

BRUNELLO AND OREGON TASTING REPORTS • DRC PURITY • SPARKLING WINE ROUNDUP

# Wine Spectator

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## Sonoma WINE COUNTRY WEEKEND

HEALDSBURG,  
RUSSIAN RIVER VALLEY,  
DRY CREEK VALLEY  
AND MORE

FLOWERS VINEYARDS  
AND WINERY, HEALDSBURG



## ALEXANDER VALLEY

Discovering Sonoma County's Cabernet Country

WITH **TIM FISH** {YOUR GUIDE}

chefs Melissa Yanc and Sean McGaughey, opened Quail & Condor in 2020, tempting locals and tourists alike. Choose from fresh bread, scones and cinnamon rolls, or try a Morning Bun, a fluffy construction of croissant dough filled with cream. Of course, there's good coffee.

Head north on Healdsburg Avenue and turn onto Alexander Valley Road just outside town. After a few miles, you'll see a stop sign, and from there Alexander Valley Road becomes Highway 128. Follow that to your first winery stop: Silver Oak Alexander Valley.

The Duncan family has been making Cabernet in the valley since 1972 and in 2018 they opened this impressive high-tech, eco-friendly winery. Electricity is 100% solar, and every drop of water—even rain—is recycled three times. Old redwood wine tanks were reclaimed to create the winery exterior, and the building's insulation is made with recycled blue jeans.

The tasting salon, open by appointment only, is located on a hill above the winery. It's a chic space that overlooks the valley. A number of different tastings are available, allowing you to sample Silver Oak's plump and polished Cabernets, both recent and older vintages. Visitors also can take a path through the 75 acres of vineyards and into the winery, where catwalks take them above the barrel room and beyond.

A few miles south on Highway 128 is another longstanding family-operated winery, Alexander Valley Vineyards. The Wetzels helped pioneer the revival of Alexander Valley grapegrowing in the early 1960s and launched their label with the 1975 vintage. The

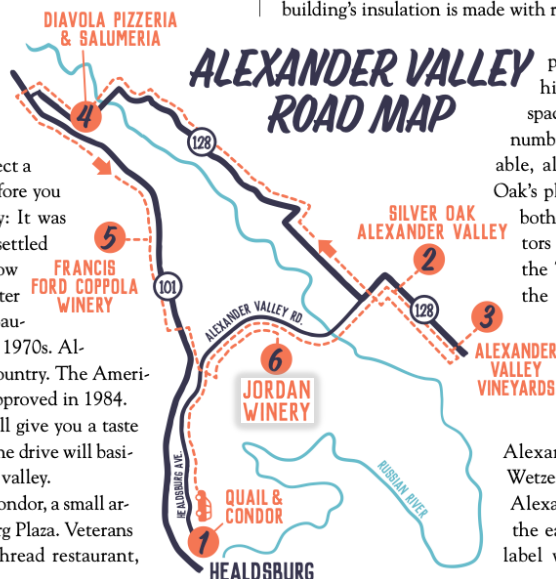
There's a calm to Alexander Valley that's like no other Sonoma County wine region. Twenty miles from north to south and 8 miles at its widest, it is sparsely populated, with only a few dozen wineries to visit. Russian River Valley is three times the size, yet Alexander Valley has just as many acres in vineyards.

Yes, there are more vines there than people, so when you set out from Healdsburg for a day trip, expect a tranquil and scenic experience. Before you hit the road, take in some history: It was named for Cyrus Alexander, who settled there in 1840 and was the first to grow wine grapes, but wheat, cattle and later prunes dominated until Cabernet Sauvignon took hold in the 1960s and 1970s. Alexander Valley is Sonoma's Cab Country. The American Viticulture Area (AVA) was approved in 1984.

Here's a plan for the day that will give you a taste of what Alexander Valley is like. The drive will basically be one long loop through the valley.

Start your morning at Quail & Condor, a small artisan bakery just south of Healdsburg Plaza. Veterans of Healdsburg's heralded SingleThread restaurant,

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tasting room is old-school Sonoma County at its best: casual, friendly, with lovely views, a wide porch and a fireplace. It's open without appointment for groups of six or fewer.

The wines are well-crafted and fairly priced. Despite the accessibility of the Cabernets when they're young, they age well. Zinfandel and Merlot are also specialties. Several tastings are offered, with new and older releases, plus tours of the cave and vineyard.

As the drive continues, you'll need to backtrack a couple of miles and follow Highway 128 north and into the heart of Alexander Valley. The two-lane road meanders between the Mayacamas Mountains to the east and Russian River to the west. Vineyards stretch

for miles on the valley floor as you drive, and increasingly in recent decades winemakers have planted in the benchlands and mountaintops.

After about 15 minutes of serene views out the car window, you'll find yourself in Geyserville, named for the hot springs common in the area. The healing waters were popular with Native Americans, and by 1847 the city was founded. It's an offbeat little town with a few tasting rooms and restaurants.

Your lunch destination is Diavola Pizzeria & Salumeria. Located in a historic storefront, the dining room has high tin ceilings, wood floors and brick walls. The heart of the dining room is chef-owner Dino Bugica's wood-fired oven.

The menu blends old-fashioned Italian fare like pasta fazool, pappardelle with lamb sugo and hearty pizzas with hamburgers, fish tacos and spicy fried chicken. It's all yummy, just the thing after a morning of wine tasting. Diavola's wine list is small and mixes local selections with Italian; it's reasonably priced with a good offering by the glass. Corkage is a modest \$25.

After lunch, hop on Highway 101 south and a five-minute drive to Francis Ford Coppola Winery. The famed director sold the winery in 2021 but the experience he built remains. There's a restaurant, tasting room and even an outdoor pool with cabanas you can rent for the day, but the main attraction for your visit is the collection of memorabilia from Coppola's storied film career.

Mementos include Oscars for *The Godfather*, artifacts from *Apocalypse Now*, costumes from *Bram Stoker's Dracula* and an original Tucker car from *Tucker: The Man and His Dream*. It's a jovial 30 or 40 minutes for movie buffs.

The day ends at Jordan Winery, which brings you back to where you started, Alexander Valley Road, just outside Healdsburg. The handsome, ivy-covered manor was established by the Jordan family in 1972 and styled after a French château. The interior finished a multiyear makeover in 2023, lending it a more open and elegant atmosphere. Cabernet is the star at Jordan and it captures the supple richness common to the best Alexander Valley reds. Multiple tours, tastings and food experiences are available by appointment.

Healdsburg and Highway 101 are a brief drive, and while you're heading back to the hotel or elsewhere, you can reflect on a memorable day.

## DAY TRIP DETAILS

### 1 Quail & Condor

149 Healdsburg Ave., Healdsburg; (707) 473-8254; [quailandcondor.com](http://quailandcondor.com)

### 2 Silver Oak Alexander Valley

7300 CA-128, Healdsburg; (707) 942-7082; [silveroak.com/visit/alexander-valley](http://silveroak.com/visit/alexander-valley)

### 3 Alexander Valley Vineyards

8644 CA-128, Healdsburg; (707) 433-7209; [avvwine.com](http://avvwine.com)

### 4 Diavola Pizzeria & Salumeria

21021 Geyserville Ave., Geyserville; (707) 814-0111; [diavolapizzeria.com](http://diavolapizzeria.com)

### 5 Francis Ford Coppola Winery

300 Via Archimedes, Geyserville; (707) 857-1471; [francisfordcoppolawinery.com](http://francisfordcoppolawinery.com)

### 6 Jordan Winery

1474 Alexander Valley Road, Healdsburg; (707) 431-5250; [jordanwinery.com](http://jordanwinery.com)



Diavola Pizzeria & Salumeria



Jordan Winery

TOP: EMMA K. CREATIVE, BOTTOM: COURTESY OF JORDAN WINERY