

Nothing conjures the epicurean lifestyle more than Northern California's Wine Country. This month I have some beautiful places to share with you that will appeal not only to spa-lovers, but to anyone who loves travel, luxurious villas, wine and yes, even business!

By Mary Jo Matsumoto

BEAUTY SONOMA STYLE

Whether you're setting out to invest in a vineyard or just looking to taste the best wines of the region, you'll want to consider settling into a luxurious villa for at least part of your stay. I highly recommend BeautifulPlaces, a leading luxury villa rental company in California Wine Country. Their specific focus on food and wine, with a select portfolio of 30 of the finest properties in all of Wine Country (ranging from small cottages nestled amongst vines to expansive world-class estates) means that there's a perfect place just waiting for you! During my recent stay in a BeautifulPlaces villa tucked in the hills of Sonoma, I fell in love with the sheer beauty of the scenery. My upstairs bedroom was mostly glass surrounded by the most beautiful trees and I loved the laid-back rustic/modern decor. On our first evening in the house, we didn't have to venture out. Dinner was waiting for us (along with some wine and champagne). This sort of pampering in a fabulous villa is just the beginning of your unforgettable stay!

BeautifulPlaces also specializes in creating unusual and personal experiences tailored to your interests and needs. Everything from blending your own barrel of wine to hitting the links with a pro in Sonoma or hiking and biking hidden trails with breathtaking views can be arranged. For more information visit www.beautiful-places.com.

There's no better way to soak in the beauty of Sonoma than with a wine bath at the Kenwood Inn and Spa. I indulged in a long soak with a view of the lush rolling vineyards followed by a grapeseed oil massage. The spa embraces the power of the grape and their custom made products incorporate vinotherapy, including red wine extracts, Chardonnay and Riesling oils. The Kenwood Inn and Spa, named "Best Resort in the USA" by the readers of *Conde Nast Traveler*, is a Mediterranean jewel with lush garden courtyards that make you feel as if you've walked into an Italian fairytale. I had the pleasure of staying at this relaxing hideaway and enjoyed the intimate atmosphere: a feather bed, sumptuous Italian linens and a lovely fireplace in the suite with steps leading out to the gorgeous swimming pool. For more information visit www.KenwoodInn.com.

One of my favorite stops in wine country is Hop Kiln Winery in Healdsburg. Located on some of the most prized dirt in the region, especially for Pinot Noir, Hop Kiln is considered

one of America's best examples of a historic kiln still standing. I stopped by for a private tasting with Hop Kiln's winemaker Chuck Mansfield and GM Denise Gill that focused on their small production HK Generations wines, which have burst onto the Russian River scene and garnered excellent ratings. It was really fun to hear first hand from the vintner about the wines he's working on. Even better, I was treated to an amazing insider tour with David DiLoreto, CEO of Vero Westside and Hop Kiln Winery, who took me around the beautiful vineyard in the heart of the Russian River while we chatted about what it takes to become a serious contender in the wine business. Bottom line: It's all about patient money; you have to be willing to invest in it and know what you're doing. David went back to school and got a degree in viticulture before he and his group purchased Hop Kiln in 2004. When David purchased the winery, production was around 3,400 cases a year. Currently, they are producing around 10,000 cases and are moving towards being 100% estate planted on the ranch's 248 acres. But David assured me that you don't need this many acres to be a serious winemaker. He feels twenty acres could still make you a serious competitor as long as you understand the many levels of successful winemaking. For more information visit www.hopkilnwinery.com.

More food for thought: No matter what your reason for heading to wine country, you'll definitely want to stop in for a meal at Russian River's famed Farmhouse before you leave. Named one of the "World's 36 Best Food Destinations" by *Gourmet Magazine*, and with top Zagat and Fodor ratings, this homey destination will give you a sense of the local flavors, textures and colors that you won't forget! While the environment is casual, the quality of the food and impeccable service is not. Did I mention how romantic dining by the fire or window overlooking the garden terrace is? For more information visit www.FarmhouseInn.com.

If you're hankering for a taste of Sonoma but just can't get away, don't despair – Brix26 is geared to those searching for the best of wine country. Peter Langenstein, owner of Brix26, obtains rare, limited production wines from California's finest boutiques and wineries. He frequently receives access to select varietals produced in such limited quantities that customers are able to purchase wines that can't be found for sale anywhere else. For more information visit www.Brix26.com.

Here's wishing you a gorgeous spring and hoping you can spend part of it in beautiful Sonoma!

Fashion designer Mary Jo Matsumoto writes a nationally syndicated style blog at www.trustyourstyle.com. She is debuting a new line of fine jewelry and a women's couture line as well as expanding her successful luxury handbag line. To view her beautiful designs, please visit www.maryjomatsumoto.com.

1. BeautifulPlaces: Mallard Drive Villa, Sonoma 2. Farmhouse Inn Restaurant
3. Hop Kiln Winery 4. Kenwood Inn & Spa

