

# NAPA'S LUXURY SIP TOUR

BY LINDA KISSAM

## What's your wine choice?

Sipping an ultra-premium glass of wine always evokes feelings of luxury. No matter where you are or what varietal or blend you drink, indulging in a glass of wine has a way of making one feel nurtured and inspired. After all, what could be more enjoyable than savoring a glass of perfectly crafted Cabernet with friends, sipping an exceptional Sauvignon Blanc while strolling leisurely through a vineyard, or conversing with a vintner or winemaker?

Like most wine lovers I've



done my time in tasting rooms located in Napa Valley. It's an important place to explore as Napa is a benchmark for all things wine. I've had the large producer experience standing in tasting lines and being part of a group tour where a spunky little guide drones on and on about things I already know before they'll let me taste the wines.

I've also done the dusty road, where in the heck am I now, back-road winery tour. You know the one. You get there 20 minutes late and everyone has gone home or 15 minutes early and they forgotten you're coming. So when someone mentioned going tasting in Napa again, I rolled my eyes and said, "Not unless you can promise me a high end experience I won't forget."

And so it was that Wineormous Wine Tours organized a three stop private winery tour reminding me that wanting to drink the world's best wine in private settings few people ever experience is as good of a reason as any to get on a plane and head off to Napa Valley. The key to this magic was getting an expert to organize it for me, arrange for ground transportation and join in at each tasting. The ability to exchange thoughts and notes with an experienced wine aficionado was indeed a luxe experience I won't soon forget.



*Al Fresco Tasting at Arns Winery*

**Here are my suggestions for a luxury sip tour. Plan about 5 hours for the experience.**

**Quintessa:** When your by appointment only private guide greets you with the statement, "We honor the birds, the owls, the butterflies—all as a part of the terroir" you know you are in for a unique experience. When that same guide takes you outside for a hillside tour and quiet tasting among natural settings, you know you've hit flower-power wine nirvana. "We're 100% biodynamic. We plant fava beans and alfalfa between the rows of grapes." The guide has my attention. However when he finishes off with, "We're creating a life force here, it's harmony Mother Nature would approve of" I begin to understand the depth of passion that goes into these seriously good wines. One sip of this complex divine wine while

pausing on the nature trail overlooking the Quintessa grounds and I am sold.

Those wines are red blends done in the style of a Meritage that are "a reflection of space and place." They began at about \$65. We step inside and are served a selection of the various vintages with some amazing cheese and crackers in an elegant tasting room. Unhurried and nurtured through the tasting by our own personal host, we left wanting for nothing and understanding the passion that only Napa Valley can deliver.

**Arns Winery:** Why would my tour guide choose a winery that is often sold out of their wines? Exactly for that reason. Taste the best, know the best, and experience the best.

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Arns is located on the hillside east of St. Helena, CA, in the heart of the Napa Valley. The 160 acre (10 of which are under cultivation) parcel sits at the 800 foot elevation above the valley floor and below the Howell Mountain Appellation. The vines vary in age from 15 to 45 years. The newer blocks are planted in dense spacing of 5' x 3' and on vertical shoot positioned trellises. There are a total of seven different clones of Cabernet Sauvignon in the various blocks. These clones present flavors of deep dark black fruit, anise, velvety chocolate, plump cherries, allspice. The yields are low and average about 1.5-2 tons per acre. All of the vineyards are farmed using organic methods. What does this mean to you? Exceptional wines beginning at about \$85 a bottle.

## **By appointment only.**

Be prepared to be immersed in a slow-hand private tasting with the owner that is organized to your ability and level. This a tiny winery where your tasting will be done outside under an awning on patio chairs. Love to stroll the vineyards? It's possible. Want to just sip out on the patio immersing yourself in the essence of their vineyards? It's doable. Want lots of chat? No problem. Thinking less is more on the conversation angle? No problem. That's the cool part of having your day pre-planned for you. All

the details have been taken care of. You wine host meets you on your level. No guessing on their part if you know your Brix from your Lees.

## **Crocker & Starr**

**Winery:** Producing about 1000 cases total of Cabernet Sauvignon, Cabernet Franc and Sauvignon Blanc this winery produces ultra-premium wines beginning with some whites coming in at the \$25 range. The reds are considerably more (Average of \$85). The charm of this stop is that guests can judge for themselves just how much price figures into deciding how a luxury wine is defined.

As with the other stops, a reservation must be made prior to showing up. There are two choices. The VINEYARD EXPERIENCE begins at their 1918 restored farmhouse with Sauvignon Blanc on the porch, followed by a seated tasting of the estate red wines. 50 minutes. Or the AL FRESCO EXPERIENCE, a wine and charcuterie pairing designed to highlight the flavor profiles of the wines. 24 hours' notice required. 90 minutes. My guide got me the whole boat experience, combining one and two into a two hour extravaganza. Notable and memorable. Not to be missed.



## If you haven't done this kind of Luxury Sip before, here are some final parting tips for you.

1. Hire a professional wine tour guide. If you have to put him/her on the plane with you to have the perfect experience, so be it. My recommendation? Tom Plant is the owner of Wineormous Wine Tours that specializes in easy breezy Temecula Tours, but his knowledge of and connections to Napa Valley are what legends are made of. Ask for him to plan your trip, arrange the transportation and driver and accompany you. He lives in Southern California. <http://wineormous.com/tours/> Worth every penny.
2. When you have a personal guide, the tip to each wine host should be Included in the price you pay for the tour. Ask up front. If not, leave a generous tip at each stop.
3. If you tasted something you liked, buy it. Your tour guide will include a place to safely store your wine purchases in the tour vehicle until s/he takes you home, or s/he will arrange for them to be sent to your home or office. A real wine tour operator will know whether your purchases can be shipped to your home state.
4. Drink an equal or more amount of water to whatever wine you consume.

Until we meet again in the most luxe places to sip, I wish you the best in your travels far and near. ■



*Napa Valley Vineyard (above)*

*Photography by Linda Kissam. Barrels image courtesy of sxc.hu.*

