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FOOD, WINE, SUDS AND MUSIC

BY SARAH DOWLING
Special Projects Editor

I recently reached a milestone. In January, I celebrated one year of living in the city of Napa — specifically, downtown Napa — a prime location to sample the city’s offerings.



SARAH DOWLING

Walking from my house to some of my favorite downtown eateries, and peering into numerous tasting rooms, has been such a highlight of moving here. And I continue to discover new sights and sounds as I explore the Napa Valley

and its people and places.

For context, I started working at the Napa Valley Register in May 2022 and commuted from my apartment in Sacramento for a year and a half. It is such a difference to be able to walk to work.

One question that comes up frequently for me as I settle into my new home is:

What is there to do in Napa Valley?

This issue of Inside Napa Valley explores different ways people spend their time, including enjoying the abundance of food and wine the valley offers.

While Napa Valley is renowned for its high-end cuisine, we took the opportunity with our Spring 2025 issue to spotlight the many food trucks catering to the masses. Contributor Vincent Vitale focuses on three in particular — Asian Burger, Cooked by Gio and Clif Family’s Bruschetteria — the last of which food reviewer Tracy J. Mayne critiques.

Vincent also highlights the number of breweries springing up across the valley — a growing beverage alternative to the wine the region is known for. The story focuses on Napa Valley Brewing Co., Tannery Bend Beerworks, Erosion Tap House, and Fieldwork Brewing Co.

Of course, part of the appeal of Napa Valley is in its many wineries and tasting rooms. Contributor Jessica Zimmer highlights the Clif Family Winery tasting room, Maria Concetto Winery tasting room, Hill Family Estate, Orin Swift Cellars and Win-

ery, and Vintner’s Collective Napa Valley.

Photographer Nick Otto captures these food and wine businesses as well as another Napa Valley staple throughout these pages.

Apart from food and wine, one thing Napa Valley is known for is its annual music festival — BottleRock Napa Valley. The three-day festival, taking place on Memorial Day weekend in Napa, welcomes roughly 40,000 visitors to the region. Contributor Damian Burford offers his “survival guide” to the festival in which everything you need to know, from what you are allowed to take in to what to eat for breakfast, is mapped out.

I have yet to attend BottleRock — personally or professionally — but to bring things full circle, I was able to hear The Offspring’s set from my house last year. This year? Hopefully, Green Day or Sublime will rock downtown Main Street. Or perhaps I will check off another Napa Valley milestone and attend in person? ■

On the Cover: Festival goers dance at the silent disco on the first day of BottleRock Napa Valley. Photo by Nick Otto.



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SPOTLIGHT ON THE FOOD TRUCKS OF NAPA VALLEY



“Emma” Liu Qian and “JC” Jun Cai pose for a photograph in front of the food truck, Asian Burger, on Thursday, Feb. 20, 2025.

NICK OTTO / REGISTER

BY VINCENT VITALE

Food trucks have become increasingly popular, and their offerings delicious, in a land known for its fine dining.

Soscol Avenue and Clay Street in Napa are now hubs for eclectic food trucks to park and offer a variety of cuisines. Other trucks park deeper into wine country, at wineries and tasting rooms, offering food to pair with wine. In this article, we dive deeper into three such businesses throughout the Napa Valley.

ASIAN BURGER

Perhaps one of Napa’s best-kept secrets is hidden along Soscol Avenue. The Asian

Burger food truck delivers a delicious ethnic cuisine that Napa locals crave. The truck started operating in Napa in April 2024.

With a culinary journey that spans continents, chef Jun Cai, known as JC, has dedicated his career to elevating and internationalizing Shaanxi cuisine. Born in Xi’an, he honed his skills in French cuisine in Singapore before serving as an executive chef at multiple five-star hotels. His passion for culinary arts led him back to his roots, where he became the fourth-generation inheritor of Shaanxi official cuisine, traveling the world to refine his craft and introduce this rich culinary tradition to global audiences.

One of the most iconic dishes in Shaanxi cuisine is cured meat, a specialty with origins dating back to the Warring States Period from the fifth to the third centuries BCE in Han County (now Lingbao County, Shaanxi, China).

According to Asian Burger’s website, a cook named Fan first developed the dish by slow-cooking pork in aged marinade, a technique that has evolved over centuries. Today, this historical cuisine is brought through in the Asian Burger’s most popular dish, the Xi’an Pork Burger. Sold for \$13.99, the dish comes complete with stewed pork that is both juicy and tender, along with bell pepper, sliced fresh garlic, and a bun made fresh and laminated with several layers

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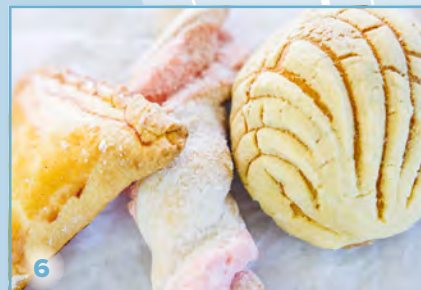
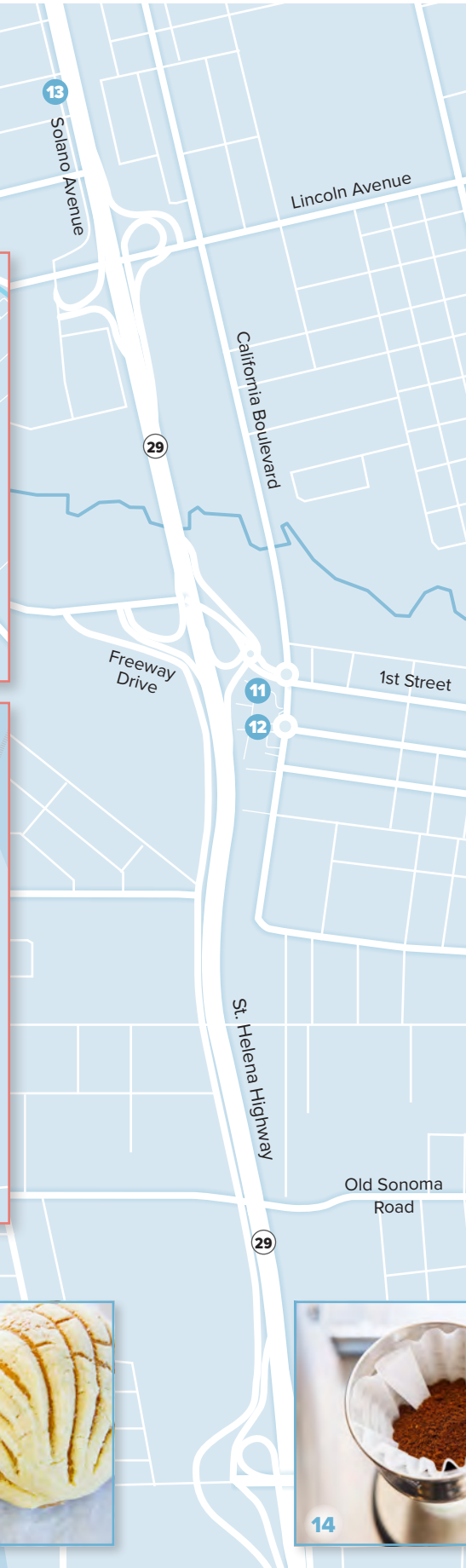
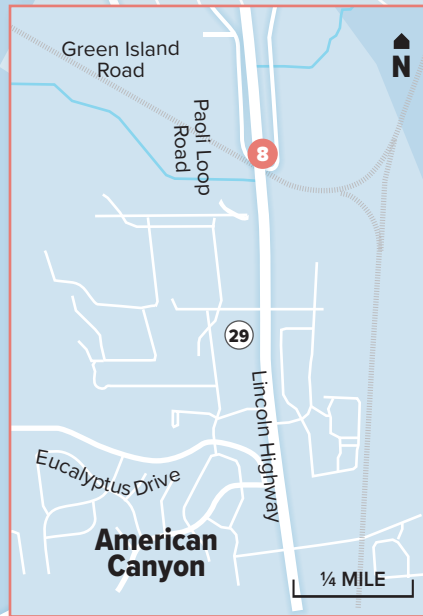
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Food trucks of Napa Valley

- 1 Annie's Lunch Box**
Address: Clay St., Napa
Info: annieslunchbox.info
- 2 Asian Burger**
Address: 1700 Soscol Ave., Napa
Info: asianburgerusa.com
- 3 Best Food Truck Ever**
Address: 1805 Old Sonoma Rd., Napa
Info: bestfoodtruckever.co
- 4 Big A's Sandwiches**
Address: 1790 Soscol Ave., Napa
Info: bigassandwiches.com
- 5 Brigachero**
Address: 1700 Soscol Ave., Napa
Info: brigachero.com
- 6 Café Gira Flohr**
Address: 1490 Soscol Ave., Napa
Info: cafegiraflohr.com
- 7 Clif Family's Bruschetteria**
Address: 709 Main St., St. Helena
Info: cliffamilyfoodtruck.com
- 8 Cooked By Gio**
Address: 166 Watson Ln., American Canyon
Info: cookedbygio.com/home
- 9 How You Mac'N**
Address: Rotating locations
Info: @howyoumacn on Instagram
- 10 Imagination on Fire**
Address: 1790 Soscol Ave., Napa
Info: imagination-onfire.com





- 11 Joella's Deli**
Address: 2410 2nd St., Napa
Info: joellasdeli.com
- 12 Kingpin Cinnamon Rolls**
Address: 2425 2nd St., Napa
Info: kingpinrolls.com
- 13 La Condesa Taqueria**
Address: 2601 Solano Ave., Napa
Info: lacondesataquerianapa.com
- 14 Ohm Coffee Roasters**
Address: 849 Jackson St., Napa
Info: ohmcoffee.com
- 15 PHAT Salads and Wraps**
Address: 1500 Soscol Ave., Napa
Info: phatsalads.com
- 16 Tacos Chavez**
Address: Coombs St., Napa
Info: @tacoschavez on Instagram
- 17 Tacos Don Carlos**
Address: 1700 Soscol Ave., Napa
Info: @tacosdoncarlos on Instagram
- 18 Tacos el Muchacho Alegre**
Address: 751 Jackson St., Napa
Info: tacoselmuchachoalegre.com
- 19 Tacos La Esperanza**
Address: 1551 Soscol Ave., Napa
Info: @tacoslaesperanza on Instagram
- 20 The Burger Truck**
Address: 1790 Soscol Ave., Napa
Info: @theburgertruck on Instagram
- 21 Vip Taco Truck**
Address: 291 Soscol Ave., Napa
Info: viptacotruck.com



W Imola Avenue



18

Kansas Avenue



20

Soskal Avenue



Sweet jasmine tea is served at the Asian Burger food truck on Thursday, Feb. 20, 2025.



Chicken dumplings and a side of pickled cabbage is served at the Asian Burger food truck on Thursday, Feb. 20, 2025.

NICK OTTO / REGISTER

to perfection.

“We make the buns ourselves, as well as the marinated pork and chicken ... and stuff our desserts one by one,” said Cylie Cai, co-owner of Asian Burger.

Other standout dishes include spring rolls, potstickers and a refreshing green tea drink. The kong fu cucumber salad consists of one full cu-

cumber, sliced but still intact, marinated and spiced perfectly.

Asian Burger is based at 1700 Soscol Ave., but also caters various local events.

JC continues to preserve and modernize Shaanxi cuisine through his expertise and deep respect for tradition, sharing its bold flavors and centuries-old techniques with

food lovers worldwide.

More is on the horizon soon.

“We are planning on promoting new items, such as cold noodle wraps,” said Cai. “This will be a summer edition item since it’s served cold. We are planning on creating more appetizers, such as Xi’an loaded fries.”

Asian Burger

1700 Soscol Ave., Napa

Website: asianburgerusa.com

COOKED BY GIO

Since its founding in 2020, Cooked by Gio has quickly become a local favorite, serving bold, authentic Filipino flavors to the Napa Valley community.

Created by husband-and-wife duo Gio and Karla Ivan,

the mobile food business specializes in traditional Filipino staples like pork sisig, chicken adobo, deep-fried pork belly, beef tapa, barbecue, lumpia and pancit. What began as a small operation selling individual plates soon evolved into a thriving pop-up venture, and the couple purchased their first food trailer in 2021.

“We’re on a journey to bring Filipino food to the forefront,” said Gio Ivan, the chef.

For Ivan, the desire to become a chef started at an early age. Born in Vallejo, he spent part of his childhood in the Philippines, in San Carlos, Pangasinan, immersed in the country’s rich culinary traditions. Inspired by the influential women in his life

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— his mother, grandmother and mother-in-law — he developed a love for cooking that would eventually shape his career.

“Gio’s earliest memory of being interested in being a chef was when he was about 12 years old, when his mom would have him chop up her veggies on the side and to keep an eye on the stove as she steps away for a few minutes,” said Karla Ivan. “Gio was basically her sous chef at the age of 12.”

Today, the Ivans have the first Filipino mobile food facility in Napa. Cooked by Gio has also made its mark at major festivals, including BottleRock and the Blue Note Jazz Festival, bringing Filipino dishes to a broader audience.

“The ultimate goal for the business is to have a brick-and-mortar, (restaurant) but we really want to stick with our mission of introducing Filipino food to cities with little to no Filipino food rep-



A Nashville Hot Chicken Sandwich served by the Clif Family Bruschetteria Food Truck is seen on Friday, Feb. 14, 2025.

NICK OTTO / REGISTER

resentation, and that’s the whole reason why we’re mobile,” said Karla Ivan.

The Ivans’ dedication to quality and cultural representation has earned them

recognition as “Napa’s Best Asian Cuisine” in both 2023 and 2024, along with a proclamation for Filipino American History Month in their hometown of American Canyon.

For Gio Ivan, cooking is more than a profession — it’s a deeply rooted passion. Through Cooked By Gio, he and Karla Ivan are on a mission to bring Filipino cuisine to the forefront of the American food scene, particularly in regions where it remains underrepresented.

With a growing fan base and a reputation for delivering bold flavors with every dish, Cooked by Gio shows that Filipino cuisine deserves a place in Napa Valley and beyond.

Cooked By Gio

166 Watson Lane, American Canyon;
1560 Silverado Trail, Napa
Website: cookedbygio.com

CLIF FAMILY WINERY’S BRUSCHETTERIA

Right in the heart of wine country, Clif Family Winery’s Bruschetteria Food Truck serves up a rotating menu of seasonally driven dishes sourced from the certified or-



The Clif Family Bruschetteria Food Truck is seen on Friday, Feb. 14, 2025.



ganic Clif Family Farm and local purveyors. The business blends Napa Valley’s rich agricultural bounty with a casual, street-food-inspired experience.

“What makes us unique is working directly with our California Certified Organic Farmers Farm to craft a seasonal menu using organic farm fresh ingredients,” said executive chef Magnus Young.

The truck specializes in rustic, farm-fresh cuisine, with a menu featuring a selection of bruschetta, porchetta, rotisserie chicken, crisp salads and seasonal sides, each highlighting the vibrant flavors of the region.

“Our menu is typically

Californian with a heavy Italian influence inspired by (Clif founders) Kit (Crawford) and Gary (Erickson’s) travels through northern Italy,” said Young.

Thursday through Sunday from 11:30 a.m. to 4 p.m., the Bruschetteria provides a welcoming setting for guests to enjoy fresh, flavorful dishes paired with Clif Family’s acclaimed wines, making it a must-visit destination for those seeking an authentic wine country dining experience.

However, on Wednesdays, the truck brings a unique twist to culinary dining by pairing globally inspired street food with locally crafted wines.

Every Wednesday from 11:30 a.m. to 7 p.m., guests can enjoy a rotating international menu from the Bruschetteria, featuring dishes made with fresh, organic ingredients sourced from Clif Family Farm. Whether dining in the cozy tasting room or unwinding on the garden patio, visitors can savor bold flavors alongside carefully curated Clif Family wines.

“Originally inspired by the idea of being able to serve something like a banh mi or street tacos, something you might find from a more traditional food truck or stall, hence the name ‘street food,’ without interfering with our

original identity,” Young said.

Additionally, from 4 to 7 p.m., guests can take advantage of happy hour specials, including \$10 glasses of wine. At the same time, Wine Club members receive exclusive pricing on both food and wine, plus complimentary by-the-glass options.

With its fusion of global cuisine, farm-fresh ingredients, and expertly paired wines, the street food menu offers a relaxed yet elevated way to experience Napa’s vibrant food scene.

Clif Family’s Bruschetteria

709 Main St. (Highway 29/128),
St. Helena

Website: cliffamilyfoodtruck.com ■



The Firecracker Salad served by the Clif Family Bruschetteria Food Truck is seen on Friday, Feb. 14, 2025.



Clif Family Winery head chef Magnus Young poses for a photograph on Friday, Feb. 14, 2025.

A BOTTLEROCK SURVIVAL GUIDE

Festivalgoers are seen walking past an art installation on the first day of BottleRock Napa Valley on Friday, May 24.



NICK OTTO / REGISTER

Music festival tips and tricks

BY DAMIAN BURFORD

BottleRock Napa Valley returns to take over downtown Napa on Memorial Day weekend, May 23-25, for its 12th edition. The festival will take place at the Napa Valley Expo and will spill into nearby downtown Napa for BottleRock AfterDark parties and experiences.

The star-studded festival brings together concertgoers of all ages, who will have a chance to discover the up-and-coming acts that adorn the lineup while getting yet another chance to welcome old favorites.

Whether you're an old festival pro or

attending your very first music festival, Inside Napa Valley wanted to highlight a few precautions that will help you prepare to have the best festival experience.

BREAKFAST

BottleRock does not allow outside food or beverages, so make sure you are prepared.

Downtown Napa has a plethora of breakfast eateries to satisfy your food urges. Be warned; many of the most popular breakfast spots such as the Jax White Mule Diner, Sunshine Cafe and Downtown Joes will be jam-packed, so plan accordingly.

A few of the local downtown eateries will offer reservations; places such as The Kitchen Door, Norman Rose Tavern and Celadon will all offer reservations for breakfast. So make those reservations now.

In a rush? Downtown coffeeshops such as Ohm Coffee Roasters, Barnhouse and Napa Valley Coffee Roasting Co. will offer a number of grab-and-go breakfast options for your weekend festivities.

Prepare for a hot afternoon in the sun. Make sure to fill yourself up with a solid base of food and water, but keep it light. You don't want to weigh yourself down with too heavy of a stomach before venturing into the Expo, which will offer a



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wide array of food and beverage options on the festival grounds.

BACKPACKS

Every prepared concertgoer should have a backpack of their own, but be warned!

BottleRock will not allow your normal everyday JanSport backpack inside. If you'd like to bring something with you to help you carry around your much-needed accessories, you'll need a clear, see-through backpack. Those are easily ordered from major online retailers, and the clear backpacks have been available at Target in the weeks surrounding the festival.

Now that you have your backpack all picked out, let's figure out what to put in it.

WATER BOTTLES

You've got to stay hydrated, and you'll want to save your money for the vast array of food and drinks available inside

the festival grounds. Why spend all your money on water?

BottleRock has joined the growing trend of music festivals working to create more sustainable practices and economical footprints. Thankfully, this means you'll be able to bring in your own empty water bottle and refill it at one of their many refill stations. But beware, BottleRock not allow any glass bottles or disposable plastic containers into the festival grounds. So make sure you bring your best Nalgene, stainless steel or blank reusable bottle with you.

CamelBak water packs are also allowed into the festival, but make sure their bladders are empty before you enter the grounds.

LAYERS

Napa Valley has some of the best weather in the world. Our Mediterranean climate is perfect for growing grapes, but it can leave some visitors a bit confused. Prepare yourself for cool mornings with a

light fog followed by warm, sunny afternoons. As the sun goes down, be prepared for cool and sometimes chilly nights.

Layering will be your best friend for a comfortable Memorial Day weekend. Make sure you're prepared with a light jacket or long-sleeve shirt for those early mornings. Bonus points: the long sleeves can also help protect you from the sun, while also keeping you warm as the party continues at one of the many downtown after-parties.

HATS

The Napa Valley sun can be a brutal mistress during the heat of the day. The BottleRock grounds have very little shade. So prepare yourself with a hat to help block out the sun. If you forget yours at home, check the merch booths as a number of musical artists will have hats in their merchandise selections.

Sunblock is a given for a three-day festival, but make sure it's in lotion form, as

NICK OTTO / REGISTER



Festivalgoers dance through bubbles at the silent disco on the third day of BottleRock Napa Valley on Sunday, May 26.

BottleRock does not allow aerosol cans into its festival grounds. Apply early in the day, and reapply often. You don't want to ruin your weekend with uncomfortable sunburns.

BLANKET OR TOWEL

This may seem like a bit of overkill to some, but in the middle of the day as you're noshing at one of the many high-class food trucks, you might look around and find you have nowhere to sit.

If you have a blanket or towel in your bag, you'll suddenly find that any space can be converted into a small picnic area. But make sure you're out of the way of the heavy foot traffic. Perhaps you can post yourself up near one of the smaller stages and discover an up-and-coming act you've never heard of while staying cozy and comfortable.

Bonus: You can always wrap your towel (or blanket) around you for warmth, use it as a makeshift shade to help yourself stay out of the sun, or you can even dry yourself off with it if it still seems to be clean enough.



The Aperol booth at BottleRock.

NICK OTTO / REGISTER

COMFORTABLE SHOES

Fashion is important for any festivalgoer, but with 26 acres of the Napa Valley Expo fairground to explore, you'll be on your

feet all day. Make sure you wear comfortable shoes in anticipation of all the walking, standing and dancing the day away. Even more professional concertgoers may bring along Band-Aids in the case of a blister.



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Norah Jones performs at the JaM Cellars Stage of the Napa Valley Expo on the third day of BottleRock Napa Valley on Sunday, May 26.



Drinks are served at the Don Julio booth on the first day of BottleRock Napa Valley on Friday, May 24.

APPETITE

Yes, you should absolutely eat breakfast and make sure it's a light one, but one of the prides of BottleRock is its excellent food selections.

You'll find anything from hot dogs to lobster rolls, if you know where to look. The BottleRock team scours the area and invites only the best of the best food vendors in the region. With an eye for luxury and unusually high-quality festival food, there will be a little something to satisfy and delight any concertgoer.

Your dining options in downtown Napa will be limited if you wait until the festival ends to go hunting for your next meal and adventure. Many restaurants will close before 10 p.m. Make sure you eat dinner before you hit one of downtown Napa's many after-party events. But don't worry, if you forget to eat before you leave the festival grounds, you can always line up with one of



Stephen Curry of the Golden State Warriors, Chef José Andrés, actor Bradley Cooper and chef Danny DiGiampitro engage with the crowd at the William Sonoma Culinary Stage on the second day of BottleRock Napa Valley on Saturday, May 25.

NICK OTTO / REGISTER

the many hot dog vendors who will set up on Third Street with their delicious street meats.

DIGITAL FUNDS

Make sure you leave your cash at home. BottleRock aims to be a cashless music festival, so make sure you have your wristband's digital wallet preloaded with money or keep your debit or credit card handy, as most booths will not accept cash.

TRAVEL-SIZED PAIN RELIEVER

Don't let that headache ruin your festival fun. Make sure you have a small travel-sized container of over-the-counter pain reliever (Tylenol, aspirin or ibuprofen) on hand for dealing with any unwanted headaches, foot pain or sunburns that may affect your experience.

POWER BANK

We assume you'll take lots of photos and vid-

eos of the day's festivities. Don't forget to take lots and lots of photos of you and your friends.

You may forget the bands you saw that day, but you'll never forget the memories you'll make with those people celebrating with you. Make sure you have enough juice to get all those memories. Bring along a pocket-sized power bank to recharge your devices. You'll be able to enjoy more of your day without worrying about how you'll find your crew later on in the night.

TISSUES

Always make sure you have some tissues for whatever issues you might encounter. There will be thousands and thousands of people at the festival. You never know when a porta-potty might be out of toilet paper, or you might be moved to tears by one of your favorite artists such as Noah Kahan. You'll be ready for anything with a small pack of travel size tissues.

Follow these tips, and remember to drink lots of water, and you'll be set for an excellent weekend of festival fun! ■

In the KNOW

BottleRock's official bag policy

Allowed

- Clear bags made up of plastic, vinyl or PVC that are no larger than 12 inches long, 6 inches wide and 12 inches high.
- Empty hydration packs with no more than one additional pocket. Water bladders must be empty.
- Small clutch purses and fanny packs (6 by 9 inches or smaller), with no more than one pocket.

Not allowed

- Any bags that are larger than 6 by 9 inches and not clear.
- Any backpacks that are not clear.
- Any bags that are larger than 12 by 6 by 12 inches.
- Any hydration packs with more than two pockets.

BOTTLEROCK — AND LA ONDA — BASICS

BY DAMIAN BURFORD



Festivalgoers have their photos taken in from of the La Onda sign on the first day of Festival La Onda by BottleRock at the Napa Valley Expo on Saturday, June 1.

NICK OTTO / REGISTER

The most magical weekend for music fans is almost here as both BottleRock and Festival La Onda, BottleRock’s Latin music showcase, both return to the Napa Valley in May.

BottleRock will be returning to its home at the Napa Valley Expo for its 2025 edition. Bay Area punk rock legends Green Day will headline on Friday, May 23, and Justin Timberlake will bring “Sexy Back” to Napa on Saturday, May 24. Noah Kahan will bring his folk favorite sing-alongs to the crowd with a headlining set on Sunday, May 25.

Other notable performances will include sets from acts such as Sublime (with vocals from Jakob Nowell, the son of original vocalist Bradley Nowell), Ice Cube, Cage The Elephant, Public Enemy, Benson Boone, Kate Hudson, 4 Non Blondes, Flo Rida, and many up-and-coming musical acts.

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Each night the festival grounds — located at 575 Third St. in Napa — will draw to a close with a strict 10 p.m. curfew, but the party doesn't end there. The masses will move to downtown Napa for the many BottleRock AfterDark parties taking place.

JaM Cellars Ballroom, the Uptown Theatre and The Garden at Tannery Bend will all host official BottleRock after-parties with acts such as E-40, Allen Stone, Linda Perry (4 Non Blondes), G. Love & Donavon Frankenreiter, The Coverups (featuring members of Green Day), Robby Krieger of The Doors and others. Many other downtown bars and restaurants will also offer unofficial after-parties as well.

La Onda will take place the following weekend on Saturday, May 31 and Sunday, June 1 for a celebration of the local Latin community. Headliners will include Marco Antonio Solis, Banda MS, Pepe Aguilar, Carin León and Grupo Firme. In addition to bringing premiere Latin entertainment to the Napa Valley, La Onda will also focus on local and regional Latin cuisine, flavors and beverages



Mexican singer Silvana Estrada performs on the last day of Festival La Onda by BottleRock at the Napa Valley Expo on Saturday, June 1.

NICK OTTO / REGISTER

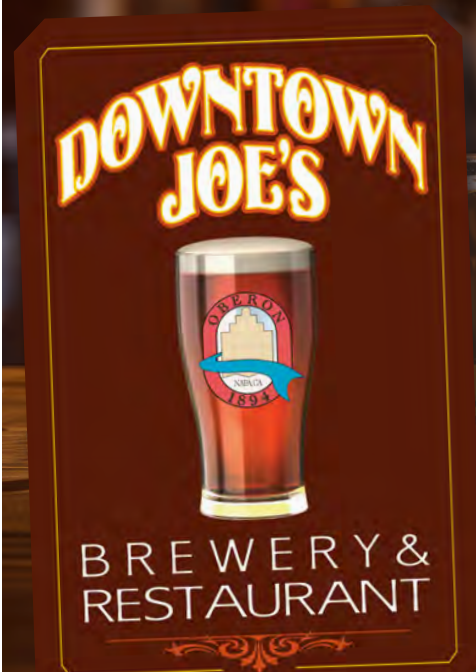
es all weekend long. This will be a unique and exciting experience in celebrating the Latino communities of the Napa Valley and Bay Area.

More information on BottleRock, in-

cluding the music lineup, tickets and details on what you can bring into the festival, can be found at bottlerocknapavalley.com.

For information about La Onda, visit laondafest.com. ■

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TASTING IN TOWN

THE APPEAL OF OFF-SITE TASTING ROOMS



Lisa and Robert Hoye of Novato have their wine tasting poured by a robotic arm at Maria Concetto in Calistoga on Thursday, Jan. 11.

NICK OTTO / REGISTER

BY JESSICA ZIMMER

Downtown is where the action is, from finding beautiful spots for wine tasting to making it easy to enjoy pairings for local restaurants. Throughout the Napa Valley, locals and visitors alike can find a wide variety of tasting rooms on or just off main corridors.

Tasting in a location other than a winery gives guests a chance to visit spontaneously and have food from local restaurants delivered. Sometimes, the tasting room has other surprises as well.

At Maria Concetto Winery in Calistoga, that includes “Robbie,” a robot sommelier that pours, serves, smiles, dances and bows. The winery also showcases live music on Saturdays twice a month. Additional performance dates are expected in the spring.

“We’re open from noon until 8 p.m., so guests can come by before and after dinner. The ambiance is stylish, like an upscale nightclub,” said Maria Reznikova, the owner of Maria Concetto Winery.

The business’ winery is located in

Mendocino County and has no on-site tasting room. Yet Maria Concetto Winery sources grapes grown in Mendocino, Napa and Sonoma counties, as well as fruit from the Central Coast.

“Our Lincoln Avenue location is convenient for guests visiting the Napa Valley who want to explore events like our food and wine pairing with Bricco Osteria Restaurante,” Reznikova said.

For cold, sunny days, Reznikova recommends the 2019 Calistoga Cabernet Sauvignon, a balanced wine with flavors of red cherry and the aromas of vanilla

and red licorice. Guests are also excited about the 2020 Moscato from Mendocino County, a crisp Italian desert wine with notes of fresh peaches and freesia.

“We have 11 wines to taste and offer cheese and charcuterie boards with nuts and chocolate. There are also specials like two sparkling wines with caviar. We can take guests on a short complimentary driven tour through Calistoga,” Reznikova explained.

Farther down Highway 29, Orin Swift Cellars and Winery’s off-site tasting room is located in a historic bank building in downtown St. Helena. The tasting room offers four tasting experiences: Rock, Paper, Scissors and the Vault.

“Rock is our walk-in casual tasting of four wines” in the main tasting room, explained



Patrons fill the tasting room at the Clif Family Winery in St. Helena on Friday, Feb. 14, 2025.

NICK OTTO / REGISTER

Allison Morales, Orin Swift’s senior marketing officer. “Paper is a seated, more structured tasting for four wines. The Vault is where you can enjoy aged magnums or library selections. Hidden away from the main tasting room in a private space is our Scissors tasting experience. (It) offers the opportunity

to indulge in extremely rare, limited production Orin Swift wines crafted exclusively for Scissors.”

In spring, Orin Swift will celebrate with new vintages of Mannequin, a California Chardonnay; Palermo, a Napa Valley Cabernet Sauvignon; Machete, a California red wine; and Trigger Finger,

a Napa Valley Grenache.

The tasting room is unique because it contains vintage furniture and materials sourced by founder and winemaker Dave Phinney. It also has obscure and hidden design features that are discoverable only to extremely observant visitors.

“Dave is the master creative behind all of Orin Swift’s provocative wine labels, most of which are photographed – also rare in the wine world,” said Morales. “Many of Dave’s own photographs will also hang in the space.”

A HUSTLING, BUSTLING MEET-UP SPOT

Clif Family Winery’s tasting room is another St. Helena favorite, a bit farther up on Main Street.



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Wine is poured for members at the Vintner's Collective on Saturday, Feb. 15, 2025.

NICK OTTO / REGISTER

"It's a little bungalow that has been renovated as a bright, welcoming spot," said Meg Barkley, the winery's vice president of marketing and membership. "There are visual treats around every corner. We have an open bar that's usually playing sports, from cycling races to local football games. You can get wine by the glass or espresso."

The tasting room attracts a regular crowd of locals as well as visitors.

"Some people find us because they're cycling on the Napa Valley Vine Trail or hiking nearby. It's a great place to stop and take a break," Barkley added. "We also have a lot of sports-gear swag."

For cold days, she recommends The Climber Red Blend, a blend of Zinfandel and Petite Sirah with notes of plum and black raspberry. Those who favor whites should try the Napa Valley Sauvignon Blanc, a fruit-forward wine with great acidity and flavors of

citrus and apple.

Clif Family Winery has many healthy food pairing options available at the food truck parked outside, the Clif Family Bruschetteria. The lineup includes salads, different types of crisp bruschetta, Mary's Organic rotisserie chicken, and chocolate chip and hazelnut cookies.

"Street Food Napa Valley is every Wednesday, and once a month, we have 'Sip & Support,'" said Barkley. "This involves a special menu and a donation of 20% of our proceeds to a nonprofit that benefits the community. We also stay open late on Wednesdays, 7 p.m. instead of our usual 5 p.m."

A little farther south in Yountville, Hill Family Estate can be found on Washington Street, the town's main thoroughfare. The family-owned and operated winery typically averages 750 visitors a month and offers customized tasting flights and a by-the-glass menu.

"Two to four guests can

also share wine by the bottle," said Ryan Hill, the winery's co-owner. "One favorite experience is the blind tasting with black stemware. We hold that once a day. From June to September, guests can travel five minutes from the tasting room to our secret garden in Yountville. There they'll have a chance to smell and taste fruits, vegetables, herbs and edible flowers."

Allison Negron, direct-to-consumer manager for Hill Family Estate, recommends "Like a Hawk." This Napa Valley red blend is a big, bold vintage that contains Syrah and Cabernet Sauvignon.

"It's elegant and punchy. (It'll) definitely warm you up on a cold day," Negron noted.

For those who like to shop, the Hill Family Estate tasting room features a small retail store with fresh flowers, changed seasonally, from the San Francisco Flower Market. The store also sells sustainable fabric and paper flowers that change seasonally.

"We also offer handmade items like the porron, a Spanish drinking vessel similar to a decanter, pottery from Calistoga Pottery, stationery made by the artist who painted one of our wine labels, and clothing with (the) slogan 'It takes a vineyard,'" Negron said.

18 VINTNERS, TOGETHER

In the city of Napa, Vintner's Collective Napa Valley, located on Main Street, offers a dizzying range of boutique wines — two to 20 barrels per label, from 18 vintners.

"The tasting menu varies according to your preferences and what's available," said Garret Murphy, owner of Vintner's Collective. "We'll ask questions and match the wines to your palate."

The group's tasting space has an upstairs area that is more exclusive and a downtown floor that is accessible without reservations. The building was originally a saloon, built in 1875, and later hosted a Chinese-owned laundry from the 1930s to the 1970s.

"I recommend coming on the weekends when we have one or two vintners who usually come by to talk about their wines and answer questions," Murphy said. "In spring, when the weather warms up, we'll open the back deck, which looks over a creek."

His tip is to try KrisTodd Vineyards' Rosé, which is made primarily from Howell Mountain Cabernet and a bit of Petite Sirah. This wine has a dark, rich color and aromas of cranberry and pomegranate.

"Pinots Noirs are a fantastic choice later in the spring," said Murphy. "We have a chef who can make delicious artisanal cheese and charcuterie boards."

One option is the Las Bonitas Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir, with flavors of wild strawberry and red currant jam and aromas of violet and black tea.

“We’re here in Napa to invite locals and day trippers who want an easy-to-reach, amazing experience that doesn’t involve climbing a mountain,” Murphy said.

He adds every visit to the

tasting room can be unique. Staff will showcase new wines that will align with what a guest has liked before.

“In spring, we expect to release a number of whites and rosés from our small boutique wineries,” Murphy noted. “We invite you to treat yourself at this historic stone building, which brings me back to my childhood in France.” ■



Patrons line the bar of the Vintner’s Collective tasting room on Saturday, Feb. 15, 2025.

NICK OTTO / REGISTER

In the **KNOW**

Planning a visit

Guests should check a winery’s website to learn the days and hours of its off-site tasting room. These may differ from the hours of the winery and its on-site tasting room. Visiting the winery’s website also indicates whether the offsite tasting room is closed for a specific period.

Clif Family Winery tasting room

- **Address:** 709 Main St. (Highway 29/128), St. Helena
- **Website:** cliffamily.com

Maria Concetto Winery tasting room

- **Address:** 1367 Lincoln Ave. (Highway 29), Calistoga
- **Website:** mariaconcettowinery.com

Hill Family Estate

- **Address:** 6512 Washington St., Yountville
- **Website:** hillfamilyestate.com

Orin Swift Cellars and Winery

- **Address:** 1321 Main St. (Highway 29/128), St. Helena
- **Website:** orinswift.com

Vintner’s Collective Napa Valley

- **Address:** 1245 Main St., Napa
- **Website:** vintnerscollective.com

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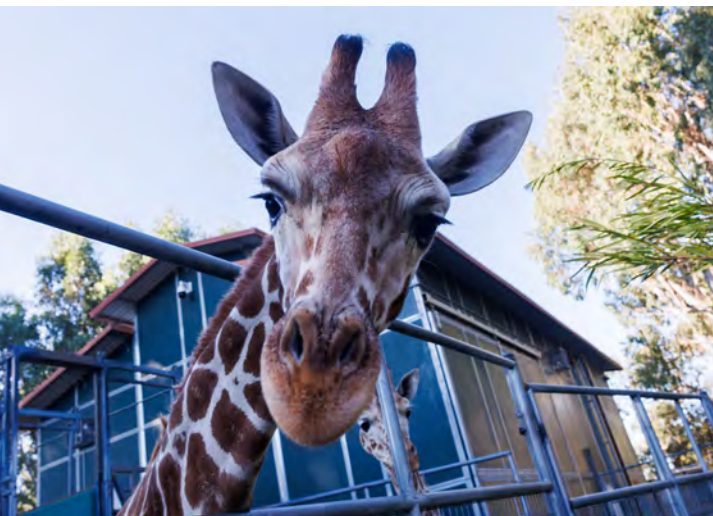


Visitors look at Full Metal Poppy an art installation by Jacques Lesec on display in the in the Napa Lighted Art Festival on Saturday, Jan. 18, 2025.

EYE ON NAPA VALLEY

MOMENTS CAPTURED BY REGISTER PHOTOGRAPHER NICK OTTO

Chich the giraffe pokes his head through the gate of his enclosure at Six Flags Discovery Kingdom in Vallejo on Thursday, Jan. 16, 2025.



San Francisco Giants third baseman Matt Chapman signs an autograph for a young fan during a stop in Napa on the team's 2025 FanFest Tour on Saturday, Jan. 18, 2025.





People are seen near a tattoo shop along Jefferson Street during a heavy fog on Monday, Jan. 6, 2025.



Members of the Napa County Sheriff's Honor Guard perform before the swearing ceremony for Supervisor elect Liz Alessio, Bella Ramos and Amber Manfree on Saturday, Jan. 4, 2025.



Newly sworn in Napa County Supervisors Liz Alessio, Belia Ramos and Amber Manfree are given a round of applause by fellow Supervisors Anne Cowttrill and Joelle Gallagher and the attendees at the official Oath of Office Ceremony held at the Napa Valley Performing Arts Center on Saturday, Jan. 4, 2025.

SUDS ON THE RISE?

A LOOK AT NAPA VALLEY BREWERIES



Visitors gather near the Calistoga Inn and Napa Valley Brewing Company on Saturday, Feb. 22, 2025.

NICK OTTO / REGISTER

BY VINCENT VITALE

While red vs. white is always a topic of conversation in wine country, sometimes you just need a change of pace.

Breweries have become more popular in recent years throughout the Napa Valley, often serving as a refreshing palate cleanser. While the overall tourism industry has slowed for many, the distribution and popularity of beers seem to be increasing during an uncertain time for the wine industry.

In this article, we review four such

breweries with various offerings throughout the valley.

NAPA VALLEY BREWING COMPANY

Within the historic Calistoga Inn, Napa Valley Brewing Company has been a cornerstone of Napa County's craft beer scene since 1987. According to its website, it was the first commercial brewery in the region after the repeal of Prohibition in 1933.

The brewery itself is a testament to

Napa Valley's rich history — housed in the property's original water tower, which was transformed into a seven-barrel, gas-fired microbrewery under the guidance of Michael Lewis of UC Davis. With a recent fermentation cellar expansion, Napa Valley Brewing Company has grown its distribution, ensuring that its locally crafted brews, typically named after local landmarks or regions, such as Bale Grist named after the Bale Grist Mill State Historic Park, are available throughout Napa Valley.

“Overall, 2024 was a slow year, and

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ST. HELENA STAR



Napa Valley Brewing Company Brew Master Nick Bartlett poses for a photograph on Saturday, Feb. 22.

NICK OTTO / REGISTER

that is true for most of the Napa Valley,” noted Michael Dunsford, the owner of Napa Valley Brewing Company Inc. and the Calistoga Inn, Restaurant & Brewery. He attributed the slowdown to “the fallout that’s been occurring in San Francisco since the end of COVID and the rise in inflation. ... It’s also more expensive to travel.”

The wine industry has also experienced this, in addition to a general move for people to drink less alcohol.

“This is also true in the beer industry, which is why you’ve seen the rise of non-alcoholic beer brands, such as Athletic and Best Day Brewing,” said Dunsford. “... Beer also has less alcohol than wine or spirits, so it’s becoming more preferred as a beverage of choice. ... In our case, however, we only distribute small amounts of draft beer to other restaurants and bars throughout the Napa Valley in addition to serving our restaurant.”

Napa Valley Brewing Co. beers can currently be found at various locations, including Solage resort, Auberge du Soleil, Farmstead, Brix, and private golf clubs such as Mayacamas, Napa Valley Country Club and The Brambles.

According to Dunsford, the bright spot may be coming after a down 2024: “It does appear that things may be turning around.”

At the helm of the brewery is brewmaster Nick Bartlett, whose passion for beer began in his parents’ garage before leading him to a formal brewing education at UC Davis Extension in 2017. Before joining Napa Valley Brewing Company, he spent time at Barebottle Brewing in San Francisco and as head brewer at Buck Wild Brewing in Oakland, earning over 10 medals for his craft. From crisp European lagers to aromatic West Coast IPAs, his approach ensures that each brew is refreshing and dis-

tinctive.

Next for Bartlett is a new beer named the Dunkel, a dark, malty German lager. Additionally, the brewery a couple of holiday celebrations for Mardi Gras and St. Patrick’s Day, and will introduce a new chef.

After the rainy season ends, the Napa Valley Brewing Company’s outdoor patio and beer garden at the Calistoga Inn is the perfect setting to enjoy a meal on any day or a beer or two. The brewery typically offers live music on the patio during the spring, summer and fall.

Napa Valley Brewing Company Inc.

Calistoga Inn, Restaurant & Brewery
1250 Lincoln Ave., Calistoga
Website: calistogainn.com/brewery

TANNERY BEND BEERWORKS

Since its opening, Tannery Bend Beerworks has gone beyond just brewing beers. It has become a community

gathering place for locals and visitors alike.

Tannery Bend’s welcoming spaces feel like a neighborhood pub from the moment you walk in. Rooted in community and craftsmanship, it is dedicated to small-batch brewing and a culinary twist.

The business started in 2017 when founders Tyler Rodde and Matt Cromwell saw a synergy between food and beer, “in the same way food and wine have been a part of Napa Valley for a very long time,” said Rodde.

When Rodde and Cromwell started as a nanobrewery on Coombs Street, they found a need for a local community brewery that focused on flavors and creativity, using fresh local ingredients.

“He and I have very similar thoughts and ideas about the process of making beer and creating recipes for food,” said Rodde.

However, during the pandemic, they were forced to close.

“It was at that time that we decided to make a much larger investment in the community and open a small regional brewery and larger beer garden to attempt to satisfy the growing demand for community in the food and beer world of Napa,” Rodde recalled.

Their original location, The Garage, is in the heart of Napa’s Rail Arts District. Beer lovers rejoice in this industrial setting, where fresh draft beers are crafted and poured daily. Both indoor and outdoor seating and convenient to-go options are available.

In December 2023, Cromwell and Rodde opened The Garden for those seeking a beer-garden experience. Located in downtown Napa’s revitalized West End district, the venue offers a rotating

selection of 20 beers on tap, an expansive cocktail menu, and a welcoming atmosphere paired with a standout food menu. The Garden is known for elevated bar food and full dinner plates.

Rodde believes the beer industry is “absolutely on the rise.” He continued: “When we started, we were producing around 400 barrels of beer, and now we are closer to 4,000.”

In the coming months, even more exciting changes are in store.

“We are very excited about some seasonal collaboration beers with our good friends (at the) Napa Palisades beer company and Barrel Brothers,” said Rodde.

The Garage and The Garden continue to evolve their hours, serving from sunrise to sunset. The Garden has an early-morning opening for the coffee crowd, offering fresh pastries. Lunch and dinner menus are available throughout the day, and The Garden has also become one of the best places to watch nighttime sporting events and listen to late-night music.

Tannery Bend Beerworks

The Garden - 1500 First St. (Suite 150), Napa

The Garage - 1721 Action Ave. (Suite C), Napa

Website: tannerybendbeerworks.com

EROSION TAP HOUSE

Everything — from the name to the beverages at Erosion Tap House — tells a story.

Erosion was initially a wine-tasting room that opened just before the pandemic forced a temporary closure. When it reopened in March 2021, it quickly expanded, doubling its size and evolving into a full-fledged destination for beer, wine and craft beverages.

In May 2023, three brothers-in-law, Eloy Garcia, Erwin Tomas and Jesus Delgado, acquired Erosion. Tomas and Delgado were employees of the original Erosion before they moved to acquire it with Garcia.

Beyond its beverages, Erosion’s original philosophy was deeply rooted in Napa Valley’s geological and cultural history. Over 180 million years, erosion shaped the region, forming the diverse soils that now give Napa wines their world-renowned character.

Just as natural forces have shaped the valley, Erosion Tap House aims to push boundaries in fermentation, crafting experimental and unexpected flavors that blend beer, wine and beyond.

Today, the tap house is split into two complementary sides. On one side is the beer hall, with TVs that show various sports. The other side is a lounge with a more family-friendly setting, including 20 flavors of ice cream. The duality of the location has garnered a loyal local following.

“We are natives to the area and very much part of the community; we take an approach of being a welcoming place that has something for everyone,” said Delgado.

One of Erosion’s popular local offerings is a trivia night, held every two weeks.

In addition to Erosion’s increasing popularity, Delgado has noticed a particular change in how beer is distributed throughout the Napa Valley.

“What has led me to believe that the beer industry is on the rise is the amount of breweries that are now distributing into the area,” he said. “In the past, the valley may have been overlooked, and now we are able to see

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some of the best breweries on the shelves and draft lists in a number of places.”

To capture the growing interest, Erosion’s owners launched The Guild of Abundance, a wine and beer membership offering exclusive access to small-batch creations. The membership has monthly and quarterly options, with members being granted first-access events, special limited beers, complimentary tastings, and discounts at the tap house and bottle shop. The shop has over 300 offerings including wine, mead, seltzer, cider and beer, along with gluten-free and non-alcoholic beverages.

“The majority are finely curated beers from some of the best craft breweries in California, along with an array of international beers,” said Delgado.

In addition to its growing

list of beverages, Erosion will host new events, participate in San Francisco Beer Week, and host specials lined up for various holidays in the near future.

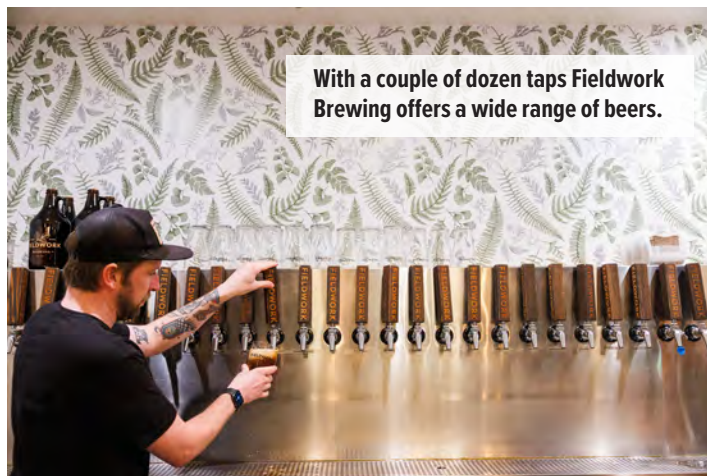
Erosion Tap House

1234 Main St. (Highway 29/128),
St. Helena

Website: erosion.buzz

FIELDWORK BREWING COMPANY

Since its founding in 2014, Fieldwork Brewing Company has been dedicated to crafting honest, high-quality beer that celebrates the art of brewing. Headquartered in Berkeley, Fieldwork has expanded across Northern California, with taprooms in Corte Madera, Monterey, Sacramento, San Leandro, San Mateo, San Ramon and Napa, offering beer lovers a



With a couple of dozen taps Fieldwork Brewing offers a wide range of beers.

NICK OTTO / REGISTER

chance to experience fresh, innovative brews in a relaxed and welcoming setting.

“Since 2020, we’ve seen a positive trend in tourism and steady growth in Napa’s craft beer industry,” said Fieldwork regional manager Terrence Tang. “Both locals and tourists are seeking a broader range of experiences,

and craft beer is carving out its own space alongside Napa’s world-class culinary and beverage scene.”

Fieldwork is unique because of its ever-changing tap list, featuring a rotating selection of small-batch releases that guests can enjoy by the glass or sampler flight. That includes beer and

Patrons sit in the late afternoon sun on the patio at Fieldwork Brewing in Napa on Friday, Feb. 14, 2025.



non-alcoholic options.

“We’ve seen a growing demand for high-quality non-alcoholic options, making this a natural extension of what we do,” Tang explained. “Beer has always been about community and shared experiences, and that shouldn’t be limited to those drinking alcohol.”

Last year, Fieldwork began offering pizza on the first Tuesday of the month, and it quickly became a favorite among locals and visitors alike.

“Our 8x8 Detroit-style pizzas are a unique addition to Napa’s food scene, offering a bold, crispy and flavorful complement to our craft beer and non-alcoholic selections,” said Tang.

With a commitment to craftsmanship and creativity, Fieldwork continues to push the boundaries of brewing,

delivering bold, flavorful beers that reflect the spirit of exploration and adventure.

“While the demand for diverse beverage experiences continues to rise, we remain mindful of economic uncertainties and their potential impact on costs and consumer spending and remain focused on the customer experience,” said Tang.

Whether one visits the original Berkeley location or sips a seasonal release at a Fieldwork taproom in Napa, each pour is a testament to the brewery’s dedication to



Patrons sit around a fire pit on the patio at Fieldwork Brewing in Napa on Friday, Feb. 14, 2025.

NICK OTTO / REGISTER

quality and innovation in California’s craft beer scene. For those looking to take the experience home, 16-ounce cans and four-packs, along-

side various non-alcoholic craft beverages, are available.

Fieldwork Brewing Co.

1046 McKinstry St., Napa

Website: fieldworkbeverage.com ■



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REVIEW

The Firecracker Salad served by the Clif Family Bruschetteria Food Truck is seen on Friday, Feb. 14, 2025.



NICK OTTO / REGISTER



A Nashville Hot Chicken Sandwich served by the Clif Family Bruschetteria Food Truck is seen on Friday, Feb. 14, 2025.

A GASTROPUB ON WHEELS

CRUISING THE CLIF FAMILY BRUSCHETTERIA FOOD TRUCK MENU

BY TRACY J. MAYNE

Many of us got our introduction to food trucks in college as places to go (after too many pitchers of beer) to stave off both late-night hunger and the ensuing next-morning hangover. My favorite at Rutgers was the aptly named Greasy Tony's, whose Garbage Can Burger was exactly what the name implies.

Fast-forward 40 years and times have very much changed. Food trucks have become crucibles of culinary innovation. Sous chefs in major cities use them as steppingstones, generating followers before moving on to expensive brick-and-mortar restaurants.

When the Napa Valley Register asked that I review a food truck, I had three in mind. But based on foodie word of mouth, my top choice was the Clif Family Bruschetteria.

Parked next to the Clif Family tasting room in St. Helena, it has garnered both a gustatory reputation and loyal lunch following. The food is

locally sourced farm-to-table, and the mantra of the chef is: grown here, made here. The menu selection includes salads, sides, mains and desserts. We decided to sample all four.

The best-selling item on the menu is the firecracker salad, made with kale, cabbage, pickled carrots and orange slices, dressed with Meyer lemon-miso and spicy curry seeds. I understand the appeal. It's light, fresh, sweet-and-spicy, with enough curry and heat to make it interesting. I'm not the biggest kale fan, so saying I would order this again is no faint praise.

For sides we had the polenta tots and Brussels sprouts. The tots are a must-order! The center is lush and creamy, with a mix of fontina/mozzarella/Parmesan cheeses, covered in a fried, crusty-brown shell. The homemade buttermilk ranch dipping sauce has a hint of lime. The crunchy/creamy/cheesy/hint-of-lime gestalt came together perfectly. It was a delight to eat.

Not to be outdone, the Brussels sprouts were perfectly caramelized and tender, covered

in abundant almonds and pistachios. The sweet-and-sour honey dressing pooled in the bottom of the bowl. At first Cody complained, until I suggested he eat from the bottom, allowing the sprouts to soak up the dressing. His sentiment changed immediately. Whether by intention or happy accident, the sprouts are cooked in a way that allows them to sponge up the sauce, and that's the way to enjoy this dish.

Next came the funghi bruschetta. The grilled, bready crust was like sourdough, but with the depth of a whole grain. It turned out to be a special sourdough bread provided by Model Bakery. Alas for proprietary recipes, because I would bring a loaf of this home in a heartbeat! The array of wild mushrooms was plentiful and earthy, with ricotta and melted fontina that covered but didn't overwhelm. The chives provided a nice accent of both color and flavor.

For our main course, we had the signature Nashville chicken sandwich. Fair warning, this is impossible to get your mouth

around and is an unavoidably messy eat! The double-stacked fried chicken is moist, salty and crispy, with a sauce that's hot but not overwhelming (a lean version of a Buffalo hot sauce). What really heightened the flavor was the pimento cheese, which brought with it a rich pepperiness and depth. The house-made brioche bun was denser than a traditional brioche and not as buttery, which suited the sandwich. Grilled, it brought a burnt savoriness.

All of this sat atop a (perhaps too) generous helping of buttermilk slaw. Given the heat, the milky slaw is a good complement, but as I write this I'm still digging some of the buttermilk out of my beard. If you're in anything but a T-shirt, either eat this leaning forward or bring a bib!

Cody ordered the seasonal mustard celebration brat. The local sausage is seared, then covered with pickled mustard greens, a mild Dijon and crispy radish slices. The house-made bun was firm and pretzelly. The mustard kraut brought a bitterness that intensified the

umami of the overall dish. A pity we are post-Super Bowl, because this would have been perfect paired with a strong lager or ale in front of a wide-screen TV.

We ordered altogether too much food (half brought home in a doggie bag), but we decided to power through to dessert. The coffee malva is a South African bread pudding. It was rich and moist and gooey, drizzled in caramel and covered in whipped cream. There was a tropical fruit flavor that I first thought to be banana, but was in fact persimmon (combined with the coffee it has a banana-like taste). It is worth saving room for.

We finished with the chocolate budino, rationalizing that the small portion stopped it from being excessive. Though billed as a sort of pot-de-crème, it is far denser, and the flavor is chocolate, chocolate, chocolate and more chocolate,

which lingers forever on the palate. It's velvety and sprinkled with Cabernet salt it is intense, so be prepared.

Prices are low for a Napa lunch. Salads are \$11 (small) and \$16 (large). Sides are \$9 to \$12 (with a full order of chicken wings at \$15). Bruschetta are \$16-18; sandwiches are \$13.50 for the bratwurst and \$19 for the chicken. Desserts are \$4 to \$7.50. If you're

frugal, you can easily have an excellent lunch for \$20.

Wednesdays are Street Food Day, featuring dishes from a different country each week. If you time it right, you can order your food and then enjoy it with a glass of wine from the tasting room happy hour, which runs 4 to 7 p.m. (\$10 pours).

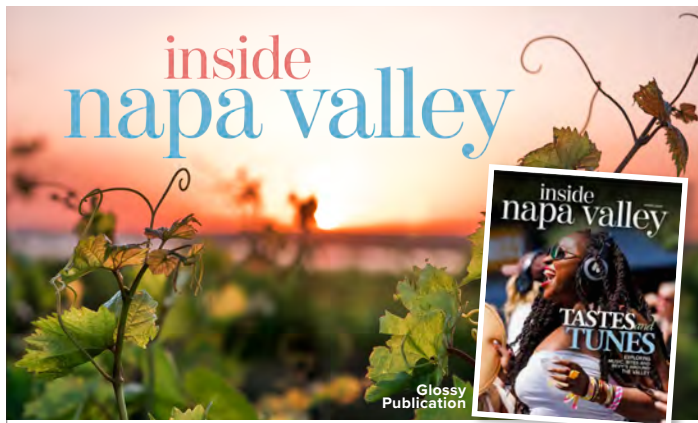
The world evolves. What was once the purview of late-

night collegiate binge drinkers is now a midday haute cuisine gastropub on wheels. Fresh local ingredients in the hands of a James Beard-level chef make for an affordable afternoon culinary experience.

But I wouldn't wait. Food this good can't help but lead to another Napa destination restaurant. When it opens, get there early because I'll be at the head of the line!

The Clif Family Bruschetteria food truck is located at 1284 Vidovich Ave., just off Highway 29/128 in St. Helena next to the Clif Family tasting room. There's ample parking and covered outdoor seating. For more information, visit cliffamilyfoodtruck.com. ■

The Mayne Menu is a food review column by Tracy J. Mayne. For suggestions on where to eat next, email themaynemenugmail.com.



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 Creative Deadlines: **Thursday, June 5th, 2025 @ 1pm PST**

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'ALL YOU NEED IS BIRRIA'

SIBLING DUO OPENS THE BIRRIA SPOT IN AMERICAN CANYON

BY RILEY PALMER

Behind the counter at American Canyon's The Birria Spot at Canyon Cafe, owners and siblings Michael Lara and Cindy Lara are taking orders and charting a new course for the breakfast spot that was once an institution in south Napa County.

The menu is a far cry from what used to be served at 3845 Broadway (Highway 29), which stuck to classic American diner fare. The Lara siblings are looking forward to bringing a sit-down birria restaurant to American Canyon seven days a week, from 10 a.m. to 9 p.m. on weekdays and 9 a.m. to 9 p.m. on weekends.

"People have always given us a chance, especially when they actually get to know us," Michael said. "We're not just a corporation, a big business; you know, we're locals, opening a business."

As the name suggests, The Birria Spot's menu is centered on birria, a flavorful slow-cooked Mexican stewed meat that is traditionally beef. The restaurant has everything from birria ramen, a combination of birria meat, birria stew and ramen noodles, to the handmade torti-



Siblings Michael and Cindy Lara pose for a photograph at their new restaurant The Birria Spot in American Canyon on Wednesday, Nov. 20.

NICK OTTO / REGISTER

llas filled with cheese and birria that are known as quesabirria.

The menu boasts other types of dishes and protein selections ranging from \$4 to \$19.95. Those needing a breakfast fix can get chilaquiles or huevos rancheros, both Mexican breakfast classics, or keep it simple with tacos or burritos.

Cindy is behind the food side of the business while her brother Michael is more aesthetics- and numbers-ori-

ented. She runs an American Canyon food truck named Tacon Hambre, while Michael has his own income tax office in Vallejo.

"When it comes to ideas on what we can incorporate here, how certain things go, what's put on certain plates, that's where my strong suit is," Cindy said.

Cindy added that their restaurant gets most of its business from restaurant sales but also sells birria by the pound for events.

The birria offered at The Birria Spot is the same recipe Cindy makes in her food truck at 4225 Broadway to the north. The only difference is that at The Birria Spot, each tortilla is handmade.

The Lara siblings grew up coming to the Canyon Cafe with their three other siblings, who have lived in town since 2004. The family has an entrepreneurial spirit, with two income tax offices, two food trucks, a real estate company and now a restaurant among them.

Cindy and Michael Lara bought the cafe in November 2023 from its former owner Ali Tadjbakhsh, a family friend. Michael admitted that the prospect of taking over a locally well-known establishment was intimidating.

"We know that Canyon Cafe has been a

The Quesabirria is served at The Birria Spot in American Canyon on Wednesday, Nov. 20.



staple here in American Canyon, and we knew that once we took over, that we had big shoes to fill,” Michael Lara said. “We wanted to make sure that we’re here to stay, that it’s something that people will be proud of.”

Once the siblings bought the location, they got to work. Tadjbakhsh gave them a run-down of what needed to be fixed after they bought the restaurant, and Michael knew he and his sister had their work cut out for them.

“Coming in, being here until 1 or 2 in the morning, taking out the (kitchen) equipment ... it’s been a long, enduring process but it’s definitely worth it,” Michael said.

There’s new upholstery on the seats, fresh paint on the walls, and a decorative wall of fake vines with the phrase “All You Need is Birria” in illuminated lettering.



Alfredo Osorio prepares food at The Birria Spot in American Canyon on Wednesday, Nov. 20.

NICK OTTO / REGISTER

“We gutted everything out, tried to fix it up and give it a whole new perspective, bring the place back to life,” Cindy Lara said. “It really did need a little bit of love.”

Now that everything at the cafe is up to code, the family has been seeking to get the word out about its reopening and have seemingly done so successfully.

Michael Lara said that it

took customers a bit of time to get used to the new menu.

“With change there’s always going to be a little bit of resistance,” he said. “Once people come and try it, they can see the direction we’re going.”

Both siblings swear by the eatery’s most popular dish — the quesabirria. The dish comes with three handmade tortillas filled with stewed beef

and mozzarella cheese, topped with cilantro and served with the birria broth known as consomé, grilled onions, cucumber and radish on the side.

Cindy and Michael Lara hope to put up an illuminated sign atop the restaurant as soon as the city processes their request, and plan to keep the iconic Canyon Cafe sign up to honor what came before them.

Michael said that in the coming years, he and Cindy intend to build an outdoor patio and host music performances and other events, which would cement their goal of creating a community hub.

“We want to be able to use every square inch of this location,” Michael said. “It’s a place to come and enjoy family. ... We’re all very close, and we want to be able to have people come in and enjoy the same thing that we’re enjoying.” ■

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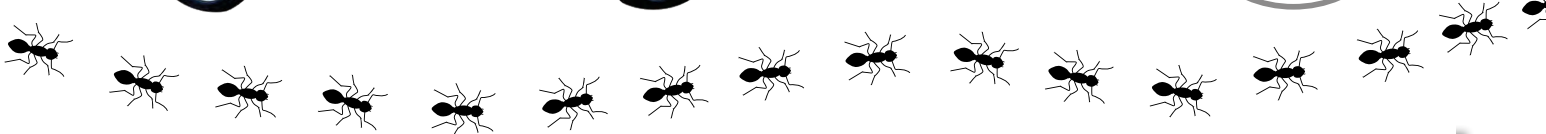
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