

THE ART OF FINE WINE LIVING

# LE·PAN

## Where do Napa winemakers dine out?

By Bill Ward on July 29, 2015



Napa's winemakers have a host of fine and casual dining options

For many Napa Valley visitors, the revelation is not the wine; it's the food. With scores of restaurants featuring farm-to-table (and sea-to-table) ingredients, it's hard to go wrong when dining out.

But where do the folks who make Napa's wines go for special occasions, or just a burger and (gasp) a beer? Where might visitors bump into their favorite winemaker?

We asked eight vintners to cite special-occasion and casual spots — and where they hang with their vinous homies.

The most-touted hangout: Rutherford Grill's bar for lunch and late afternoon. If you don't encounter a famous winemaking face while dining, at least you know that the food will be stellar.

**Philippe Melka**

*Owner/winemaker of Melka Wines, owner of Atelier Melka Wine Consulting Company*



Philippe enjoys Press for it's comprehensive wine list and rare bottles. Photo by: Atelier Melka Consulting Company



Photo by: Kristen Loken

**Special occasion:** “Whenever we go to [Press](#), we know we are in for a treat. Sommeliers Kelli White and Scott Brenner always impress me with their recommendations, (and) Press has one of the most comprehensive wine lists in Napa with a number of rare older vintages/special bottles.”

*Must-have menu item:* “the truffle mac and cheese and bacon platter.”  
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**Casual:** “[Goose and Gander](#) is one of my favorite places to hang out and have a cocktail at the end of the day.”

*Must-have menu item:* “You can’t beat their burger and octopus salad.”  
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**Eileen Crane**  
CEO/winemaker of *Domaine Carneros*





If you're looking for a small piece of France in Napa Valley, Eileen recommends Bouchon. Photo by: Domaine Carneros



Photo by: Deborah Jones

**Special occasion:** "[Bouchon](#) is a little piece of France in the middle of Napa Valley. On nice evenings you can sit al fresco on their patio ... taking in the Wine Country air while enjoying good food and wine.

*Must-have menu item:* "The smoked-salmon rillettes with toasted croûtons. Insider's tip: You can also purchase these at Bouchon Bakery next door."  
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**Casual:** "It's no secret that I love sparkling wine, and nothing goes better with sparkling wine than oysters. I would eat at Hog Island [Oysters](#) every day if I could.

*Must-have menu items:* "I love their grilled cheese, made with Cowgirl Creamery's fromage blanc and house-made pickles."  
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**Tim Mondavi**  
 Owner/winemaker, Continuum



Thomas Keller's contribution to the culinary scene should be recognized, says Tim. Photo by: Continuum





Photo by: Drew Altizer

**Special occasion:** “For exquisite dining, the [French Laundry](#) still sets the standards. Thomas Keller has made significant contributions for the culinary scene and it’s appropriate to recognize that. The best view and food combination is the deck at [Auberge du Soleil](#).”

*Must-have menu item (Auberge):* “None, because the menu changes so frequently.”  
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**Casual:** “[Angele](#) and [1313 Main](#) are great examples of a new energy coming into downtown Napa and featuring the great food and wines of the world. Another one: [Zuzu](#) in downtown Napa.”

*Must-have menu item (Zuzu):* the boquerones  
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**Jenny Wagner**  
Owner/winemaker, Emmolo



Jenny's choice for a casual meal? Ciccio's pizzaPhoto by: Emmolo





Photo by: Ciccio

**Special occasion:** “Press’ cuts of meat are of the highest quality, and the restaurant strongly supports Napa Valley wineries of all sizes, also offering many older vintages that are impossible to find anywhere else.”

*Must-have menu item:* “The macaroni & cheese is unforgettable.”  
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**Casual:** “My favorite go-to restaurant in the valley is [Ciccio](#). The owners, the Altamuras, have perfected the most delicious pizza you will ever try. I love the casual, fun ambiance. The wine list offers some of Napa’s best wines at great prices. If you’re not in the mood for wine, be sure to try a specialty Negroni.”

*Must-have menu item:* any pizza.  
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**Dan Petroski**  
*Winemaker, Larkmead, and owner/winemaker, Massican*



Dan loves the service and attention to detail at French Laundry. Photo by: Massican





Photo by: Deborah Jones

**Special occasion:** “It isn’t always the food at the French Laundry that connects you with a time or a place; the service and attention to detail is second to none.”

*Must-have menu item:* “The ‘oysters and pearls’ is easily one of the world’s best and most luxurious bites.”

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**Casual:** “I don’t think there is a more energetic place to eat in Napa Valley than [Ad Hoc](#). With a fixed menu nightly in family-size portions, the staff is knowledgeable about the ingredients and preparations and their enthusiasm for the food is infectious.”

*Must-have menu item:* “The fried chicken is first-class.”

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### **Cathy Corison**

Owner/winemaker, Corison



Cathy recommends Farmstead for a great feel for Napa Valley living. Photo by: Rebecca Gibb





Photo by: Matt Edge

**Special occasion:** “When I have good friends in town, I want them to get a feel for living in the Napa Valley. [Farmstead](#) at Long Meadow Ranch in St. Helena is great for that. It is a fully integrated farm-to-table restaurant, growing everything from the vegetables and Scottish Highland beef to the wine.”

**Must-have menu item:** “Don’t miss the brick-cooked chicken, a specialty of chef Stephen Barber.”  
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**Casual:** “[Market](#) is a lovely space with old stone walls. They serve good, homey food to mostly locals and have a terrific wine list.”

**Must-have menu item:** “I like the hanger steak.”  
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**Chris Carpenter**  
*Winemaker, Cardinale and Lokoya*





For a down-to-earth and relaxed atmosphere, Chris chooses Bistro Jeanty. Photo by: Cardinale and Lokoya



Photo by: advencap at Flickr.com via Creative Commons license

**Special occasion:** "[Bistro Jeanty](#), because i really like the food and the atmosphere. It's a little more comfort-food-driven than other Napa places, and that works for me. The food is spot on, and the wine list is not daunting as far as size and prices."

*Must-have menu item:* "The cassoulet rocks. Best I've ever had."  
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**Casual:** "[Cook St. Helena](#), definitely a local spot and the food is outstanding. Another small, great wine list. When they're in season, I always get the Brussels sprouts; can't beat 'em.

*Must-have menu item:* "Mussels and clams with house-made sausage."  
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**Elizabeth Vianna**  
*Winemaker, Chimney Rock*





With a wine list dedicated to local vintners, Rutherford Grill is Elizabeth's favorite casual spot. Photo by: Chimney Rock



Photo by: Neeta Lind on Flickr.com via Creative Commons license

**Special occasion:** [Bistro Don Giovanni](#), an Italian bistro with beautiful outdoor or indoor fireside seating. The food is fantastic and consistent. The pastas are beautifully made in-house. The wine list is fun with some good Italian selections when I'm in the mood to 'travel' with my wine selection.

*Must-have menu item:* "Pollo alla Diavola. I rarely eat chicken when I eat out, but this dish is out of this world."  
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**Casual:** "At the [Rutherford Grill](#), the atmosphere is fun, and the wine list is dedicated to local vintners."

*Must-have menu items:* "The grilled artichoke and the jalapeño cornbread."  
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## Bill Ward

Bill Ward is a freelance wine, food, travel and lifestyle writer. His "Liquid Assets" column runs in the Minneapolis Star Tribune, and his work has appeared in the Wine Enthusiast, Sommelier Journal and Wines & Vines magazines.

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