

On Wine: Day Tripping to Chateau Montelena



Blessed with beautiful weather eight to nine months out of the year, we Californians know how to enjoy life in the great outdoors. In recent months, with ever-changing restrictions due to COVID-19 and a significant proportion of indoor activities being cancelled, we've had to perfect our ability to recreate outside.

Helping in this endeavor, hundreds of wineries throughout the state have overhauled their operating procedures, increased safety measures and reimagined the customer experience to include wine tastings that can be enjoyed in the fresh air, saddled up next to nature.

Recently I wandered a little farther from home to see how our Napa neighbors were handling the newest mandates. I made a reservation at one of California's most historic wineries: Chateau Montelena in Calistoga. This is the winery featured in the movie "Bottle Shock," which tells the story of the Judgement of Paris Wine Tasting in 1976, where California wines, including Chateau Montelena 1973 Chardonnay, earned top marks over their French counterparts, elevating the status of California wineries on the world wine stage.



At the winery I was greeted outside the reception area and escorted along a pathway that passed the main winery building. Breathtaking in size, the building is reminiscent of a medieval castle, built from large thick rectangular stone blocks and covered in ivy.

As we trekked across the property, it was evident that Chateau Montelena had invested much energy in meeting the challenges of the pandemic, with procedures to guarantee employee and guest safety. Some of the new protocols:

- All tasting appointments must be scheduled in advance and will take place outside. If there are no tasting appointments available, visitors can purchase two bottles and sit outside and enjoy their wine using disposable Govino glasses provided by the winery.
- All visitors must wear a mask until they are seated for their tasting experience.
- Tours are not available due to social distancing restrictions. History of the winery is provided as guests are escorted to the tasting area.
- Tasting areas are for adults only, although the winery has a designated spot on the property near the lake for children and designated drivers.



While the precautions taken are strictly enforced, they do not detract from the experience. The winery property is beautiful, spacious and meticulously maintained. A large pond, called Jade Lake, sits at the center of the grounds and is home to at least one swan, who put on a show for us during our visit. Around the lake, tall trees provide generous swaths of shade; there are plenty of flowers and lush, green landscaping.

Some tasting options:

A Taste of Montelena—\$40 per person, includes the winery's current releases, including the Estate Cabernet.

Library Tasting—\$65 per person, includes wines not commonly available in the marketplace and library selection of Montelena classics.

Montelena Estate Collection—\$95 per person, includes four vintages of the winery's flagship wine, the Estate Cabernet, along with a library selection of chardonnay.

In addition to the tastings offered at the winery, Chateau Montelena has also partnered with Calistoga Ranch to bring new exclusive experiences to guests of the resort. These offerings range in price from \$250 to \$5,000 per person.

To learn more about Chateau Montelena and the tasting experiences, please visit

<https://montelena.com/>

To learn more about the joint experiences offered at Calistoga Ranch, please visit

<https://aubergeresorts.com/calistogaranh/experiences/calistoga-ranch-x-chateau-montelena/>

