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## Top Wine Travel: Outstanding Value and Pinot Noir in California's Anderson Valley

On a recent visit, our wine columnist found that little has changed in this friendly corner of northern California over the last 20 years—including the prices. Use her guide to find the region's best hotels, restaurants and winery tastings.



By Lettie Teague      May 12, 2022 12:54 pm ET

IF YOU WANT to travel back to a time when it was easy and cheap to taste good California wine, I have some advice: Go to Anderson Valley.

As with any time-travel story, there are a few obstacles to overcome. For starters, Anderson Valley is remote—about three hours north of San Francisco, in Mendocino County—and the final leg of the journey features a few hair-raising turns. Hotel rooms are limited, and few could be called luxe. The restaurants are open on limited days and hours; ditto the winery tasting rooms. But if that doesn't dissuade you, you'll find friendly locals, good food and reasonable prices, not to mention first-rate wines.

The addition of air conditioning to some hotels was one of the few changes between my first trip to the valley almost two decades ago and my visit last month. Another: the proliferation of great Pinot Noir by local winemakers and producers from outside the valley who have purchased vineyards here. Both have helped get the word out that Anderson Valley is one of the best places to grow Pinot in California and maybe the world.

There are no corporate resorts or hotels here. In fact, there are fewer than 100 hotel beds in the entire valley, according to the Anderson Valley Winegrowers Association.

For more than three decades, Johnny Schmitt has owned the Boonville Hotel in the town of Boonville (population around 1,000), which marks the beginning of the 18-mile-long Anderson Valley wine region. Mr. Schmitt's late parents, Don and Sally Schmitt, founded the famed French Laundry in Napa in the 1970s and later moved north to Mendocino, where they launched Philo Apple Farm, still a working farm, kitchen and collection of tastefully rustic guest cottages in Philo.

Set high on a hill overlooking the vineyards on the outskirts of that charming hamlet, the Indian Creek Inn is a collection of three lodges owned by Kevin Orr, his wife, Elizabeth Ashiku-Orr, their son, Travis Orr, and Elizabeth's brother, Phillip Ashiku. Next to Indian Creek Inn is the Madrones, the valley's luxury option. Owner Jim Roberts built the Italian-inspired group of buildings as a residence and design business, and in 2011 he turned it into a small inn and restaurant (The Wickson). Later he added tasting rooms for Drew Family Cellars and Long Meadow Ranch winery, plus a stylish cannabis dispensary, the Bohemian Chemist.

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The Wickson and the Boonville Hotel's restaurant offer the valley's most ambitious dining and comprehensive wine lists, but there are good casual options as well. In Boonville, Offspring Pizza at the Farrer Building, run by the team at the Boonville Hotel, serves delicious wood-fired pizza. A few doors down, at Mosswood Market Café & Bakery, the empanadas are so ardently sought-after that when I arrived just before noon to buy a few, they had long been sold out. (I placed an order for the following day, and they were well worth the wait.) At the Company Kitchen in Philo, I was pleased to see Libby Favela at the helm. She was working as a chef in the valley when I visited two decades ago, and her signature tacos did not disappoint. There is a shortlist of local wine and beers here, and a \$15 corkage fee if you bring your own.

**The reasonable prices extend to the valley's tasting rooms, too. Tastings have always been free at Husch Vineyards. "It would feel weird to us to charge," said Zac Robinson, whose family purchased Husch in 1979. His sister and co-owner, Amanda Holstine, runs the tasting room; her husband, Brad Holstine, is the winemaker.**

The \$15 per person tasting fee at Handley Cellars is relatively new, necessitated by Covid and increased expenses, according to co-owner Lulu Handley. (It's also waived with a three-bottle

purchase.) “It was a big deal for us to start charging,” she said, sounding pained. Her mother, Milla Handley, was one of the region’s pioneers.

At Drew Family Cellars, Jason Drew makes the wines, and his wife, Molly Drew, hosts tastings on weekends by appointment and walk-ins “as space permits.” At Baxter Winery, Phillip Baxter is the winemaker and his wife, Claire Baxter, runs the tasting room—but, she noted, she stopped doing the pouring when their children were “old enough to pull bottles off the shelf.”

Modesty abounds in this region, but there is nothing modest about the quality of its wines. Stay tuned for parts two and three of this time-travel story, to learn more about the Anderson Valley Pinots and sparkling wines that have earned a most ardent following.

### Hotels and Restaurants

**The Madrones and the Brambles:** At this upscale enclave, guest rooms and cottages run \$275-\$350. A fine-dining restaurant, The Wickson, offers a well-priced, locally focused wine list. The Madrones is also home to two winery tasting rooms and a high-end cannabis dispensary. [TheMadrones.com](http://TheMadrones.com)

**Boonville Hotel & Restaurant:** This iconic roadside hotel/cottage complex has a restaurant, wine shop and kitchen garden. From \$195 a night, including breakfast, [BoonvilleHotel.com](http://BoonvilleHotel.com)

**Indian Creek Inn:** Three renovated lodges decorated with artwork by co-owner Elizabeth Ashiku-Orr sit high on a hill overlooking the Goldeneye Confluence Vineyard. From \$190 a night, [IndianCreekInn.biz](http://IndianCreekInn.biz)

**The Company Kitchen:** This casual restaurant and bar offers burgers and Mexican fare by chef Libby Favela, a mainstay of the Anderson Valley community, as well as a shortlist of local wines and beers. 8651 Highway 128, Philo

**Mosswood Market Café & Bakery:** At this friendly cafe, the breakfast pastries and the sandwiches are good, the delicately flaky empanadas, outstanding. 14111 Hwy 128, Boonville

### Winery Tasting Rooms

**Baxter Winery Tasting Room:** Winemaker Phillip Baxter produces first rate single-vineyard Pinot Noirs, and his wife, Claire Baxter, oversees their small tasting room. [BaxterWinery.com](http://BaxterWinery.com)

**Drew Tasting Room:** Molly Drew conducts tastings at this cozy tasting room. Her husband, Jason Drew, makes exceptional Pinot Noir as well as Syrah, Chardonnay, Viognier and Albariño. [DrewWines.com](http://DrewWines.com)

**Handley Cellars:** The late Milla Handley founded Handley Cellars in 1982; it’s now run by her daughter Lulu Handley. Well known for Pinot Noirs, Handley also produces appealing sparkling wines. [HandleyCellars.com](http://HandleyCellars.com)

**Husch Vineyards: Co-owner Amanda Holstine offers a wide range of well-priced wines at the rustic tasting room of this Anderson Valley stalwart, including a terrific Chenin Blanc, made by her husband, Brad Holstine. [HuschVineyards.com](http://HuschVineyards.com)**

Navarro Vineyards Tasting Room: The tastings are still free here, on the patio or in the garden. Known for Gewürztraminer, the winery produces a range of other wines, too, including Pinot Noir. [NavarroWine.com](http://NavarroWine.com)

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