

Romancing the Vine Calistoga

A LOVER'S
JOURNEY TO

*Wine
is bottled
poetry*

- Robert Louis
Stevenson



BY ANNA KARELIS

Tucked away in the midst of rolling vineyards, majestic mountains and sweeping canyons is the charming town of Calistoga with stunning views, rustic charm and exquisite wines. *Flying Adventures* invited ten incurable romantic couples for a three day Valentine odyssey to Calistoga. Publisher, Michael Higgins challenged his fellow aviators, "If you don't take your sweetheart to Paris, you better bring her to Napa...this will surely be your most unforgettable romantic experience *ever!*"

Aviators viewed the miles of flawlessly groomed vineyards first by air of the Mayacamas Mountains, alluring ravines and rich volcanic soils that feed the vines to a winemakers dream. They flew into **KaiserAir** at the Sonoma County Airport (STS) where they were greeted warmly with flutes of champagne and breakfast at the superb new facility.

Beau Wine Tours arrived in first-class style with their opulent Limo Bus, a luxurious way to meander through the hillsides of wine country. More champagne to enjoy on board for the twenty aviators with two big screen TVs, plush seating, room to roam, relax and take in the breathtaking scenery along the way. Including a chauffer who knew just as much about Napa as each of the long time vintners themselves.

The first stop to romance was the magnificent Italian castle of love, **Castello di Amorosa**. The Castle Sommelier gave the adventurers a royal grand tour of the 121,000 square foot castello (castle in Italian). It took owner and fourth generation winemaker, Dario Sattui over fourteen years to build his dream and thirty years of research to perfect the design of his 171-acre vineyard property. Over 170 containers of supplies were shipped from Europe to build this replica of a true authentically styled Tuscan 13th century castello.

A true castello it is, the aviators toured the eight levels of brick and stone lined winding tunnels filled with handcrafted

Romancing the Vine



CASTELLO DI AMOROSA

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BEAU WINE TOURS OPULENT LIMO BUS

wine, barrels, armor, and even a torture chamber. The tunnels unwound to the stately 12,000' Grand Barrel Room with 200-year-old brick imported from Austria and 40 Roman cross-vaulted brick ceilings to house their Italian style wines including their coveted Port, Madera and Angelica.

The aviators were whisked away to more secret passageways where a hand-hewn wooden door opened to the magic of elegance, the Royal Apartment. A special treat awaited - a red rose for each lady, four wine glasses at each setting, and a menu made for aristocrats - an eight course Royal Wine and Food Pairing with home-made Foie Gras, Truffle Cheese, Italian Charcuterie, three decadent chocolates... a pairing fit for a king...aviators were dubbed into royalty.

The second rendezvous was at **von Strasser Winery**, an esteemed winery known for its Cabernets in the Diamond

Mountain District. Once you taste their wines you realize why this gem is called Diamond Mountain. Owner, Rudy von Strasser greeted the aviators in his mountainous vineyards with his trusted black lab by his side eagerly awaiting the guests. Von Strasser, known by many as the 'Prince of Cabernet,' took the aviators to his pride possessions - his cult wine in the caves where a candlelit lunch enticed the wine lovers with his impeccably balanced full-bodied wines. The adventurers were mesmerized by his stories of being the first American intern at Chateau Lafite-Rothschild which transpired into his dream... owning his own vineyard with his wife, Rita and making wine true to the land where the vines flourish.

Purchasing their vineyard 21 harvests ago, von Strasser learned about the unique quality of the district and in 1998 was instrumental in creating the sub-appella-



CASTELLO DI AMOROSA



VON STRASSER WINERY

...rich volcanic soils that feed the vines to a winemakers dream

KAISERAIR AT THE SONOMA COUNTY AIRPORT (STS)



Romancing the Vine

The foodies savored unique pairings of decadent chocolate indulgence including Orange Truffle, Charbay Rum, Kahlua Coffee, Pure Caraibe...with Calistoga wines.

tion, Diamond Mountain, where his focus is making the best in Cab, Zin, Cab-Franc and Gruner Veltliner, an Austrian white grape varietal from his heritage. He is the first Californian winery to grow Gruner Veltliner, the most popular grape in Austria.

Next, Beau's trusted chauffeur took the adventurers to their breathtaking resort, a hidden jewel in the Calistoga Mountains, a retreat unlike others. Tucked away in a secluded canyon on 157 acres surrounded by vineyards and lush vegetation, **Calistoga Ranch Resort** is true paradise. Guests were greeted with a glass of Calistoga Ranch Chardonnay and plush golf carts that escorted them to their *private residences*. Only 23 *private residences* are available to purchase as partial ownership (roughly 1 ½ months out of the year) and 48 *lodges* are also at the resort for all to enjoy on a nightly rental. FA guests were fortunate to experience the luxurious accommodations. Each residence has 2,500 square feet of pure luxury - two master suites, a gourmet kitchen, outdoor and indoor living rooms and yes, an outdoor shower, enjoyable even in the wintertime. Special gifts were waiting for each couple with Mayiah lotions (Greek for magic), Corto Olive Oil and a photo book by Wes Walker, *Hidden Napa Valley*.

No time to rest the taste buds as there were even more amazing Calistoga wines to try. Local vintners surprised the aviators with a visit to Higgins' residence. Of course, he would be the one hosting another romantic event, Chocolate and Wine Pairing, with two of the most charming lady vintners of the region, Suzanne Phifer Pavit of Date Night Wine and Karen Cakebread of Ziata Wines. And nothing but the best in local chocolate than with one of the best chocolatiers, Chris Kollar of Kollar Chocolates who brought exotic flavors of chocolate. The foodies savored unique pairings of decadent chocolate indulgence including Orange Truffle, Charbay Rum,



B CELLARS



VON STRASSER WINERY



VON STRASSER WINERY



SCHRAMSBERG VINYARDS

Romancing the Vine



CASTELLO DI AMOROSA

WINERIES

➔ B CELLARS

877.229.9939 • BCellars.com

➔ CASTELLO DI AMOROSA

707.967.6270 • CastelloDiAmorosa.com

➔ CUIVAISON ESTATE WINES

Calistoga Tasting Room:
707.942.2468
Carneros Tasting Room:
707.942.2455
Cuvaizon.com

➔ DATE NIGHT WINERY

707.942.4787
DateNightWines.com

➔ ROBERT FOLEY VINEYARDS

707.965.2669
RobertFoleyVineyards.com

➔ SCHRAMSBERG VINEYARDS

707.942.4558 • Schramsberg.com

➔ VON STRASSER WINERY

707.942.0930 • vonStrasser.com

➔ ZIATA WINES

888.942.2008 • ZiateWines.coms

Kahlua Coffee, Pure Caraibe...with Calistoga wines.

Rest for the weary, this is the place, guests had a few hours to unwind and enjoy the setting at the Ranch before dinner. A heated swimming pool, open-air fitness facility, world-class spa, Bocce Ball, yoga classes, bikes delivered to their lodge to explore the miles of trails and the serene peaceful setting.

A special evening waited with more romance... dinner in the **Calistoga Ranch Wine Cave**. FA guests were first welcomed with cheese by the expert Cheesemonger himself, John Raymond who is known in the area as the walking encyclopedia of cheese. Guests talked frommage and gained new knowledge into the world of cheese. The taste, of course, the best in Blues, Bries and Camemberts.

Rose petals scattered on the table, candles glowing in the night, your sweetheart at your side, with a menu that depicts pure romance...Paris eat your heart out! Seared Diver Scallops, Chocolate Mousse and Red Velvet Cake all paired ever so perfectly with **Robert Foley** wines. Just to make the evening a little more special Robert Foley himself and his beautiful wife Kelly, joined the group to share his stories of winemaking and music with his band, The Robert Foley Band. Known for his bold red wines and flagship Cab Merlot blend Claret, Foley shared the story of his first love in winemaking, Charbono, an unknown red varietal, and how this grape began his winemaking career. He now makes a cult Charbono from the same vineyard that he worked at in his first vintner job. The secret to his fabulous wines? Foley smiled as he told the group that it is because he practices his guitar in the caves where the wines are stored.

Early the next morning guests were taken away by three black stretch limos. Again Beau Wine Tours pampered the travelers with comfort, style and flowing champagne. Arriving at the most amorous place to begin Valentine's Day, the acclaimed **Schramsberg Vineyards**, guests enjoyed a Sparkling Wine Tour and special surprise by the owner and winemaker himself, Hugh Davies.

Schramsberg has over one mile of caves holding 2.7 million bottles of sparkling

wine made from 89 coveted vineyards in the Napa Valley. Founded in 1862, it is the second bonded winery in the area and sits in the midst of a 217-acre vineyard surrounded by lush forests. The wine lovers were taken to a special alcove in the cave with sparkling wine bottles 40 rows deep and a wide range of world-renown bubbly to taste. Gourmet cheese and pate were paired with each sparkling wine as Davies enlightened everyone on the history of the winery. His parents purchased it the month after he was born so Davies grew up with the vineyards and barrels as his playground. He carries on the same high quality traditions as his parents in producing the finest American sparkling wines in the fermented authentic Methode Champenoise where many of the bottles are still hand riddled. Guests met one of the riddlers who showed them how he lifts and rotates the bottles, 1/8 of a turn once a day for five to six weeks per bottle and can turn an average of 8,000 bottles per hour.

The highly anticipated moment came, as guests watched and learned from the expert in sabering a bottle of sparkly from the master himself, Davis, who in his youth practiced with his two older brothers to perfect the art of shaving off the top of the bottle with a saber as Napoleon did to celebrate victories after battle. Pop! The FA wine lovers enjoyed every last drop that was sheared with his special blade.

How do I love thee...let me count thy wines...at **B Cellars** that is. The adventurers began the journey of playing wine-maker for the afternoon with the owners, Jim Borsack, Duffy Keys and one of their



B CELLARS



SCHRAMSBERG VINYARDS



CASTELLO DI AMOROSA

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CUIVAISON ESTATE



AIRPORT

SONOMA COUNTY AIRPORT (STS)

(closest airport to Calistoga)

FBO - KaiserAir

707.528.7400 • KaiserAir.com

ACCOMMODATIONS

CALISTOGA RANCH

707.254.2800

CalistogaRanch.com

TRANSPORTATION

BEAU WINE TOURS

800.387.2328

BeauWineTours.com

VISITOR INFORMATION

CALISTOGA VISITORS BUREAU

707.942.6333

CalistogaVisitors.com

NAPA VALLEY VINTNERS

707-963-3388

NapaVintners.com

CULINARY

DANGER, MEN COOKING

707.944.1338

KOLLAR CHOCOLATE

707.815.5728

KollarChocolates.com

RAYMOND CHEESEMONGERS

800.266.6936

RaymondCheesemongers.com

winemakers, Derek Taylor. B Cellars is known for its Bordeaux and Rhone artisan wines blended from over eighteen of the most highly coveted vineyards in the Napa Valley and FA wine lovers learned from the true wine masters just how to blend their own barrel of wine.

The aviators were split into two groups (Team A and Team B) and were given the challenge to create the best blend from three notable vineyards, Narsai David Cabernet, Williamson Cabernet and T & S Mount Veeder Syrah. B Cellars vintners guided FA guests on how to perfect their blend by tasting each wine, taking notes on the flavor profiles and blending their own secret percentages of each wine. They were taught how to look for balance, tannin and structure. Then wine lovers took a break from the task of wine blending to enjoy lunch. 'Danger, Men Cooking' chefs, treated the winemakers to gourmet pizzas paired with more B Cellars cult wines and an indulgent Valentine dessert made of heart-shaped gold dusted chocolate and strawberries. Back to work, as the teams tasted the wines blind (unmarked) and voted on the best one. Team A won and the newest B Cellars reserve was christened, 'Flying Adventures Pilots Reserve.'

In celebration of Valentine's Day and vino, **Cuvaion Estate** exceeded Higgins' challenge to make this the most unforgettable romantic Valentine ever! ...all to share a truly special evening in the caves at Cuvaison's Domaine of Cupid. FA wine lovers were greeted for a night of love by President and CEO Jay Schuppert, his Valentine and wife Karen, as well as their Wine Educator, Joelle Kurrus in their candlelit 22,000 square foot wine cave lined with roses and Frank Sinatra music in the air. They shared a toast of Chardonnay, a sumptuously extravagant dinner including Caviar, Lobster Bisque, Beef and Shrimp on Cupid's Arrow and Champagne Truf-

fles. Schuppert graced FA lovers with the history of Cuvaison winery and the divine details of their world-class estate grown wines the guests were privy to taste all evening. All were paired with their single block wines and a special limited release Brandlin Cabernet, a rare beauty from their Mt. Veeder Vineyard.

They are known for their Pinot Noir, Chardonnay, Sauvignon Blanc and Syrah from their 400-acre vineyard in the Carneros region and Cabernet, Cab Franc, Malbec, Petit Verdot, Zinfandels from their 170-acre vineyard in the Mount Veeder district (Cuvaion has tasting rooms in both Carneros and Calistoga). Cuvaison purchased the 170-acre Brandlin Vineyard in 1998 from a pioneering family that owned the vineyard for over 140 years and never had their name on a wine label. Cuvaison honored the family for its preservation of the esteemed vineyards by naming their prized wine, Brandlin Vineyards, which indeed, makes a glorious Cabernet.

The last day, being a non-drinking fly day, was left for pure relaxation and bliss at **Calistoga Ranch**. FA guests had spa treatments, breakfast at the private Lakeview Restaurant, enjoyed the hot tub and strolls around the property. Another successful flying adventure; and yes Higgins, all the guests agreed, this was the ultimate wine lover's escape and most unforgettable Valentine fly-in ever! [FA](#)

