

The Best Napa Weekend Getaway

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Bryce Wiatrak



Photo by John Russo

A cottage at Carneros Resort and Spa

A mere hour from San Francisco, Carneros straddles Napa and Sonoma and is home to some of wine country's best tasting rooms, restaurants, and stays.

Heading north from [San Francisco](#) to wine country, some of the earliest signs of vines come from one of California's most charming wine-growing regions: Carneros. An appellation traversing the southern portions of [Napa](#) and [Sonoma](#), Carneros rests just above the San Pablo Bay, whose cooling influence provides a haven for pinot noir, chardonnay, and sparkling wine production. Though some of this appellation sustained fire damage from the October wildfires in Northern California, it's open for business and just as wonderful as ever.

Despite the pedigree of so many of these vineyards and the proximity to the grand tasting rooms of Highway 29, the ethos in Carneros is quainter, more agrarian, and less overdone than what you might experience elsewhere in Napa or Sonoma. If traffic is good, Carneros is a mere hour drive from San Francisco—the easiest wine country getaway for visitors and locals alike. Here's where to eat, drink, sleep, and explore with 36 hours in Carneros.

DAY ONE

Taste: Saintsbury

10 a.m.

A tasting at Saintsbury encompasses everything I love about the Carneros ethos—beautifully crafted California wines without pretention. There's no ornate tasting room, but rather a bucolic courtyard and a friendly staff, and in the winter months, they may move you into the barn. The emphasis here is on pinot noir and chardonnay, and winemaker Tim Colla crafts several renditions of each from a series of top sites extending along the North Coast. Guests can sit down and enjoy the current releases, but consider opting for the library tasting, where you can track how well these wines can age by trying several vintages from a couple of select vineyards.

Eat: The Fremont Diner

12 p.m.

It's easy to drive past the Fremont Diner, but that would be a mistake. This unassuming roadside eatery is a wine country icon—offering breakfast all day, comfort food, and a sizeable selection of California craft beers. This isn't the place to count calories, and the food is wholly gratifying. Sitting out on the back patio with a pile of French toast and a skillet full of mac 'n' cheese on the side makes for the perfect intermission to a long day of tasting.

Taste: Domaine Carneros

1:30 p.m.

Ever since its inception in 1987, Domaine Carneros has been a leader in top-quality California sparkling wine. That should be no surprise because the property was principally founded by the renowned champagne house Taittinger. The building draws inspiration from Taittinger's Château de la Marquetterie in Épernay, complete with a grand staircase and French-style gardens leading up to the property. A tasting here always feels decadent, but those looking to seriously indulge can opt for "The Ultimate Chips and Dip," which pairs Domaine Carneros's top sparklers with potato chips, crème fraîche and three selections of Tsar Nicoulai Caviar.

Taste: Hyde Vineyards

3 p.m.

If Carneros were to have a "*grand cru*" vineyard, it would likely be Hyde. Larry Hyde founded the property in 1979, back when most of Carneros was covered in orchards and grazing pastures. Situated near Carneros's eastern edge, Hyde Vineyards has provided fruit to some of California's most revered producers, including Paul Hobbs, Ramey, Kistler, and Joseph Phelps. In 2009, the Hyde family started their own eponymous label, and just this year opened a tasting room by appointment in the style of a Polish manor. Its pinot noirs and chardonnays are both exceptional, but be sure to try the merlot—a wine of earthiness and restraint that serves as a testament to this grape's promise in the region.

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Stay: Carneros Resort and Spa

Simple luxury is an apt description for much of the Carneros experience and one that is epitomized by the Carneros Resort and Spa. It boasts every comfort desired from a top-flight Napa hotel, without ever feeling overwrought or pretentious. The Carneros Resort is divided into 100 cottages, suites, and residences, each embodying an elegant California countryside aesthetic, with such amenities as indoor-outdoor showers and private gardens. Cottages are organized into “neighborhoods” named after some of the plant life you may encounter in the area (I stayed in “Juniper”). As enticing as it may be to never leave the comfort of your room, it’s worth exploring every corner of this sprawling property. After you borrow a complimentary bike from the front desk, your first stop should be the adults-only hilltop pool. Here you can watch the sun fall over the Carneros hills (actually, Hyde Vineyards specifically), cocktail in hand. Next door, you can book a spa appointment, with such wine-centric options as the “Late Summer Fig and Chardonnay Treatment.”



Photo by John Russo

A cottage at Carneros Resort

Eat: FARM

7:30 p.m.

There are plenty of excellent dining options nearby in downtown Napa, but the Carneros Resort houses a selection of wonderful restaurants, the flagship being FARM. As the name suggests, the restaurant focuses on seasonal, farm-to-table cuisine, alongside a lengthy wine list that includes both domestic favorites and international gems. After a long day of

indulgence, you may be tempted to go à la carte, but the tasting menu is worth making room for. You'll experience five courses that showcase both the bounty of California ingredients and the creative skillfulness of chef Aaron Meneghelli. Plus, you'll want the added time to enjoy the minimalist barn-chic ambience. When you're finished with your petits fours, wander over to the bocce courts for a round or to the covered terrace for a nightcap and a game of Connect Four or Jenga.

DAY TWO

Eat: Boon Fly Café

10 a.m.

I have to warn you—it's going to be very difficult saying goodbye to the Carneros Resort. A final, early morning trip to the hot tub overlooking the vineyards is highly recommended. But before you hit the road, grab brunch at the Boon Fly Café. Housed in a modern play on the red farmhouse, the Boon Fly Café serves up country kitchen fare with a rustic contemporary style. If you're still stuffed from last night, go for the red quinoa and egg white bowl. Still, it behooves you to make room for the Boon Fly Donuts—these tasty guys will disappear more quickly from your plate than you'd like to admit.

Taste: Artesa

11:30 a.m.

For a taste of Spain in California wine country, stop by Artesa. Owned by the cava producer Codorníu, whose family history of winemaking dates back to 1551, Artesa incorporates Spanish tradition into each visit. The newly renovated tasting salon is covered in Catalanian tilework, opening to a terrace with sweeping vistas above Carneros's gentle hills. Guests can select a variety of food pairing experiences, from cheese to chocolate to tapas. The pintxos pairing draws from Basque cuisine, where small bites are served on skewers. Make sure to taste the albariño as well as "Tradició" (a blend of graciano and tempranillo)—two wines from Spanish grape varieties that exemplify how well Artesa straddles its two homes. Worth noting: This winery narrowly escaped burning in October's fire—which is yet another reason to raise a glass here.

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Experience: di Rosa

1 p.m.

Di Rosa opened its doors for the first time since sustaining fire damage in the October wildfires on Thursday, November 16. It's one of Napa's greatest treasures—and not a drop of wine is made here. The di Rosa houses one of the most comprehensive collections of Northern California art, spread across 217 acres with three galleries and a sculpture meadow. The late Rene di Rosa spent much of his life acquiring the works of Bay Area artists, and today the di Rosa serves as his legacy for decades of work as an art advocate. The pieces are quirky and inspiring, spanning various media and finding a way into every pocket of the old di Rosa home.

My favorite piece? The “Angel-Go-Round” by David Ireland, a dynamic installation that juxtaposes questions of religion and technology. To see the whole property, you must go on a guided tour, so be sure to plan accordingly. Make sure to visit this treasure and support it post-fire.

Taste: Donum Estate

3 p.m.

The di Rosa isn't Carneros's only exceptional art collection. The Donum Estate is home to a remarkable collection of international sculpture works, which are interspersed throughout the property, including pieces by Fernando Botero, Keith Haring, Ai Weiwei, Yayoi Kusama, and several others. Make sure to navigate your way through Gao Weigang's "Maze," as well as climb the hill and see Richard Hudson's "Love Me," a massive heart that reflects and distorts the image of the vineyards below. Keep an eye open for wildlife—the property sits within a migratory path and makes for excellent bird-watching. As if Donum weren't wondrous enough, the wines are also fantastic. The Donum home was opened this past September as a new hospitality space, open by appointment. A tasting here is a lesson in three of California's best terroirs for pinot noir: Carneros, Sonoma's Russian River Valley, and Mendocino's Anderson Valley. The house style is rather fleshy and round, but for those seeking a leaner pinot can try the Ten Oaks, picked earlier than its primary Russian River bottling. Before you reluctantly return to San Francisco, look carefully at the parking lot for a palm tree that's not like the others (hint: it's Douglas White's inconspicuous sculpture "Black Palm").