

Beyond Wine: What's New in California's Napa Valley

BY BEVERLY MANN

Napa Valley conjures up a matchless climate of sunny days, fresh air, and endless stretches of verdant vineyards and wineries. Some of the country's best wines can be sampled by just a stroll through the wide range of tasting rooms in the boutique towns of Calistoga, Yountville, and Napa that have blossomed in the past 5 to 10 years.

However, Napa Valley offers much more than wine. It is a place of healing with some of the best spas and treatments. Also a growing arts community, Napa attracts artists and artisans from all over the world. Everywhere I turned, there were outdoor sculptures and galleries lining the main city streets. The area has also become a culinary capital with more Michelin star restaurants per capita than anywhere else in the country.

A recent Napa Valley getaway, only a one-and-a-half hour car ride from San Francisco, proved to be a cornucopia of surprises—



The Luxe Calistoga manages to blend an upscale, contemporary feel with simple elegance in a homey environment.

with lots of new additions to the arts, restaurant, and spa scenes.

Start With Calistoga Pampering

My two-night stay at the newly renovated Luxe Calistoga exemplified how a B&B can create an upscale, contemporary feel and simple elegance to a homey environment. The establishment is run by two well-traveled men, Brent and Chris, who have a love of people, places, and food.

I was welcomed with generosity and graciousness in a well-appointed room, where Woodhouse Chocolate from St. Helena was at my bedside. From 4 p.m. to 6 p.m. six each day, there were a variety of gourmet cheeses and fine wines available for guests.

Most impressive were the



The Fish Story Restaurant in Napa features yummy selections like (top L) the Heirloom Tomato Salad with grilled watermelon and pine nuts, (top R) fresh salmon dishes, and Upside-Down Cake (L).

artful breakfasts enjoyed on an expansive, white veranda. One morning, the sunlight poured across my home-baked scones,

fresh berry parfait, and crispy crab cakes, while I relaxed to the soothing background music permeating the patio.



The decorative and delicious Beet Carpaccio at Brannan's in Calistoga is a special dish prepared by Chef Jon Korsorek, pioneer of gourmet street carts in East Bay.

Right next door sits the year-old Calistoga Goddess, a petite spa run by 26-year veteran and local Barbara Rae De La Rue, a warm person who treats her customers with TLC and affordable prices. After her hour European facial, I walked out glowing.

Another new boutique spa in Calistoga is the Mais Oui Massage & Spa Train located at the historic Train Depot where Pullman rail cars have been converted into small shops. I was given a round-trip ticket for a 100-minute signature package, which included an exfoliating scrub, a moisturizing honey facial, and an ultra-relaxing olive oil body massage.

Appointments are recommended but some walk-ins are accepted. Note that there are no showers, bathrooms, or other spa facilities here, which keeps the prices at a reasonable rate.

On the dining front, one of the newest restaurants, JoLe, has risen in popularity fairly quickly with its creative tapas dishes. I lingered over a flavorful lamb and scallop dish that was quite filling. The desserts, especially the coconut cream pie, were more than ample and served as a good finale to the meal.

Brannan's has always been a favorite dining experience of mine when visiting Calistoga. The restaurant now has a new addition, Chef Jon Korsorek, the pioneer for gourmet street carts in the East Bay.

The beet carpaccio, finely sliced like petals over a bed of goat cheese and pistachio nuts with a bouquet of mixed greens in the center to simulate a flower, was a



Beverly Mann
MANN ABOUT TOWN



This delectable breakfast was presented on the veranda at the Luxe Calistoga Bed & Breakfast.



This Asian-style breakfast is one of the unusual morning repasts that the Hopper Restaurant at Hotel Yountville conjures up for guests.

meal in itself. Korsorek has also created a mint-chip ice cream with cocoa beans that cools the palate after a hearty meal. He makes his own mozzarella cheese, soft and creamy to taste.

A good way to end the evening was to walk off the meal and discover the decorative murals of the town painted by noted artist Carlo Marchiori, whose gallery sits at the town's entrance. Don't miss a visit to the artist's awesome Villa Ca'Toga Tour, embellished in trompe l'oeil frescos. Tours are only given on Saturdays at 11 a.m., May through Oct.

PLEASE SEE NAPA ON B2



Wine and cheese selections are offered daily at the Luxe Calistoga.

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