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NEXT STOP

Fine Art Meets Fine Wine in Napa Valley

By JAIME GROSS

IT was a crisp and sunny Saturday in Yountville, a wine-soaked town in the heart of the [Napa Valley](#), and a steady trickle of day-trippers was hopping from tasting room to oak-scented tasting room, spearing Manchego cubes and sipping the latest vintages.

But the crowd at [Ma\(i\)sonry](#), a new shop on Washington Street, was sampling something different. Armed with glasses of [pinot noir](#) and zinfandel, the preppy weekenders from [San Francisco](#) and beyond tiptoed from room to room, admiring oil paintings of golden-hued riparian landscapes by Wade Hofer and graphic silhouettes of California poppies rendered in acrylic on canvas by Chiara Mondavi, a scion of the legendary winemaking family.

Housed in a restored 1904 manor house with exposed log rafters and thick stone walls, Ma(i)sonry (6711 Washington Street, Yountville; 707-944-0889; www.maisonry.com) represents the new, multifaceted face of Napa: wine, with a side of [art](#).

Art is popping up all across the vineyard-rich valley, from agricultural barns that used to house hay and livestock feed to private, museum-worthy collections secreted in the rolling hills studded with faux Tuscan villas, orderly rows of grapevines and, in the winter, yellow stripes of mustard flowers.

"Hundreds of artists live here, there are galleries in every town and there's an extraordinary range of art available, if you know where to look," said Michelle Williams, executive director of the Arts Council Napa Valley, a nonprofit that promotes the arts. "You could go to an art opening or event every weekend, if you wanted."

The valley's artistic roots go back to 1970, when Margrit Mondavi, the matriarch of the [Robert Mondavi Winery](#) (841 Latour Court, Napa; 707-226-1395; www.robertmondaviwinery.com), opened a 5,000-square-foot gallery at the Spanish Mission-style estate, with adobe walls, exposed beam ceilings and huge windows that frame the surrounding vineyards and purple oaks. It was the region's first such wine-and-art combo.

"I saw empty wall space, and I thought: some art must go there," Ms. Mondavi said. "We wanted to introduce our wine together with beautiful things, to capture the joie de vivre of winemaking." Ms. Mondavi, 84, still curates the gallery, which focuses on abstract and figurative paintings and sculpture. Exhibitions change every two months, and often showcase

work by established artists like [Wayne Thiebaud](#) and Earl Thollander.

Mondavi may have paved the way, but Ira Wolk, a local gallery owner who died this past summer, helped the art scene blossom. In 1990, he opened the [I. Wolk Gallery](#) in downtown St. Helena (1354 Main Street; 707-963-8800; www.iwolkgallery.com), the region's first fine-art gallery not affiliated with a winery. The gallery, with its eclectic lineup of high-caliber artwork, quickly attracted a rarefied clientele, from French aristocrats to [Oprah Winfrey](#) to the Queen of Jordan.

More recently, Mr. Wolk opened two satellite galleries, including a 33-acre sculpture park at [Auberge du Soleil](#) (180 Rutherford Hill Road, Rutherford; 707-963-1211; www.aubergedusoleil.com), a resort that is a favorite of celebrities and splurging honeymooners.

Officially, the open-air gallery at Auberge is open only to resort guests, but for visitors who can't swing the \$550-and-up room rate, they can take their chances by dining at its Michelin-starred restaurant and sweet-talking the maître d' into unlocking the gate to the undulating sculpture garden, laced with olive groves and meandering gravel paths. It's worth the extra legwork.

"I was going for the 'aha' moment," Mr. Wolk said earlier this year. He placed 90 sculptures throughout the lush grounds, most of them tantalizingly sited barely within view of one another, so moving from one piece to the next is a process of discovery and delight. Certainly that's the effect when a visitor stumbles on a full-scale aluminum moose peering through tall grasses (a piece by Ken Kalman), or the bright yellow and red steel hoops that appear to roll down a grassy slope (by Jack Chandler).

Fortunately the region's most dynamic collection requires no wrangling to view. A sleek three-story temple to modern and contemporary art, the [Hess Art Museum](#) at the Hess Collection Winery (4411 Redwood Road, Napa; 707-255-1144; www.hesscollection.com) is free and open to the public.

The owner, Donald Hess, a Swiss entrepreneur and wine producer, opened the 11,000-square-foot museum in 1989, partly to promote artists he had been collecting, including heavyweights like Robert Motherwell, [Francis Bacon](#) and Anselm Kiefer. He also wanted to draw customers to his winery, which is situated well off Napa's beaten track, along a winding road lined with pine and redwood trees.

Visitors today can sip the estate's highly regarded [cabernet sauvignon](#) in a farmhouse-style tasting room before touring the galleries, which display about 120 blue-chip works, including photorealistic paintings by the Swiss artist Franz Gertsch and an installation of melted and cracked rocks by the British artist [Andy Goldsworthy](#). Strategically placed windows offer glimpses of the working winery: from the gallery staircase, an overhead view of giant fermentation tanks, and, in the West Gallery, a cutout overlooking a rapid conveyor belt where bottles are cleaned, filled, corked and labeled, at a rate of 100 a minute.

But while there are many places to watch wine being made (at Napa's hundreds of wineries, for starters), seeing art in the making is a rarer treat. For that swing by Clos Pegase (1060 Dunaweal Lane, Calistoga; 707-942-4981; www.clospegase.com), where Jim Stallings paints amid oak fermentation tanks, or drop by Gordon Huether's refurbished Hay Barn Gallery (1821 Monticello Road, Napa; 707-255-5954; www.gordonhuether.com), a huge metal-clad barn where glass is fused, pressed and laminated into abstract art.

On a crystalline summer afternoon, a dozen studio assistants were airbrushing enamel paint and sprinkling glass dust onto glass panels, soon to be assembled into a gigantic wall installation for a [Houston](#) airport. "It's like going to the Jelly Belly factory, except with art," Mr. Huether said, as he led visitors on an impromptu tour, past a glowing kiln.

Art in Napa also extends to photography, including a gem of a collection at Mumm Napa (8445 Silverado Trail, Napa; 707-967-7700; www.mummnapa.com), a sparkling-wine producer. There, inside a barnlike building, is a red-walled gallery where you can sip bubbly while viewing more than 30 rare, original [Ansel Adams](#) prints, on loan from Matthew Adams, the photographer's grandson. An adjacent gallery spotlights contemporary photography.

Another iteration of Napa's art scene has only come to the fore in recent years. With its luxurious estates and concentration of wealth, Napa and neighboring [Sonoma Valley](#) are home to many notable private art collections, some of which are now open to the public, though usually by appointment.

One of the most ambitious belongs to Steven Oliver, a construction company magnate who turned a former sheep ranch in Geyserville, in Sonoma County, into an art complex that he calls [Oliver Ranch](#) (call 510-412-9090, extension 210, for tour appointments and directions). Mr. Oliver commissioned artists like Bill Fontana and Bruce Nauman to create 18 installations specifically for the 100-acre estate. Mr. Nauman's project, for example, is a quarter-mile-long concrete staircase that traverses grassy meadows and leads to the stone house where Mr. Oliver lives part-time.

"I tell them: you just dream, we'll figure out how to do it," said Mr. Oliver, who has a fleet of bulldozers and cranes at his disposal. To install a 245-ton [Richard Serra](#) sculpture, he transported a crane from [Arizona](#) because [California](#) didn't have one large enough to handle the job. He also reinforced three bridges en route.

The ranch is open to the public just on weekends from April 15 to June 1, and from Sept. 15 to Nov. 1 and only by appointment. Mr. Oliver personally leads the two-and-a-half-hour tours.

But perhaps the most eye-popping collection is [di Rosa](#) (5200 Sonoma Highway, Napa; 707-226-5991; www.dirosaart.org), which claims to hold the largest collection of contemporary art by Northern California artists. Scattered on the 217-acre property are more than 2,000 pieces — of varying quality, but never banal — owned by the nonagenarian collector, Rene di Rosa, a self-described "artoholic" and one of the first to plant grapes in the Carneros region, in the 1960s.

The artworks are crammed in two white-walled galleries by a meadow and a lake, and in a 125-year-old former winery where literally every surface, floor-to-ceiling, is spangled with colorful prints, paintings, drawings, sculptures, photographs, and video art.

The exuberant di Rosa may be “the opposite of the white cube,” said Kathryn Reasoner, the museum’s executive director. “But everyone leaves smiling.” That kind of buzz can’t be bottled, even in Napa.

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