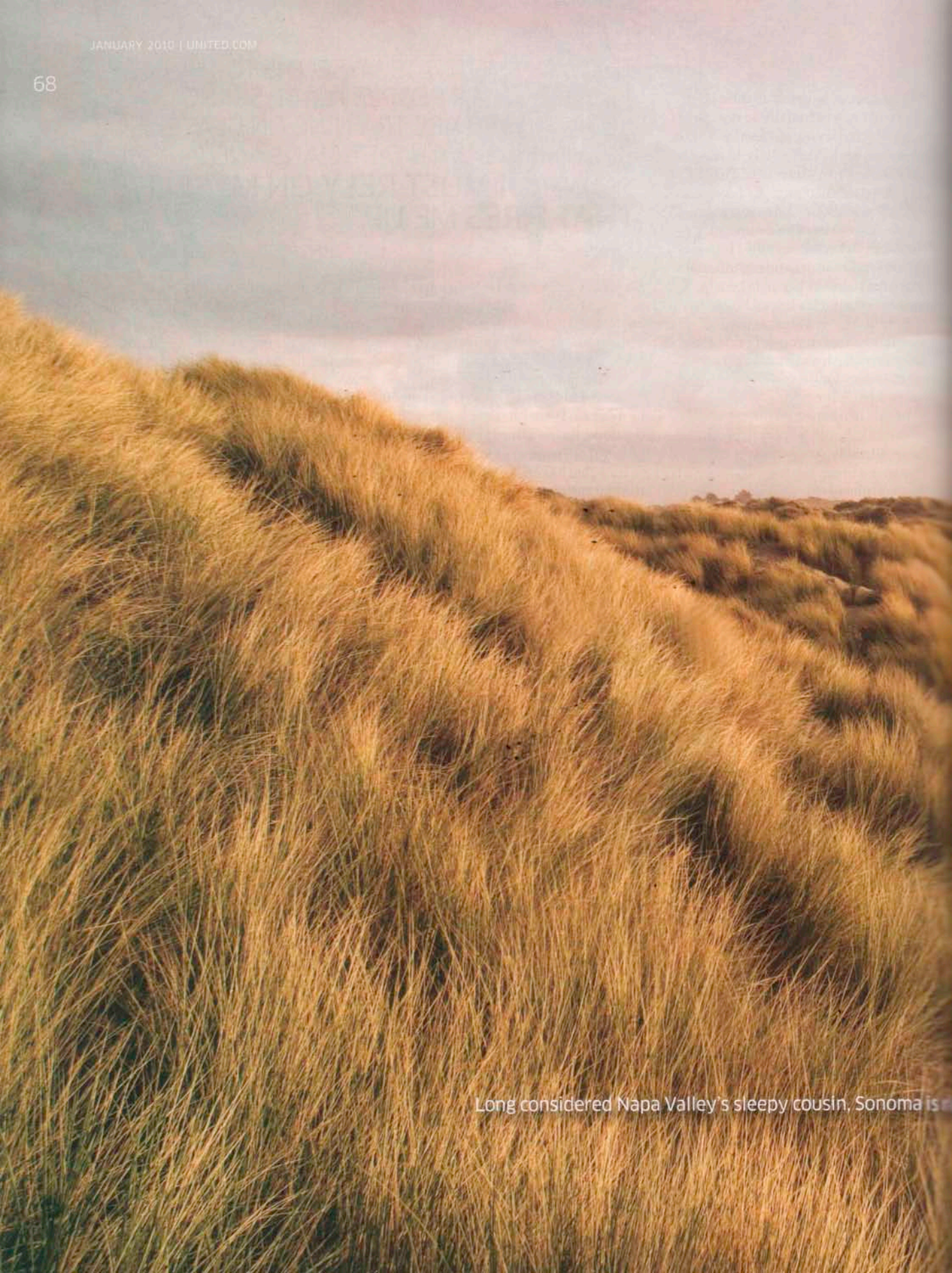


75 DAY TWO
Eating oysters
in Graton



76 DAY THREE
Seal-spotting at
Stump Beach

CALIFORNIA DREAMING
The dunes along Sonoma's coast



Long considered Napa Valley's sleepy cousin, Sonoma is



8.5 FT

4.5 FT

**HOTEL CALIFORNIA**

Charlie and Lisa Palmer's Lime Stone, housed in the Hotel Healdsburg across from Charlie's Dry Creek Kitchen Restaurant

WANDER THE STREETS OF AFFLUENT HEALDSBURG, the symbolic heart of Northern California's Sonoma County, and there's little doubt that these valleys and rolling green hills—once unknown—are now a world-class destination for oenophiles and food lovers. Among the winemakers and rugged fourth-generation locals, there are more and more glitzy types clad in linen or draped in cashmere, and they feel right at home. Sonoma has arrived.

To its detractors, hippie-dippy Sonoma is a cultural no-man's land where oddball characters cavort in the hills. Of course, that's exactly how the locals like it. After all, only the scrappiest of pioneers made their way to this stretch of the remote West, digging in and adapting to its dramatically varied microclimates. In the generations that followed, hardworking farmers, largely Italian-American immigrants, worked the land for lumber and produce. Importing their family winemaking traditions from the old country, they discovered something vital: The local wine was pretty darn good. Visitors soon began to understand all the fuss over the region's soil and air, and all the care that's put into everything produced here, from lettuce to cheese and wine.

Though Sonoma is quickly becoming the next big thing, it still contains many hidden corners you'll feel as if you discovered on your own. And the locals, finding you off the beaten path, will welcome you with a wink, and let you imagine that you have.

1 | DAY ONE Pull the dark wooden shutters wide and step out onto the balcony of your understatedly chic room at the **Hotel Healdsburg (1)**. A trace of early morning fog envelopes the swank town's plaza and its thick canopy of ancient redwoods. Soon, the mist dissipates, and the green of the trees deepens. Below you, farm trucks purr along West Street, bound for the vineyards of the Alexander Valley, Russian River Valley or Dry Creek Valley.

Descend to the hotel's loftlike lobby and begin the day with a fitting breakfast of fresh granola and fruit. Out on Matheson Street, half a dozen spandex-clad athletes are preening themselves like baby-boomer birds of paradise, stretching for a day of biking on the winding roads of wine country. Before you embark on anything quite so ambitious, set out on foot and get your bearings in what's now known as "Beverly Healdsburg."

Stop in at **Copperfield's Books (2)**, an uncommonly good bookstore, which will reassure you that for all Sonoma County's beguiling beauty, the place has

▼ **CALISTOGA'S MUD BATH** // Getting Dirty //

Hop over the Mayacamas mountains to Calistoga, where the resort Solage Calistoga offers a modern take on the area's traditional mud baths, inspired by local Native Americans. (Robert Louis Stevenson and P.T. Barnum were early fans of the unusual treatment.)

STEP 1: Head to the property's sleek bathhouse and select your custom blend of essential oils and mud at the mud bar.

STEP 2: Enter a warm, private room and slather yourself with the stuff.

STEP 3: Twenty minutes later, just as your skin starts to itch, slip into a therapeutic mineral bath.

STEP 4: Nap time! Wrapped in a down comforter, indulge in a relaxing, full-body "sound experience" that's just as peculiar as you'd imagine.



LISA GOTTRICH
CHEESEMAKER, BOHEMIAN
CREAMERY // "I am sort of a
hunter-gatherer. I love to go
for a run along Dunes
Beach, and when I get to the
end and it's low tide I collect
mussels. Or I'll go mushroom
picking for chanterelles and
porcini up at Salt Point
State Park."





BOUNTY HUNTING Opposite, the unmistakable Hop Kiln Winery, and above, pomegranates and apples at the Jimtown Store



BIRON RICE
WINEMAKER, ARTISTS
WINERY // "I love taking
my kids to Snowbunny,
the organic yogurt shop
in Healdsburg. My order
is the original tart."

(3PD SONOMA)

brains as well. Pick up a copy of Steve Heimoff's *A Wine Journey along the Russian River* and thumb through it for background on the local soil. Go on to ponder the bountiful Californian lifestyle at **Plaza Gourmet (3)**, where you run your hands longingly over copper cookware and cheese boards repurposed from retired wine barrels.

Getting further into the foodie frame of mind (this is what people live and breathe in Sonoma), you saunter off the main square to peruse the pickle bar at **Love Farms (4)** organic market on

North Street, where the heirloom tomatoes on display are worthy of a photograph.

Arm yourself with a trusty Wine Road map and set off by car—in this case, a sleek Mercedes SLK 55 convertible—toward Highway 128, wending your way into the Alexander Valley to stop for lunch at the **Jimtown Store (5)**, a cheerful clapboard shop that first opened its doors in 1895 and is now refreshed and stocked with local wines. Order the house specialty, a Brie-and-chopped-olive sandwich on a baguette, to go.

Picnic supplies in hand, make your way to the eco-friendly, ultramodern **Ridge Vineyards (6)** on Lytton Springs Road. Take a seat at one of the teak tables out back, surrounded by oak barrel planters overflowing with fresh rosemary and wildflowers, the rolling vineyards just a few feet away. Request a flight of wines (a.k.a., a tasting selection) to accompany lunch, and dig in. (If you prefer to actually drink than to taste, you can always arrange for a bus tour through sonomawinetours.net.)

Afterward, head to the **Michel-Schlumberger Winery (7)** in nearby Dry Creek Valley, and join the 2 p.m. tour, during which you'll walk among the vines and ponder the meaning of *terroir* (or, heck, just enjoy the views from this quiet corner of the county). After a taste of their Deux Terres Cabernet Sauvignon, it's back over the charming Lambert Bridge and home to Healdsburg.

Sequester yourself in the hotel's hidden hot tub or indulge in a quick nap on your crisp Frette linens in preparation for an epic meal at the town's finest dining establishment, the decadent **Cyrus (8)**. With chef Douglas Keane, an alum of New York's Lespinasse, helming the kitchen, reservations are a must. However, if you haven't planned ahead (or aren't game for Keane's five-course culinary extravaganza), step up to the elegant bar and order a succulent porcini pot pie.

Take a postprandial stroll around the plaza before sinking into your plush bed and dreaming of repentance with plenty of aerobics...as soon as you get home, that is.

WHAT A CROCK Tony cookware shop Plaza Gourmet, and the goods within





FIELD OF DREAMS

A vineyard before harvest; Duskie Estes and John Stewart of Zazu; and a sampling of Zazu's Black Pig Salumi



3 | DAY THREE Rouse yourself for breakfast at the Farmhouse and then begin the winding drive west on River Road, where Sonoma gets just a little bit funkier.

Note the various trapped-in-time motels tucked into the shadows of enormous redwoods and feel happily relieved you've arranged fancier digs. At Guerneville, a sleepy relic of a logging town, turn toward **Armstrong Redwoods State Reserve (1)** and get out for a walk (you think all that cheese is going to metabolize itself?). Here in the dim woods, you're eerily alone. Gaze heavenward at the tops of the tallest trees, which are some 1,000 years old, and let yourself be dazzled. In the otherworldly green light, odd New Age philosophies somehow seem less odd.

Feeling ready for human contact (and a little worried about bears), you hop back into the Mercedes and wind along the Russian River, named for the Russian fur traders who came south from Alaska in the 19th century.

Drive through the settlements of Monte Rio and Duncans Mills, looking out for old wooden holiday cottages perched precipitously in the hills. When the mouth of the snaking Russian reaches the Pacific, you have arrived in Jenner, a tiny trapped-in-amber seaside town. Stop for lunch at the old-school **River's End (2)**, order the reliable West County burger with fried leeks and prep for the last leg of your remarkable road trip.

From Jenner, venture north on the perilous, cliff-hugging Highway 1. Stay on the lookout for stray cows (you're in ranch country now, and the hapless giants occasionally wander onto the road) until you reach **Salt Point State Park (3)** and Stump Beach, named for the giant felled trees that wash up here. Note the sign: "Strong Backwash. Sleeper Waves. Rip Currents." Watch as the surf tumbles through the kelp beds, the odd seal poking his head out of the water. The air is a fair bit cooler here than in Healdsburg, so you head back to the Mercedes and put up the top.

From Highway 1, you ramble through the dense redwoods on **Skaggs Springs Road (4)**, a byway so remote that signs warn you in advance to make sure you're gassed up. Finally, the road turns south, completing the loop through the wilds just in time for you to peel off your fleece and freshen up before a final dinner at the Farmhouse, with its well-deserved Michelin star.

In the softly lit dining room, under a mural depicting Russian River Valley farmers of yore, a cork pops and the waiter pours a glass of Roederer Estate sparkling wine from the nearby Anderson Valley. For dinner, it's Gruyère potato gratin and beef tenderloin served with beans from the Bartolomei's farm and a local Pinot noir. You sip and savor it, tasting rich cherries and mint, even a whiff of the salty ocean. You're beginning to get this *terroir* thing, after all. ■

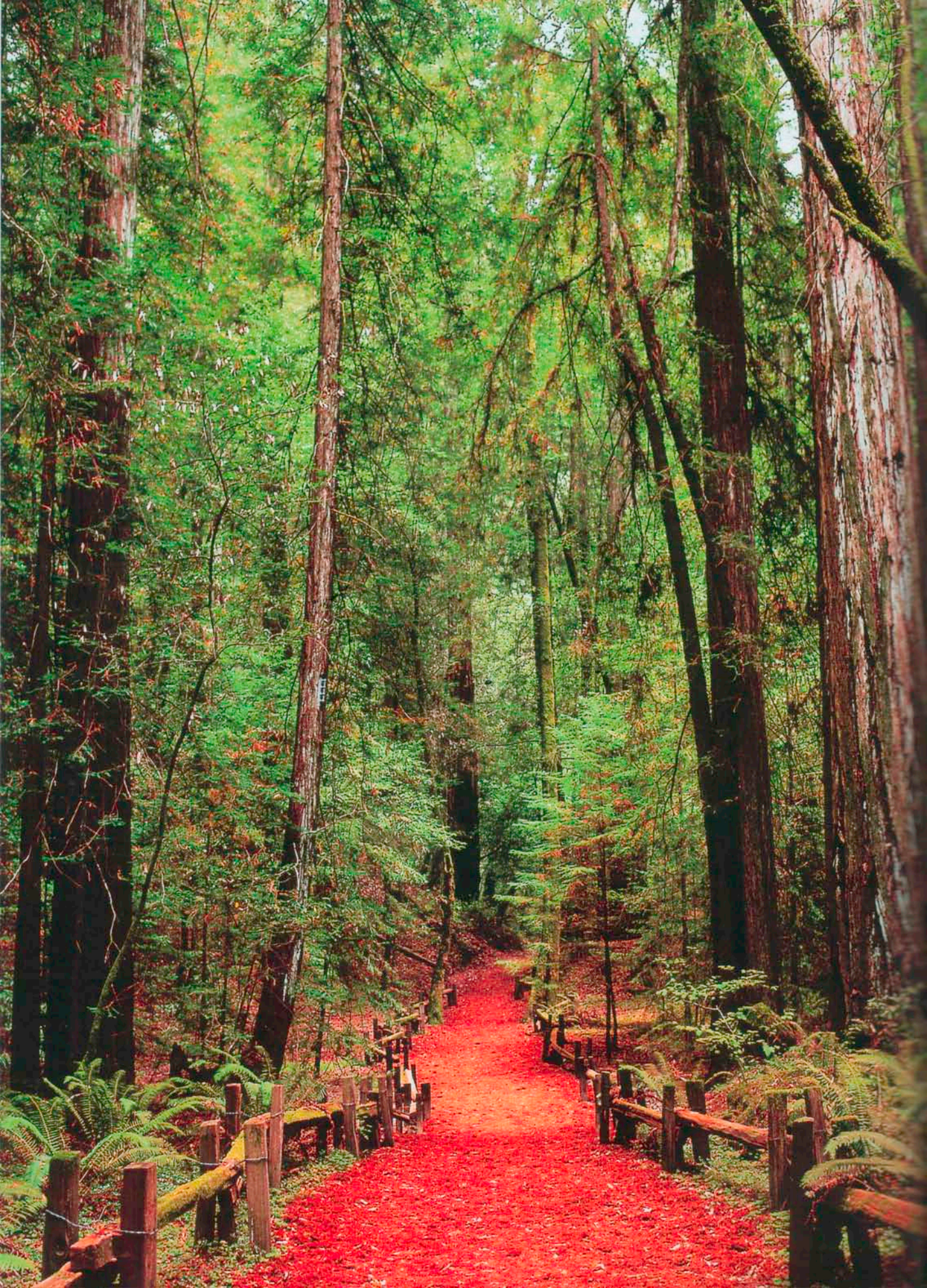


SAUL GROPMAN OWNER, CAFE LA HAYE, SONOMA // "Customers often ask me for wine tasting suggestions, and I tell them wineries that bring something new to the table. The Benziger family has made a dramatic commitment to bio-dynamic farming and gives a great tour and tasting that reflect their farming principles."



BOARDING PASS
United's hub at San Francisco International Airport makes getting to Sonoma so easy that it's just, well, perfect. ■

SARAH HORNE is now a living testament to the health benefits of wine.





FOREST FOR THE TREES Opposite, the Armstrong Redwoods State Reserve; above and right, Flying Goat Coffee



2 | DAY TWO Pack your bags, albeit reluctantly, and check out. Before you hit the road in your ragtop, stop for coffee and a buttery croissant at Healdsburg's **Flying Goat Coffee (1)**, where the potent brew is taken ever so seriously.

Begin your leisurely drive down Westside Road, stopping in at the **Hop Kiln Winery (2)** to see the striking landmark 100-year-old hop kiln building, which now houses the winery's tasting rooms. Take in the historic photos of the laborers of old, a reminder of when Sonoma was best known for its plum trees. Snag some of Hop Kiln's zinfandel-infused grainy mustard, and you're on your way.

Cruise into Graton (not too fast, or you'll miss it) and settle in for succulent Drakes Bay oysters on the half shell and a side of roasted blue potatoes at **Underwood (3)**, a cool bistro that's doing its part to transform what was a "rough little apple cannery town" into an urbane yet rustic destination for food and wine aficionados.

Drive north and check into a luxurious barn room at the **Farmhouse Inn (4)**, where sister-and-brother owners Catherine and Joe Bartolomei have created a stylish Russian River Valley idyll. Ask the concierge to set up a visit to the pleasantly rickety **American Wine Building (5)** in Forestville to check out the work of the vintners behind Arnot-Roberts and Wind Gap wines, two local labels that have earned the seal of approval of the inn's in-house master sommelier, Geoff Kruth.

After chatting with the winemakers about their modern take on traditional barrelmaking and wine-stomping (and meeting the curious winery dog), head back to the Farmhouse and take a dip in the pool. Then stop by reception and help yourself to the "bath bar," a complimentary array of salt scrubs and milk baths, and have a soak in the tub. You've earned it.

As the sun hangs low in the sky, hit the road for a low-key dinner at **Zazu (6)**, an old-fashioned roadhouse-turned-carnivore's-delight. Start with a selection of the Black Pig Salumi and move on to a hand-thrown MacBryde Farm fig pizza and a tasting flight of Russian River Valley pinot noir, the region's celebrity grape.

Head back to the inn and inhale the cool night air, the scent of the fragrant herb garden and the rich, silty river in the distance. It will clear your head. It's perfect sleeping weather.

▼ **INTO THE WOODS //** High Camp at Bohemian Grove // For two weeks each July, the members of the mysterious men's-only Bohemian Club head to a closely guarded 2,700-acre compound off of Monte Rio's Bohemian Highway. Staff members are forced to sign nondisclosure agreements and get their hands scanned for entry, but several journalists have infiltrated the top-secret confab over the years to peek at members as they frolic in the Redwoods, perform skits and engage in a ceremony known as the Cremation of Care. The difference between the campers in this wooded glen and the rest of the hippies dancing in the forest in Sonoma? This group includes some of the most powerful men in American business and politics: think Colin Powell, Arnold Schwarzenegger, George Bush (both of them) and a sprinkling of Rockefellers and Forbesees. If your invite got lost in the mail, hey, there's always the nearby Russian River Beer Revival.



BETH COSTA, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF THE WINE ROAD

"I can't think of a better way to start the morning or recharge after a day of wine tasting than with a latte from Flying Goat Coffee."







THOSE THREE PERFECT DAYS

DAY ONE

- (1) **Hotel Healdsburg** 25 Matheson St.; Tel: 800-889-7188
- (2) **Copperfield's Books** 104 Matheson St.; Tel: 707-433-9270
- (3) **Plaza Gourmet** 108 Matheson St.; Tel: 707-433-7116
- (4) **Love Farms** 126 North St.; Tel: 707-433-6274
- (5) **Jimtown Store** 6706 Highway 128; Tel: 707-433-1212
- (6) **Ridge Vineyards** 650 Lytton Springs Rd.; Tel: 707-433-7721
- (7) **Michel-Schlumberger Winery** 4155 Wine Creek Rd.; Tel: 707-433-7427
- (8) **Cyrus** 29 North St.; Tel: 707-433-3311

DAY TWO

- (1) **Flying Goat Coffee** 419 Center St.; Tel: 707-575-1202
- (2) **Hop Kiln Winery** 6050 Westside Rd.; Tel: 707-433-6491
- (3) **Underwood** 9113 Graton Rd.; Tel: 707-823-7023
- (4) **Farmhouse Inn** 7871 River Rd., Forestville; Tel: 707-887-3300
- (5) **American Wine Building** 6450 First St., Forestville
- (6) **Zazu** 3535 Guerneville Rd; Tel: 707- 523-4814

DAY THREE

- (1) **Armstrong Redwoods State Reserve** 17000 Armstrong Woods Rd., Tel: 707-869-2015
- (2) **River's End** 11048 Highway 1; Tel: 707-865-2484
- (3) **Salt Point State Park** 25050 Highway 1; Tel: 707-847-3221
- (4) **Skagg Springs Road**