VIRTUOSO LIFE

Southern Sampler

20 RESTAURANTS TO TRY, Y'ALL
- CHARLESTON
- NEW ORLEANS
- NASHVILLE
- ATLANTA

Plus: CELEBRITY CHEFS AT SEA • NAPA'S NEW WINEMAKERS • BERLIN DINING
The Young Ones
Get to know Napa's next generation of winemakers.

BY MARIKA CAIN

PHOTOGRAPHY BY ERIN KUNKEL
Our Tesla model S glides along a sinuous Howell Mountain back road, its atlas-size touchscreen tracking our progress through stands of live oak. At an iron gate, the driver punches in the keypad code he knows by heart. The gate swings open. At the top of the drive, Eddie Clark, 31, movie-star tan in cargo shorts and dusty work boots, greets us with a grin and a NorCal drawl. He leads the way to a tasting table on the patio overlooking Amizetta Estate Winery’s hillside vineyards and the Napa Valley beyond. Everything about the scene—the car-commercial arrival, the insider access, the young proprietor, and the round and fruity cabernet—encapsulates the new Napa, where a changing of the guard is under way.

If the 1976 Judgment of Paris—in which California wines bested French vintages for the first time in a blind tasting—marked one dramatic turning point for Napa, the rise of a new generation of winemakers is bringing a subtler transformation to the valley that turns out Robert Parker-pleasing vintages. Long gone are the Wild West days of the late 1970s, when a retired Silicon Valley cowboy could plunk down ten grand an acre for a hillside on Howell Mountain and start churning out cabs. With prime Napa real estate selling for around $300,000 per acre today and planting highly restricted, the easiest way in is through a big lottery win—or as is more common, family ties. And really, who would choose radiology or accounting when the family business involves the good-life cornucopia of great wine and fine food in a legendary setting?

Michelle Marré, a San Francisco-based Virtuoso travel advisor who knows Napa well, sees several trends among wine country’s younger generation. “A lot of them are consulting winemakers for big wineries and make their own wine on their own time. They’re generally less interested in Parker scores and points,” she says. “And many travel not just to France and those old-world destinations, but also to Australia and South America for inspiration.”

Likewise, scions of established wine families are turning out their own smaller-production, often more affordable releases. The Mondavi sisters have their Dark Matter zinfandel and cabernet sauvignon, with a star-spangled skull label. Carlo and Dante Mondavi’s currently sold out Raen pinots are a bright mineral departure from the flavors of their family’s more mass-market wines. Will Harlan, son of Harlan Estate magnate Bill, is producing his Mascot cabernet sauvignon, a relatively less pricey alternative—or maybe a gateway wine—to his family’s flagship, priced-for-investment reds, which can sell for ten times Mascot’s going rate of around $85 to $150. There’s a thriving Next Generation in Wine group for young winemakers, and in May the New York Times Magazine dedicated upward of 4,600 words to examining young winemaker Rajat Parr’s In Pursuit of Balance group, which promotes a new-school approach to winemaking that doesn’t pander to the point system.

Even Meadowood, the private club and resort that hosts Napa’s prestigious annual wine auction, with its dedicated croquet pro and $33,000 annual membership fee, is getting in on the updates. A recent guest-room refresh transformed them into airy cream-and-earth-tone retreats—albeit formal enough still that the bathroom amenity kits include collar stays. In 2016, the
property will present its third annual Young Winemakers’ Dinner, showcasing new talent from around the region. And some whisper that its three-Michelin-star restaurant, where chef Christopher Kostow turns out 15-course tasting menus that look like the work of gourmet flower fairies, surpasses The French Laundry.

I spent a day in wine country, meeting a few of Napa’s new guard. With 100-plus wineries in Napa – closer to 800 if you include Sonoma and other surrounding areas – a bit of guidance from a well-connected travel advisor makes the mission successful. Some of the best wineries are secreted in the hills, open by appointment only, and a world away from traffic-clogged Highway 29 and its 75,000-case-per-year tasting dens. Take the following itinerary as a snapshot of Napa right now – and a jumping-off point for exploring wine country’s youthful side.

**FIRST STOP**

**Keever**

**From growers to winners**

What began as Bill and Olga Keever’s retirement plan to grow and sell grapes quickly morphed into a full-blown wine-producing operation – and a natural bridge into the industry for their children. Ashley Keever, 33, runs the winery’s hospitality and administrative side, and her brother, Jason, 38, is the cellar master. (Consulting winemaker Colia Welch crafts Keever’s three wines: a well-regarded cabernet sauvignon, the Bordeaux-inspired Inspirado blend, and a sauvignon blanc.) Ashley’s daughter, Lily, spent the first eight months of her life in the winery’s office while her mother worked. “The goal is to keep it going,” Ashley says of the 2,000-case-per-year operation. From Keever’s outdoor terrace, looking east across Yountville toward Gina Gallo’s home (the former Mondavi estate) – a view that’s all vineyards, tawny hills, and green pastures – it’s easy to see why.

**NEXT UP**

**Amizetta**

**Brother act**

“Younger winemakers are making more approachable wines because we want to drink them now,” Amizetta winemaker Eddie Clark says. And now – around noon on a cloudless day with views stretching out to Lake Hennessey – seems as good a time as any to sit back on the patio next to a handful of vines that are just a little younger than Eddie and sample two of the winery’s four reds and a sauvignon blanc.

Eddie’s older brothers, Perry and Spencer Jr., oversee the

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**NAPA KNOW-HOW**

**VIRTUOSSO ADVISOR TIPS FOR A SUCCESSFUL TASTING TOUR.**

Virtuoso advisor and wine collector Michelle Murre spent six months living in Yountville just to get to know Napa better. Here are her tips for planning a successful stay.

* Plan trips early. Napa has been incredibly booked year-round. With no snow in Tahoe last year, locals came even in January.

* Have an idea about what you want to see. How many wineries do you want to visit per day? What styles of wine do you like? Are you looking to buy or just taste? Know your preferences and how much activity you want to fit in.

* Think beyond winetasting. The area offers great cooking classes, demonstrations at the Culinary Institute of America’s Greystone campus, wine-blending courses, hot-air ballooning, hiking, biking, and much more.

* Check out 750 Wines, a fantastic Saint Helena shop that focuses on up-and-coming, small-production wineries. It’s a great way to taste bottles from smaller winemakers you might not otherwise.
business and agricultural sides of the operation, respectively. While control of the winery—which mom Amizetta and dad Spencer wrangled out of 40 unplanted acres of Napa land they bought in 1979—is transitioning from parents to children, the tasting room retains the grand, comfortable feeling of an established family home. Behind its bright-red double doors, a worn Persian carpet adorns the wood floor, a magnum draped with medals stands on one side of the room, and a chocolate Lab with a graying muzzle wanders in and out. Inside the bottles, though, changes are afoot as Eddie Clark tweaks Amizetta’s flavors. “My dad likes our old style,” he says. “But most people like our new style more. It’s rounder and fruitier.” Sales have grown rapidly since the change—and Amizetta’s wine club membership has tripled.

STOP THREE
Upstart Crow The newcomers

Blake Chambers, wearing flip-flops and khakis, hurries through feeding his chickens as we pull in at Upstart Crow Wine on the valley floor outside Saint Helena. A relative Napa newcomer, San Diego-born Chambers and his business partner, Hayden Morris, both 32, launched their first vintage in 2009 from a 1968 Airstream trailer. The pair hauled the spruced-up land yacht along the California coast, hosting 30 tasting events in 30 days. They returned with empty pallets and a loyal following.

Named in honor of young William Shakespeare’s chilly reception from the establishment of his day, Upstart Crow’s scrappy approach extends to a bartering ethos: In raised garden beds marked with the names of local venues such as Goose & Gander and Calistoga Ranch, the winery grows produce for area chefs. In exchange, each chef hosts a lunch or dinner for Upstart Crow’s wine club throughout the year. Chambers also scored the four-acre property’s 300 olive trees in trade for two pickup trucks. Seated at a barn-door-size table for an alfresco lunch—takeout from Bruschetteria, the Cliff family’s (of Cliff Bar fame) food truck—we sip Upstart’s $38 rosé and $55 Napa Blend. The winery, which sources grapes from around the area, also produces a cabernet sauvignon and will soon release a Sonoma pinot noir—and they’re on the hunt for a chardonnay vineyard.

More wine country up-and-comers.

MEMENTO MORI
Winemaker Sam Kaplan’s day job is at state-of-the-art Arkenstone Vineyards on Howell Mountain, but he also oversees winemaking for this relatively new brand, which produces just one wine—a cabernet sauvignon.

KELLY FLEMING WINES
Becky George worked her way up from assistant to head winemaker at this Calistoga winery.

AZUR WINES
Before going out on his own with Azur, Julien Fayard worked at some of France’s most hallowed châteaus (such as Lafite Rothschild) and as right-hand man to renowned winemaker Philippe Melka.

VIVIER WINES
Burgundy native Stéphane Vivier has started his own label in addition to working as head winemaker for Hdv Wines in Carneros.

Janet Viader prepares a tasting on Viader’s terrace with views across Napa Valley.
LAST CALL

Viader New World influence

Delia Viader established Viader Vineyards & Winery on Howell Mountain in the 1980s while raising four kids on her own. A respected member of the winemaking community, she now shares the workload with two of her children: Janet, 32, runs sales and marketing, while Alan, 34, oversees operations. “She did this for us, in a way,” Janet says as we taste Viader’s offerings, alongside chocolate made by Alan’s wife, a chef, and cheeses. Between their higher-priced Viader vintages and the more moderately priced Greek line, the winery produces eight wines – seven reds and a dry rosé. Their founding – and signature – “liquid cashmere” Viader blend accounts for the majority of their production. Although Delia was born in Argentina, she cultivated her palate living in France and, accordingly, produced the old-world-influenced cabernet franc and cabernet sauvignon Napa is known for. But Alan, inspired by a season spent in Mendoza, Argentina, planted a quarter acre of malbec a few years ago. It shows up in the winery’s blackberry-tinged Black Label wine, bringing a new flavor to the Viader roster – an apt metaphor for the changes afoot in Napa today.

GRAPEVINE GOLD

SEE NAPA – AND SONOMA – THE RIGHT WAY.

GO Virtuoso advisors can work with Virtuoso’s on-site connection for wine country to tailor excursions to travelers’ interests, whether they’re serious buyers, casual tasters, or wine-tasting novices.

STAY Meadowood Napa Valley, the country club and resort on 250 acres outside Saint Helena, is propelling itself into the area’s future wine and hospitality scene with The Restaurant’s annual Young Winemakers’ Dinner (held next in June 2016): a major overhaul that lightened and brightened its 85 rooms, suites, and cottages; and a brand-new spa, which opens in November. One of the most unforgettable meals of my life was the 15-course dinner at the three-Michelin-star Restaurant at Meadowood, where local ingredients get precise, surprising, and delicious treatment from chef Christopher Kostow and his team. Doubles from $500, including local chocolates on arrival, a $50 daily breakfast credit, and a $100 spa credit.

The 99-room Carneros Inn’s cottages, situated conveniently close to Napa and Sonoma, feature in-room fireplaces and backyards with outdoor tubs and showers. Doubles from $395, including a $40 daily breakfast credit and a $100 spa credit.

In the Rutherford area, Auberge du Soleil, founded in 1981 around its now Michelin-starred, Provence-inspired restaurant, quickly expanded to become an inn, today with 50 rooms. Doubles from $875.

The 89-studio Solage Calistoga makes use of the area’s famed hot springs for its spa treatments. Doubles from $370, including breakfast daily, a $100 hotel credit, one Mudslide spa treatment, and a bottle of Napa wine.

At woodsy Calistoga Ranch in upper Napa Valley, 50 freestanding “lodges” with iron-wood decks and outdoor living rooms ensure maximum nature time. Doubles from $845, including breakfast daily and a winetasting.

Mineral springs feed pools and infuse spa treatments at the 226-room Fairmont Sonoma Mission Inn & Spa. Guests also get access to the private 18-hole Sonoma Golf Club. Doubles from $229, including breakfast daily and a $100 dining credit.

The 25-room Farmhouse Inn, just south of Healdsburg in the Russian River Valley, positions guests for Sonoma County touring, especially at its partner wineries, such as Iron Horse. Doubles from $695, including breakfast daily and a $100 spa credit.

At Meadowood: King crab with sea urchin and cauliflower, and (left) the croquet lawn.