

# real weddings

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our Local Wedding Planning  
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dazzling  
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THEM LOCALLY!

Presenting our cover model  
finalists: Nicole, Sarah and Jillian!  
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# LOVE *among* THE VINES

BY JENN THORNTON

The quixotic gardens, mossy tree canopies and well-tended vineyards of northern California's scenic Napa Valley set a story-book backdrop for *Happily Ever to Begin* in earnest. But the newly wed do not have to be connoisseurs of fine wine to enjoy it (though if they are, they surely will); foodies savor the region's five-star cuisine, spa-goers find restorative respite in its mineral hot springs and purifying spas, and the hearts of hot air balloonists soar over breathtaking views. With too many honeymoon possibilities to count, *Real Weddings* tempts you with just a taste of our favorite grape escapes.

## ST. HELENA

**Destination:** Meadowood, 800-458-8080, meadowood.com

**What to Expect:** Quiet hand-in-hand ambles through densely-forested but immaculately-groomed terrain; worlds-away respite in five-star accommodations (and when we say five-star, we actually mean ten-star); a service-first approach to high-end hospitality (you will be spoiled appropriately and often); the Michelin-rated restaurant; indulgent spa services; golf and croquet-glorious-croquet—all make Meadowood undisputed wine country royalty (you will bow down in grateful amazement). For exceptional service and top-tier accommodations alone, Meadowood tops our list of dream destinations, but the resort's endless pampering extras—such as the sweetheart artisan spread of afternoon coffee, tea, cider and warm buttery cookies—seal the deal.

**The Suite Life:** Expect extreme pampering at all levels of accommodation. Eighty-five elegantly appointed (but not stodgy) hideaway cottages, suites and lodges offer a woodsy escape and the privacy prized by peace-seeking honeymooners. Stone fireplaces and the gentle pitter-patter of falling raindrops make the resort an excellent place for off-season romance—not to mention an in-suite dinner by firelight.

**The Sipping Point:** Raise your glass to Meadowood's signature wine education program, which proffers expert instruction on various aspects of viticulture by the resort's wine educator, Gilles de Chambure. Guided wine excursions and elegantly prepared picnics are spirited ways to experience Napa Valley beyond overcrowded winery tasting rooms.





The Fairmont Sonoma Mission Inn



Calistoga Ranch



The Carneros Inn

**SONOMA**

**Destination:** The Fairmont Sonoma Mission Inn and Spa, 707-938-9000, Fairmont.com/Sonoma

**What to Expect:** Despite having lingered in the large shadow cast by Napa Valley's sister communities, Sonoma is no Cinderella after midnight. In fact, many would fairly argue that it is the glass slipper of the entire region. Regardless of where Sonoma ranks in this ongoing popularity contest, fairytale dreams come true at the Fairmont Sonoma Mission Inn and Spa—a refined oasis with an amazing, must-experience spa that offers honeymooners advanced therapies that will leave them in ahhh. Ideally and scenically situated in proximity to premiere wineries and signature activities—the Inn is known for its 18-hole championship golf course—this amenity-rich property offers everything honeymooners could possibly desire.

**The Suite Life:** Honeymooners who reserve a Country Junior Suite with a Jane Austin-inspired garden view will toast their remark-

ably sound decision with a glass of wine poured from the complimentary bottle that greets them upon arrival. These aesthetically-pleasing suites offer Provence-style interiors, fireplaces, Jacuzzi tubs, spacious sitting areas and atmosphere-inducing dimmer-controlled lights.

**The Sipping Point:** If spirits are what you're after, no problem. Head to the Fairmont's gorgeous lobby, which features plush seating areas, high ceilings and an abundance of stone that harkens the majesty of a centuries-old castle, for late-afternoon wine tasting.

**CALISTOGA**

**Destination:** Calistoga Ranch, 800-942-4220, calistogaranch.com

**What to Expect:** Pastoral Calistoga is not only beautiful, but not the least bit pretentious. Wine country uppity-ups tend to overlook this enchanting corner of the region, which is just fine with locals who enjoy their separate-but-more-than-equal status and celebrate it with luxurious charm. Those seeking the ultimate in accommodation will find it at Calistoga Ranch. Streamlined and sexy, yet warm and intimate, this modern-designed property is a stunning example of rigorous architecture and a solid reminder that contradictions can be harmonious partners. Bocce ball courts, heated swimming pools and sundecks, and a private lake and stream complement Calistoga Ranch's incredible spa.

**The Suite Life:** Indoor and outdoor living spaces; plush linens and down bedding that make for the best sleeping arrangements of one's life; outdoor rain showers; original artwork; cutting-edge technology and custom all-natural bath and body products are just a few enticements that round out a Ranch reservation.

**The Sipping Point:** Not only does Calistoga Ranch offer its very own vintage-stocked wine cave, it also has a vineyard, a private wine label and hosts wine seminars and classes.

**NAPA**

**Destination:** The Carneros Inn, 707-299-4900, thecarnerosinn.com

**What to Expect:** Honeymooners looking for ethereal escape will find it at the more-romantic-than-you-could-possibly-imagine Carneros Inn, where flocks of wine lovers come for beautiful vistas and a vintage experience without peer. This incredibly intimate property surrounded by 27 acres of apple orchards and grape vines reflects the countryside that envelops it and the beautiful rural farmland upon which it sits. Three full-service restaurants, including the five-star FARM; a gourmet market stocked with artisan fare and an espresso bar; a post office and inspired concierge service are just some of what makes the Carneros Inn an ideal spot for discerning honeymooners. The property's spa, which overlooks bucolic gardens, offers a comprehensive menu of healing treatments that incorporates indigenous natural ingredients designed to rejuvenate the mind, body and spirit.

**The Suite Life:** All highly secluded cottages and suites are, in a word (though many could be used), amazing. Suites offer private retreat with wood-burning fireplaces, spacious living areas, state-of-the-art entertainment systems, bathrooms with soaking tubs, indoor and alfresco showers, a large outdoor patio and lovely garden views.

**The Sipping Point:** Honeymooners are encouraged to pick up a Carneros boutique wine and personalized picnic basket from the property's market to be enjoyed in the delightful garden setting of their cottage or suite—because there is no better incentive to go anywhere else (trust us). ☺

For more honeymoon destination ideas, visit [realweddingsmag.com](http://realweddingsmag.com).