

# Hurrah for Healdsburg

Sonoma's weekend favorite delivers big on wine-country flavor.

BY KIMBERLEY LOVATO

PHOTOGRAPHY BY KORENA BOLDING SINNETT



Pot of gold: Valette's day-boat scallops *en croûte*.



Clockwise from top left: The Matheson's En Honoré cocktail, picnicking in Healdsburg's plaza, garden-grown crudités at Jordan Winery's "Paris on the Terrace," and Quail & Condor co-owner Melissa Yanc.

**W**ITH A RESPECTFUL GLASS raised to the more celebrated Napa Valley, Sonoma County's wine country – roughly an hour north of San Francisco's Golden Gate Bridge – invites wine and food lovers to opt out of oenophile clichés in the easygoing town of Healdsburg.

Set on the banks of the Russian River at the nexus of three fertile valleys flush with more than 400 wineries, the agricultural town of about 11,000 has long lured in-the-know day-trippers looking for more chill than frill. At the heart of Healdsburg is its strollable, tree-shaded plaza, where late-1800s buildings house dozens of tasting rooms and homey restaurants. When chef

Kyle Connaughton and his horticulturist wife, Katina, planted a five-acre farm nearby and opened their now three-Michelin-starred restaurant, Single Thread, in 2016, Healdsburg became synonymous with haute cuisine, enticing gourmet pilgrims everywhere to pin it on their maps. The recent opening of the Montage Healdsburg resort, just a few miles north of the plaza, makes it even more enjoyable to soak in the idyllic setting. Yet despite its steadily rising culinary mercury, Healdsburg's authenticity remains its hottest commodity.

"We came here 22 years ago, and there's still the same small-town pleasantness," Katina says. "Healdsburg has become a little more refined, but it's still a town where people

actually live and work and enjoy an agricultural lifestyle. I don't think that will change."

The past few years haven't been easy on residents, with record-setting heat waves propelled by climate change putting the region in the crosshairs of devastating wildfires. Last summer's rare lightning siege sparked hundreds of fires that would eventually burn more than 360,000 acres across five counties, all while the pandemic slogged on.

But if there's one thing you can count on here, it's glass-half-full optimism. Paired with a perpetually unfurled welcome mat and a casual wine-country lifestyle, Healdsburg's get-up-and-go spirit greets this summer with a corkscrew at the ready and farm-fed heritage at these favorite spots.



## On the Table



Clockwise from left: Healdsburg flora, Hazel Hill's lobster tartine, and prepped for the grill in Single Thread's open kitchen.



### Farm Fans SINGLE THREAD

Stroll around town and inevitably you'll hear Single Thread mentioned in conversations around the plaza. Kyle and Katina Connaughton's new 24-acre Dry Creek Valley farm supplies their 55-seat restaurant, which made the World's 50 Best Restaurants list in 2018 and earned its third Michelin star in 2019. The 11-course, Japanese-leaning menu

changes daily, but what stitches it all together is Sonoma County's bounty. "We fell in love with the diversity of small-scale winemakers and farmers," says Kyle. "There's a genuine collaborative spirit here, supported by agriculture and shared between newcomers and long-standing families."

### Flour Power QUAIL & CONDOR

Food Network's *Holiday Baking Championship* winner Melissa Yanc arrived in town five years ago when her husband, chef Sean McGaughey, joined Single Thread's team. The duo now kneads together

full-time at their bakery, which opened in January. Yanc's naturally leavened sourdough loaves originally proved a hit at the weekly farmers' market; now customers line up at Quail & Condor for her breads and baked goods – onion biscuits, raspberry-cream-cheese danishes, plum pies, strawberry-rhubarb scones, and more, depending on what local produce is peaking.

### Hometown Hangout VALETTE

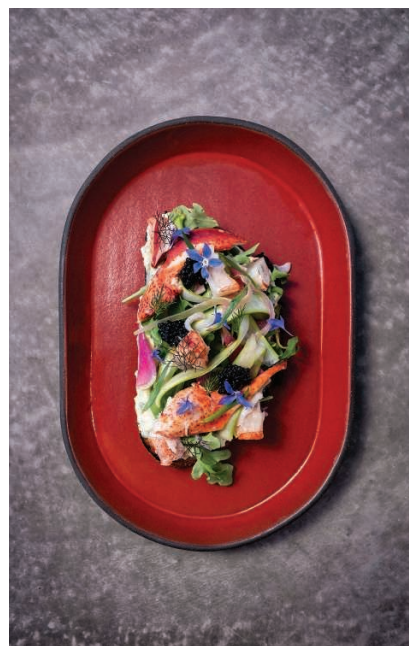
Six years ago chef Dustin Valette dreamed of creating a fine-dining restaurant in his hometown. Now his corner spot is a go-to for gathering around dishes such as day-boat scallops *en croûte*, a perfectly puffed pastry dome hiding the delicate seafood. He also cures his own charcuterie, a skill he learned as a kid from his great-grandfather. "It means everything to us that people return," says Valette. "We have some of the best ranchers and farmers close by, and we support them by cooking and eating what they grow."

### Family Matters THE MATHESON

Valette's new restaurant, The Matheson, stands as an ode to the region's viticultural roots, with a ceiling resembling wine-barrel staves and a wall dedicated to 88 mostly local wines on tap. "I wanted The Matheson to be about the surrounding community," Valette says. "But my family DNA is here too." (His great-grandfather once ran a bakery in the space.) Reserve tables downstairs for Hawaiian ahi poke, spring lamb loin, local line-caught halibut, and more fine-dining fare, or head upstairs to Roof 106 cocktail lounge's outdoor terrace, overlooking the plaza, for drinks, wood-fired small plates, and cozy firepits. A recommendation: the En Honoré, a brandy-based cocktail named for Valette's great-grandfather.

### Yucatán Man MATEO'S COCINA LATINA

Chef Mateo Granados opened his downtown restaurant ten years ago this September. When he's not harvesting produce from his Dry Creek Valley farm or browsing Healdsburg's farmers' market, Granados gathers goods from around Sonoma County to infuse dishes with the flavors of his





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## On the Table



Sonoma County's newest draw, Montage Healdsburg.

## WINE COUNTRY ESCAPES

Where to sip and savor the best of Sonoma.

### STAY Montage

**Healdsburg** sits a five-minute drive from downtown's main square and has 130 bungalow-style rooms with spacious outdoor patios and mountain and vineyard views. Unwind with yoga on the lawn, dine by the pool, or gather for a handcrafted cocktail by the fire at Scout Field Bar. *Doubles from \$995, including breakfast daily and a \$100 resort credit.*

Presiding on ten acres in the Russian River Valley, **Farmhouse Inn** is brother/sister Joe and Catherine

Bartolomei's casual country escape, with a bonus Michelin-starred restaurant, a spa, and 25 rooms, suites, and cottages with fireplaces and homemade gluten-free chocolate chip cookies at turndown. *Doubles from \$700, including breakfast daily, a \$100 spa credit, and complimentary winetastings from select Sonoma vineyards.*

Five minutes from Sonoma's square, the 226-room **Fairmont Sonoma Mission Inn & Spa's** hot springs have served as a haven of

relaxation since the 1920s. The wine list at the hotel's Santé Kitchen restaurant counts more than 100 Sonoma and Napa Valley vintages. *Doubles from \$389, including breakfast daily and a \$100 resort credit.*

**SIP** From the folks behind Reeve Wines, **BloodRoot Wines** offers flights or reds and whites by the glass, including a joyful, sparkling blanc de gris.

Opening in July, **Marine Layer Wines'** coastal-chic tasting room serves a five-

wine flight of Sonoma single-vineyard chardonnays, as well as pinot noirs.

Bordeaux-style wines and a tasting room as gorgeous as the vineyard views make **Aperture Cellars** a must.

**Lioco's** bright-yellow door leads to a buzzy tasting room for pinot noir, chardonnay, and carignan wines made from predominantly Northern California vines.

Savor craft cocktails inspired by global travel with bar bites to match at **Burdock.**



## TIP

"When people find out I'm from Healdsburg, the first question they ask is, 'What wineries should I visit?' My top two recommendations: Coursey Graves, for organically farmed wines by gifted winemaker Cabell Coursey, and, for pinot noir lovers, Cartograph Wines. Both have tasting rooms downtown – reservations recommended."

– Michelle Mickaelian, Virtuoso travel advisor, North Lake Tahoe

Yucatán homeland, such as in his signature *cochinita pibil* – a suckling pig wrapped in banana leaves and slowly braised. Cool off on hot afternoons with his seasonal *aguas frescas* or kick off happy hour with the bar's selection of Mexican and locally distilled spirits, such as Sipsong Indira gin.

### Bistro Beauty JORDAN WINERY

For scenic vistas and French bistro flair, Jordan Winery's four-course "Paris on the Terrace" lunch is hard to top. Chef Todd Knoll leans on the estate's vegetable and flower gardens as well as nearby producers for his California take on bistro fare. A sampling: herbed *fougasse*, ahi tuna poached in Jordan Estate olive oil, house-garden crudités, and charcuterie from Healdsburg's Journeyman Meat Co., served next to the ivy-covered château overlooking the 1,200-acre estate.

### Wine Country Hideaway HAZEL HILL

Hazel Hill's glass dining room and terrace sets the stage at the new 285-acre Montage Healdsburg, with its 15 acres of vineyards on view from the terrace. Herbs, veggies, and edible flowers pulled from the chef's garden enhance dishes, while locally sourced products make an appearance too, such as Pacific Ocean oysters, Bellwether Farms cheese, and Liberty Farms duck. "Hazel Hill honors the wine-country landscape that's literally right outside our doors," says chef de cuisine Jason Pringle. "It's a truly immersive experience." VI

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