

CHICAGO SUN-TIMES

Wine Flights: City of Napa Keeps the Libations Flowing In Area's Wine Bars and Tasting Rooms

NAPA, Calif. -- Napa Valley -- derived from the Indian word "plenty" -- has long been known as a wine lover's paradise. The glorious vineyard views, surrounded by mountains, serve as fertile backdrop to the fancy restaurants and more than 360 wineries blanketing the area.

The city of Napa itself lies near Napa Valley's southern edge and the tonier towns of Yountville and St. Helena, both situated to the north. Traditionally, visitors traveled "up valley" and bypassed this riverfront town of 64,000 people, filled with its own character of Victorian mansions and 19th century commercial buildings.

A vibrant wine scene has sprouted in Napa for connoisseurs looking for a more mellow experience. A total of 10 wine bars and tasting rooms have emerged downtown, all within a short distance. This centrally located grouping is arguably the densest concentration of wine tasting rooms anywhere in the world, even beating out Chateauneuf-du-Pape, in Provence.

Downtown Napa has re-invented itself in the last few years, beginning with COPIA Robert Mondavi inspired COPIA, the contemporary museum of Wine, Food & the Arts, which only opened in late 2001. COPIA, named for the goddess of abundance, is a huge draw, bringing visitors into the city, instead of simply driving north to the wineries. Today, Napa boasts a thriving array of fine upscale downtown restaurants including Budo, Zuzu, Cole's Chop House and Posticino; many boutiques, specialty shops and even some nightlife. The various wine bars, collectives and tasting rooms have led this transformation. Combining the wine tasting experience, with shopping and dining, the City of Napa is vying for the big time. As a local, I've seen this transformation take place - from a city that rolled up its doors at 6:00 p.m., to one where commerce and entertainment are begin to flourish once the sun goes down. Downtown Napa is a small area - one could walk its entirety in thirty minutes.

**“The nexus of this new Napa is Bounty Hunter
Rare Wine & Provisions.”**

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The Bounty Hunter at the corner of First and Main is considered ground zero, or the nexus of this new, Napa phenomenon. The Bounty Hunter is a real "wine bar" (serving only wine and beer) and makes its mark by offering forty wines by the glass, plus more than four hundred wines in the bottle. This is a place to talk wine, sample hard-to-find wine, enjoy wine and buy wine. With room for about 35 people to sample and savor varieties, the place is a veritable open wine barrel.

A rustic, Western feel livens up the interior, complete with authentic Old West artifacts and vintage saddle chairs dotted throughout. (They even sell antique knives.) At the same time, the Bounty Hunter serves many significant wines from California, as well as from around the world. Wines by the glass may, on any given night include fine, hand selected imports from Australia, Bordeaux, Italy and beyond. Their beer selection is also worthy of perusal. Food is available too, with excellent barbecue, (try the beer-can chicken) and various small plates.

With a knowledgeable staff and hopping clientele, many of whom are in the wine business, this place is a must visit for all wine loving, Napa-bound visitors. Being a true "wine bar," the Bounty Hunter also stays open the latest of all the local tasting rooms. Try the Downing Family '02 Cabernet Sauvignon for a special treat.

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