



- Sections:
- [Mailbox](#)
 - [Recipes](#)
 - [Recipes by Emeril](#)

- [Virtual Kitchen](#)
- [Women's Nutrition](#)

Click here. Check Sutter first.

Lifestyle TASTE

Does my doctor embrace new technology?

Click here. Check Sutter first.

Joint tasting rooms take the whine out of sipping wine

By Mike Dunne -- Bee Food Editor

Published 2:15 a.m. PDT Sunday, October 12, 2003

Here's a scenario that looks to be more common each passing weekend:

You head out for a leisurely day of touring and tasting in one of Northern California's wine regions, such as the Napa Valley. But traffic is congested and slow, and by the time you reach the city of Napa at the southern reaches of the Napa Valley, you are so wrung out you no longer want to continue the crawl north.

Now you don't have to. Throughout California's wine regions, collective tasting rooms are popping up in unlikely settings, and Napa is the epicenter of this latest attempt by wineries to grab new customers.

For visitors to such wine areas as the Napa Valley, collective tasting rooms offer an opportunity to taste the wines of 10 or so individual producers without hopping in and out of the car to get from one winery to another.

Basically, at a collective tasting room, several vintners pour wines in a setting similar to a traditional winery tasting room. However, such tasting rooms generally aren't attached to a winery.

"Most of them are small companies; a tasting room would be too expensive for them," says John Matthew Green of the wineries who do their pouring at Vintner's Collective in downtown Napa, where he is the director of sales and marketing.

Housed in Napa's oldest stone building, built in 1875 as a brewery, Vintner's Collective plays host to 10 Napa Valley wineries, with room for eight more. The lineup includes such well-established brands as D Cubed Cellars and Mason Cellars, as well as promising newcomers such as Mi Sueño Winery and Melka Wines.

Vintner's Collective has 38 different wines on hand, but on any given day just four are poured. The cost is \$10 for four wines or \$15 for the four wines and a logo glass.

At the nearby Napa Wine Merchants, which carries the wines of 12 producers, Thrace Bromberger takes a different approach. "Everything for sale can be opened and tasted," Bromberger says. "If people don't taste it, they don't buy it."

The counter behind her is lined with 20 bottles of opened wine. Wineries represented at Napa Wine Merchants include Gustavo Thrace, Benessere, Harrison and Hendry. (Her charge is \$5 for any three wines.)

More than today's competitive market is prompting vintners to join the joint tasting rooms. Most participants are small, family-owned operations without winery tasting rooms because of zoning regulations, remote settings or the cost. Some make so little wine they can't get national distribution, so they have had to come up with another outlet. Several don't even have their own wineries, making their wines at neighboring wineries or custom-crush facilities.

The Napa Wine Co. in Oakville is one such facility. Of the 85 clients making wine at the Napa Wine Co., 22 brands are available in the adjoining Cellar Door, the company's tasting room. They include such high-profile producers as Jones Family Vineyard, Fife Vineyards, Joel Gott and Pahlmeyer.

Selections for tasting are rotated in and out of the daily menu, which offers four tiers of three wines each, ranging from \$5 to \$20 per group.

Randy Mason, owner and winemaker of Mason Cellars in the Napa Valley, has his wines at two tasting rooms, the Cellar Door and Vintner's Collective.

"I can't afford a winery," Mason says in explaining why he makes his wine at Napa Wine Co. Thus, collective tasting rooms offer him a way to expose his wines aside from the traditional winery tasting room. "It's a way to get the Mason name out and to get the wine tasted. If I can get people to taste Mason, I usually do a pretty good job of getting them to buy it."

Here's an introduction to several collective tasting rooms in the Napa Valley:

* Artisan Wine Tasting, open 10 a.m.-6 p.m. daily. A former antiques shop with a massive rock fountain out front, the new Artisan features 12 wineries, including Howell Mountain Vineyards, Domaine Charbay and Lamborn Family. 3000 Highway 29 (at Lodi Lane), St. Helena; (707) 967-0666.

* Cellar Door at Napa Wine Co., open 10 a.m.-4:30 p.m. daily. Winemakers occasionally appear at Saturday afternoon presentations. 7830-40 Highway 29, Oakville; (707) 944-1710; <http://www.napawineco.com/>

* Napa Wine Merchants, open 10 a.m.-5 p.m. Mondays, Wednesdays, Fridays and Saturdays; 10 a.m.-7:30 p.m. Tuesdays and Thursdays. 1146 First St., Napa; (707) 257-6796.

* Vintner's Collective, open 11 a.m.-6 p.m. daily except Tuesday. 1245 Main St. (at Clinton Street), Napa; (707) 255-7150; <http://www.vintnerscollective.com/>

* Wineries of Napa Valley, open 10 a.m.-8 p.m. daily. Eight wineries pour at the newest of Napa's cooperative tasting rooms, including Goosecross Cellars, Burgess Cellars and Girard Winery. 1285 Randolph St. (at Clay Street), downtown Napa; (707) 253-9450; <http://www.napavintages.com/>

About the Writer

The Bee's Mike Dunne can be reached at (916) 321-1143 or mdunne@sacbee.com.

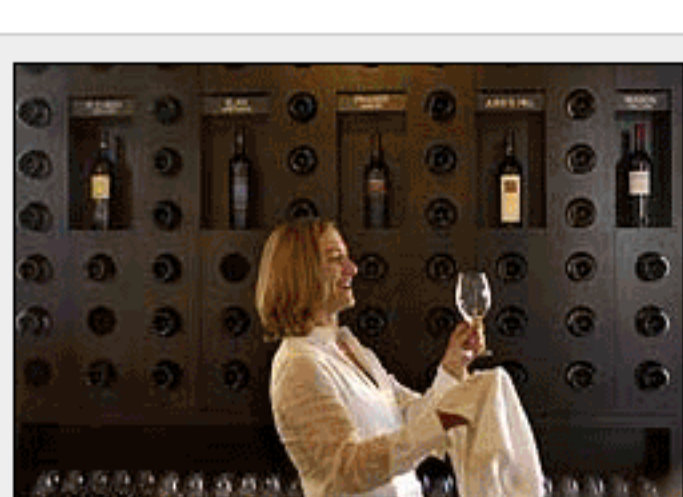
Lodi, Sutter Creek jump on bandwagon

Napa isn't the only place where collective tasting rooms are springing up. Lodi and Sutter Creek also are testing the concept.

* Lodi Wine & Visitor Center: Part tasting room, part exhibit hall, part museum, the Lodi Wine & Visitor Center is the largest and most ambitious collective in Northern California, with 100 Lodi wines by 80 producers on hand, though just nine are available for tasting on a rotating weekly basis. The fee is \$1 per taste. Open from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. daily at 2545 W. Turner Road, Lodi; (209) 365-0621; <http://www.lodiwine.com/>

* Sutter Creek Wine Tasting: In contrast to most collective tasting rooms, the three small Sierra foothill wineries in this old Main Street residence -- French Hill of Calaveras County, Le Mulet Rouge of Amador County and Gold Hill of El Dorado County -- don't charge for pours of the 28 or so wines available any given day. Open from 11 a.m. to 6 p.m. daily at 85 Main St., Sutter Creek; (209) 267-5838.

The Sacramento Bee - Get the whole story every day - [SUBSCRIBE NOW!](#)



Diana Ackert, tasting room manager at the Vintner's Collective in downtown Napa, polishes a glass at her establishment, which offers sips of wines from 10 wineries too small to have their own tasting rooms.

Sacramento Bee/Randall Benton



sacbeeTOPJOBS

[Medical Physician Physician's ...](#)

[Apartment Maintenance, company has ...](#)

[NURSE REGIONAL NURSE Growing Assisted ...](#)

[Drivers/ Activities Asst For Non-profit ...](#)

[Nursing FT UM/ UR Nurse Immed. opening ...](#)

[Sales Equipment Leasing Direct lender ...](#)

[ACCOUNTANT Midtown trade assoc. ...](#)

[MARKETING REP INSURANCE ...](#)

[MEDICAL RECEPTIONIST S. Sac Ophthalmic ...](#)

[CUSTOMER SERVICE for expanding tile ...](#)

[DRIVERS NEEDED EXCELLENT PAY CD ...](#)

[SALES ACCOUNT EXECUTIVE ...](#)

[VETERINARY If you are looking for ...](#)

[Engineer Civil / Land Development ...](#)

[DENTAL HYGIENIST Friendly East Sac ...](#)

[WAREHOUSE WORK Immed FT Positions. ...](#)

[HVAC Installer w/ exp. ALSO: Service ...](#)

[LOANS Sacramento Mortgage Broker ...](#)

[TRUCK DRIVER Local Flat Bed & Low ...](#)

[Human Resources Rapidigm, an IT ...](#)

[Computer Local Credit Union seeks ...](#)

[OFFICE MANAGER Looking for exp. ...](#)

[INSURANCE 100% CONFIDENTIAL ...](#)

[TEACHERS ASST. NPS seeking a F/ T ...](#)

[SALES REPS NEEDED Bell Brothers ...](#)

[CLERICAL. Ins. Agcy seeks motivated ...](#)

[View All Top Jobs](#)