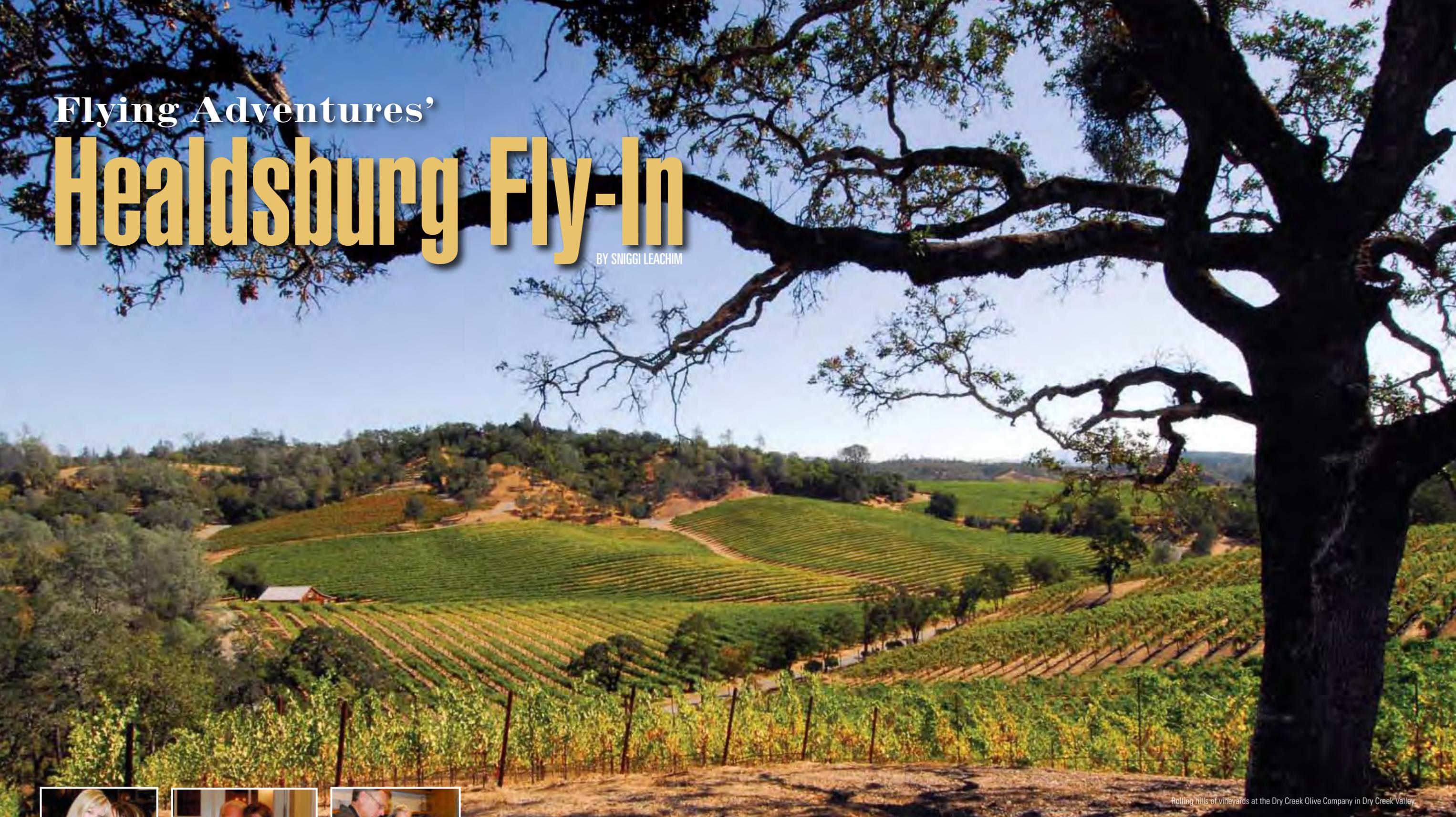


# Flying Adventures' Healdsburg Fly-In

BY SNIGGI LEACHIM



Rolling hills of vineyards at the Dry Creek Olive Company in Dry Creek Valley.



**We share another exclusive trip with our readers.**

The town of Healdsburg, California, is on the short list of top destinations for exploring the West Coast's wine country. Despite its comparatively small population (about 1,100-plus folks call it home), Healdsburg is central to more than 100 world-class wineries and tasting rooms. The historic town is set at the convergence of three

significant California viticultures — the Alexander Valley, famous for its cabernets, the Dry Creek Valley, known for its zinfandels, and the Russian River Valley, where the signature wines are chardonnays and pinots. *Flying Adventures* arranged a special behind-the-scenes visit to the region during harvest season, and 10 lucky couples flew in from



The Jimtown Store is step back in time. The wonderful frame building is nestled in the Alexander Valley and a local favorite for great coffee, home baked goods, local produce, old fashioned toys and candy. When you visit, ask to try their amazing chocolate pudding!

around the country to join us.

Sonoma County Airport (STS) was the rendezvous point, 9:00 a.m. sharp on a Friday morning. Readers had arrived in a potpourri of aircraft, from personal jets to high-performance singles, and were met by a uniformed chauffeur from Style 'n Comfort Limousine Service. The company provides unique luxury transportation in an array of vehicles, including what they call a "limo van." As the name implies, it's in every way a limousine, created inside a large stretch van that provides cavernous comfort. A key ingredient in touring the wine country is to arrange for someone else to drive, and the Style 'n Comfort Limousine Service made all the difference in the world.

With three limousines in tow, the *Flying Adventures* group's first stop was Benovia, a comparatively small winery that truly handcrafts its

wines in the heart of the Russian River Valley. It's a young winery whose primary focus is making some of the world's finest pinot noir. Joe Anderson, Benovia's owner, is a pilot, aircraft owner and vintner (maybe in that order?), making this a perfect introduction to winemaking for our group of FA readers.

Benovia's winemaker Steve Anderson explained his focus for winemaking. Of high importance to him is what vintners call *terroir*, a French term referring to the contribution that the soil and geography make in shaping the flavor of the grapes. Anderson is constantly walking the vineyard and studying its evolving life cycle. He uses the information gathered to help Benovia's grapes develop to their full potential. And once they're harvested, Anderson relies on his experience to translate that generation of grapes into world-class



Large barrel fermentation at Jordan Winery (above); sampling freshly crushed Syrah in open fermentation at Michel-Schlumberger (below); and dessert wines for pairing with individual desserts at Charlie Palmer's Dry Creek Kitchen (upper right).



wine. Our group was given exclusive access to some of Benovia's finest vintages.

By noon, the group was transported to the Jordan Winery, esteemed producers of some of the world's most highly regarded cabernet sauvignons and chardonnays. Winery owner, pilot and aircraft owner John Jordan greeted the *FA* guests and ushered them to a harvest lunch outdoors under the oak trees. The Jordan Winery is reminiscent of the French countryside, with the architecture derived from an amalgam of 18th-century French châteaux. In addition to the ivy-covered main buildings,



HEALDSBURG FLY-IN



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Aerial view of the Jordan Winery estate in Alexander Valley (above); Luncheon catered by Jimtown Store in the Robert Young Winery caves (below); de-stemming Chardonnay grapes at Jordan Winery (below right).

the winery boasts more than 1,575 acres of rolling oak woodlands (an informal preserve for deer, wild turkey, coyotes, waterfowl and other wildlife), with panoramic views of the Alexander Valley, Geyser Peak and Mount St. Helena. Finely sculpted French gardens and clipped privet hedges circle the winery's poplars and sycamores.

Jordan's dedication to French tradition, both on their grounds and in their winemaking styles, is ubiquitous. That tradition calls for cooking food for absolutely everyone who helps at harvest time, including our group of FA guests. Food and wine are so entwined at Jordan that to match their worldwide recognition in creating top cabs and chards, the winery is also the full-time home of master chef Todd Knoll, formerly of the Ritz-Carlton in San Francisco.

The *Flying Adventures* readers were also given an unexpected lesson in wine packaging. They were treated to two samples of the same cabernet sauvignon, one from a standard 750ml bottle and one from a magnum. A second and older cab was served in the same way, and the results were confirmed: Surprisingly, the size of the bottle actually affects the way the wine tastes. Who knew!

Jordan also hosted half of the FA group, offering access to their onsite VIP accommodations, including a two-bedroom cottage. These residences aren't available to the general public, but were graciously offered by John Jordan to make sure the group was comfortably, if not royally, domiciled.

The other half of the group unpacked their bags in town at the Hotel Healdsburg, described by Condé Nast as one of the best places in the world to stay. The hotel has elegantly appointed guest rooms, surrounded by country gardens, a pool, a world-class spa and an area hot spot, Chef Charlie Palmer's Dry Creek Kitchen restaurant. Situated on the Healdsburg town square, the hotel provides a perfect headquarters for



exploring the surrounding galleries, shops and eateries.

Cooking is such an integral component to enjoying wine that it should be no surprise to find true culinary artists in and around Healdsburg. Like Chef Donna del Rey, founder of the Relish Culinary Center, a teaching kitchen for individuals and groups who want to learn the essence of haute cuisine. She immediately escorted the FA group to her amply equipped food preparation and cooking area, already encircled with cream-colored dinner plates where the pending four-course meal eventually would be served. Under her careful direction, handmade ravioli began to roll from the small pasta press while others in the group learned the secrets of great salads. A guest winemaker assisted with pairing great vintages with the great meal that was unfolding.

Nothing feels better than a good bed after a great meal, but a full night's rest wasn't on the schedule. It was 2:00 a.m. when some of the group turned up back at the Jordan Winery to help in the chardonnay



grape harvest. Harvest time is often nighttime, and the group took the wee-hour rendezvous in stride, dressed in bathrobes and Jordan caps! Samples of this special chardonnay grape juice were offered as a reference before the extracts are shuttled into the fermentation process. All agreed the middle-of-the-night harvest experience was singular, if not downright fascinating.

On Saturday, the group went by limousine to the Robert Young Estate Winery, a five-generation, family operation dating back to the mid-1800s. Riding in a special gondola behind a hefty John Deere tractor, our readers toured through undulating rows of chardonnay, merlot and cabernet sauvignon grape vines.



Tasting in the barrel room at Michel-Schlumberger



Harold Middlebrook, Founder, Penn Yan Aero, circa 1936

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Harvest Lunch at Jordan Winery (above left); Relish Culinary Center (above right); Learning expert cooking tips at Relish Culinary Center (below)



Ten other varieties thrive on the ranch in lesser quantities. Much of what this vineyard yields is grown under contract to top-tier wineries around California's wine country. Some of the best grapes, however, are harvested and fermented by noted winemaker Jeff Noel, in charge of following the tradition of Robert Young's award-winning wines.

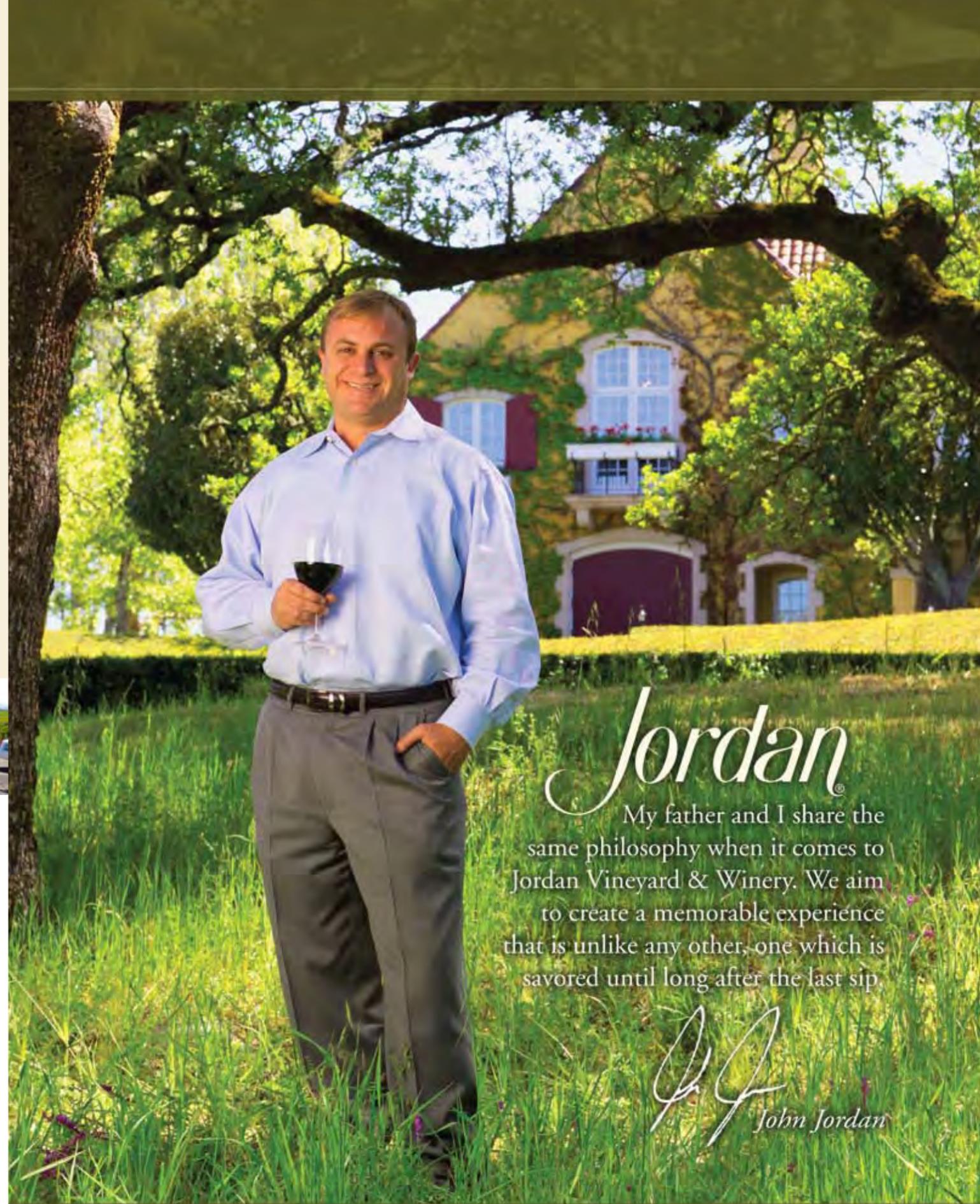
It was here the group got another special treat — a candlelit lunch in a cave used exclusively by the winery to age its most sought-after vintages. The meal, provided by the Jimtown Store, an authentic country store nestled amidst the vines of the Alexander Valley wine appellation, set the pace for tasting a special vintage called Bob's Burn Pile Cabernet. Despite its name, the wine topped the list for a number of our readers.

Next, it was time for stained hands and fingernails. The Michel-Schlumberger Wine Estate is an organic vineyard in Wine Creek Canyon, an area within the famed Dry Creek Valley. Here, the FA group experienced "the crush," the process where the harvested grapes are mashed into pulp, peels and juices headed for winemaking. Participating in the crush, along with sampling the extracted juices and getting a tactile sense of this early phase of winemaking, was a new experience for everyone in the *Flying Adventures* group.

Back at the Hotel Healdsburg, celebrity chef Charlie Palmer was preparing to put on nothing short of doctoral research into the fine art of dessert wines. No less than 25 different bottles were spread out for all to enjoy. A sommelier paired the wines with gourmet desserts as live jazz floated overhead. Everyone agreed that it was an intriguing alternative to the more serious wines the group had tasted over the last two days.

**"Cooking is such an integral component to enjoying wine that it should be no surprise to find true culinary artists in and around Healdsburg."**

The last day, Sunday, was wine-free in respect to the pilots who soon would be heading back home. The Style 'n Comfort limousines took the group to the Dry Creek Olive Company for an advanced class



# Jordan

My father and I share the same philosophy when it comes to Jordan Vineyard & Winery. We aim to create a memorable experience that is unlike any other, one which is savored until long after the last sip.

*John Jordan*

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Barrel aging discussion and vineyard/winery view at Robert Young Estate Winery.



in olive oils from pilots, aircraft owners and proprietors Tim and Mary Louise Bucher. The husband-and-wife team makes some of the best oils in the world using a 19th-century stone olive mill. *FA* readers not only were treated to samples, but learned the secrets of creating a variety of olive oil flavors, ranging from smooth, buttery Spanish blends to peppery Italian blends.

Back at the airport that afternoon, there was consensus on how quickly the time had flown by. And when the pre-flights had been completed and it was time to finally say good-bye, a bit of malaise came over the group. Words like “incomparable” and “priceless” were used to recap the experience, but everyone seemed sad that fun was coming to an end. Many asked when the next special trip would be. The answer is easy. Keep reading the magazine or visit [FlyingAdventures.com!](http://FlyingAdventures.com) **FA**

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WINE COUNTRY FLYING ADVENTURES



## JOIN US FOR AN EXCLUSIVE FLYING ADVENTURES FLY-IN TO WINE COUNTRY

Join us on our next insiders weekend, mingling with the best of the best in winemaking, where the locals put together the most amazing experience to show off their wines. These are typically three-day adventures, and usually limited to five to ten couples. If you love wine, this is an event you will not want to miss.

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Learn wine from the experts and taste their most special vintages. Some are pilot vintners too! Lots of wine tasting, food pairing, cooking demonstrations, and behind-the-scenes winery and cave tours. Even have dinner in the home of a winery owner or harvest grapes in a vineyard at midnight. So many special and unusual things get planned. All specially designed just for Flying Adventures and a few of our guests.

So if you would like to be on the invite list, just drop us an email at [WineCountryFun@FlyingAdventures.com](mailto:WineCountryFun@FlyingAdventures.com) or call us at 626.618.4000.