16 secrets to aging well
great advice for body and soul

GIRLFRIEND GETAWAYS
WHY YOU NEED TO TAKE ONE

PLUS
NAPA 3 WAYS
GRAPES, MUD AND MORE
INDIA FOR BEGINNERS
PLAN YOUR DREAM TRIP
wine country

3 ways

by Liz Woodson

AUTUMN MEANS HARVEST TIME IN NAPA AND SONOMA, CALIFORNIA, prime time for visitors wanting a peek into the production process at area wineries. But the appeal of Napa and Sonoma Valleys goes way beyond vineyard tours and tasting rooms. The region’s tourist industry began with another natural lure: mineral-rich mud baths. Today, wine country chefs are on the leading edge of the slow-food movement — and this farm-fresh produce is extending to the spa scene as well. From grapes to mud to straight-from-the-farm scrubs, here are three ways to tap into the region’s unique brand of wellness, with picks for any budget.
the vines

THE WHAT
The fruits of the vine aren't just good for drinking, they're also great for the skin. Vinotherapy — the term assigned to the practice of using grape byproducts for beauty purposes — is relatively new, originating in France in the late 1990s. But spas in this corner of the world have taken it up with great enthusiasm, in part because it's another way to connect visitors with the region's wine heritage. While we're all for local color, there's an even better story here to tell: Grape leftovers from winemaking — the skin, pulp and seeds — are very high in vitamins, minerals, proteins and antioxidants, including the potently anti-aging, anti-inflammatory polyphenols (which also promote new cell growth). In fact, some research indicates that the antioxidants found particularly in grape-seed oil are even more powerful than the dermatologist-beloved vitamins C and E (though grape-seed oil also contains vitamin A, among other beneficial ingredients). This means your skin will love being exposed to grapes just as much as your palate.

THE STEAL
The downside of some vinotherapy-inspired scrubs: Exfoliating blends that use grape pulp and seeds can sometimes stain the skin. But the new Scrub Bar at Yountville's Villagio Inn & Spa lets guests get all the benefits of the fruit in a custom-made scrub without the potential red. Therapists help guests blend their own body scrubs by mixing a skin-perfecting exfoliant (dead sea salt, coffee grinds and crushed oats are all on offer) with a choice of a hydrating base (we recommend the grape-seed oil). Guests can also choose to add a scented essential oil (sandalwood or rose, for example), along with a skin-benefiting enhancement (lavender petals, green tea, etc.). After concocting their perfect mix, guests are led to a wet room where an attendant rubs them down with the blend and washes them off with a Vichy shower. The leftover scrub is then packed up for the guest to take home.

It's all in keeping with the 112-room Tuscan-inspired hotel, which strives to put a unique yet accessible spin on the wine country experience. When guests check into the Inn, spread out over a series of low-slung, terra cotta-roofed buildings on Yountville's main drag, they're presented with a complimentary bottle of wine, and a free champagne breakfast buffet is included each morning. We also love the V Wine Cellar, located in the hotel's adjacent shopping complex, which simplifies the wine selection process by bringing wine tastings and even wine-blending seminars into a cozy lounge setting. And all this for a rate that's less than other notable Napa hotels. 30 minutes, $75; rooms from $370, villagio.com

THE SPLURGE
Meadowood first opened as a country club on a prime stretch on north valley in 1963. Some 48 years later, the property now encompasses 250 acres of tennis courts, fairways, croquet lawns, hiking trails, swimming pools and 85 rooms in a collection of shingle cottages, which sometimes seem like they'd be more at home on a Nantucket beach than in the woods of St. Helena. The air here can feel positively old-world — guests can tee off at the nine-hole golf course using hickory clubs, whites are required on the croquet lawn and afternoon wine tastings in the main lodge are held around a grand piano. Despite its old-fashioned leanings, there's nothing at all conventional about the spa. Treatments like the Grape Seed Antioxidant Facial use the high-quality, homegrown line NV Organics, which combines the latest research in vinotherapy and only uses regionally sourced, organically grown grapes. The Cabernet Crush exfoliates with grape-seed polish made from cabernet grapes before a grape-seed oil massage. When you blend top-of-the-line potions and lotions with some of the most skilled therapists in the valley, you have our idea of the perfect pairing. 90 minutes, $190 (for facial); rooms from $475, meadowood.com

THE TAKE-HOME
All of the grape's goods are most potently found in the grape seed, and the best way to get them is with the oil cold-pressed from the hard kernel. Most products in the NV Organics line incorporate grape-seed oil, but our favorite is, hands down, the Antioxidant Grape Seed Extract Facial Massage Oil. Not only will your skin benefit from all of the oil's antioxidant properties, but it also contains a high concentration of linoleic acid, a fatty acid that preserves the health of skin cell membranes. A healthy cell membrane helps your skin lock in moisture. Grape-seed oil is also quickly and deeply absorbed into skin, which makes it an ideal hydrator. Use it in place of your moisturizer, or layer it underneath for an extra hydrating and protecting kick. 2 oz., $14.50, nvorganics.net