

The world's best wine magazine

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Decanter

Stars of Southern Italy

Pioneers and newcomers, from the edge of Rome to the tip of Sicily



CALIFORNIA CALLING
The wines that should be
in your cellar, and the best
wine bars in Napa & Sonoma

- PLUS**
- Global Sauvignon Blanc
 - Aussie Pinot Noir & Shiraz
 - Bordeaux au naturel
 - Priorat reds



BEST WINE BARS IN NAPA & SONOMA

Whether you're after the reverence of a classic institution, a youthful quirky vibe or the surprise of a revamped old favourite, there's a wine bar for you in **Jess Lander's** pick of 10 must-try venues

With roughly 1,000 wineries, a bounty of Michelin-starred restaurants and new luxury hotels popping up around every corner, Napa and Sonoma businesses are constantly being pushed to up the ante and diversify in order to stand out from the stiff competition. The local wine bars are no exception.

A wave of new venues have entered the scene with trendy and playful designs made for the Instagram age, while some old wine-country favourites have gallantly bounced back better than ever after falling victim to the recent earthquakes and fires. These join the ranks of the tried and true classics, who have no need for pageantry and thrive on their reputable wine lists alone.

As for food, it's a given, though it ranges from late-night nibbles to farm-fresh veggies and gourmet burgers that go above and beyond the customary condiments.

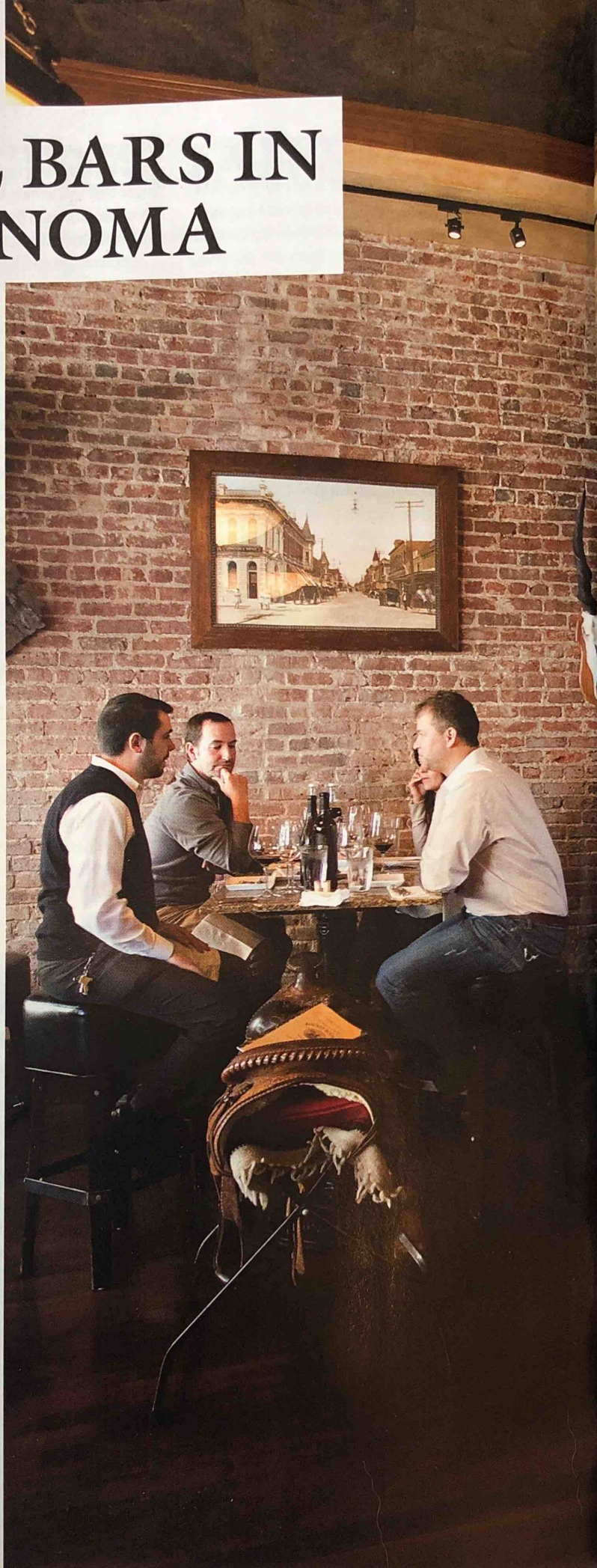
This is all good news for California wine country visitors, for there is literally a wine bar for everyone. Interested in expanding your palate? Order a glass of Hungarian Kadarka at downtown Napa's newest addition, Compline. Looking to party? Stroll another block down First Street to Cadet. Strictly sparkling? Check out The Jade Room or Sigh, Sonoma's lively bubbles bars. You get the idea.

In the same way that one prefers a buttery Chardonnay and another a complex Cabernet, Napa and Sonoma wine bars aren't one size fits all, but rather choose your own adventure.



Jess Lander is a wine, food and travel writer based in Napa Valley

Photograph: Gustavo Fernández





Bounty Hunter Wine Bar & Smokin' BBQ NAPA

Carrying more than 400 rare bottles from all over the globe in its wine shop and offering 40-plus pours by-the-glass, Bounty Hunter is proof that smoky barbecue can pair with so much more than Zinfandel. Housed in an 1880s brick building downtown, Napa's favourite barbecue joint feels like a modern-day saloon (it also has a collection of more than 40 whiskeys) and has been grilling up ribs, brisket, pulled pork and

its specialty beer-can chicken for 25 years. Unpretentious to its core, Bounty Hunter approaches wine with a refreshing lightness. Each dish on the menu is listed with a suggested pairing, whites and reds are listed in definable categories - 'Rich and Textured' or 'Bold but Balanced' - and wine flights have pun-tastic names, like 'Let's Get Fizz-ical' and 'Pinot Envy'.
975 First St, Napa
www.bountyhunterwinebar.com



The Jade Room SANTA ROSA

Once inside the unassuming 4th Street entrance in slightly gritty downtown Santa Rosa, The Jade Room's classic Hollywood banana leaf wallpaper suddenly transports you to the Beverly Hills Hotel. Chic, vibrant and fun, Sonoma's newest wine bar doesn't take itself too seriously. Case in point: a bright neon sign that reads 'Poppin' Bottles' has launched The Jade Room to instant social media fame since opening in early 2019. Relax in Palm Springs-inspired, mid-century modern furnishings: plush green sofas with flamingo pillows and overstuffed, blush-coloured swivel armchairs. Bubbly is the main focus, with roughly 10 sparkling wines and Champagnes served by the glass, in flights, or Champagne cocktails (and on Sundays, they host a two-hour, bottomless mimosa brunch). The food menu consists of mostly shared plates, such as oysters, a cheese and charcuterie spinner, and a trio of grilled cheese sliders. But fitting for The Jade Room's mostly millennial clientele, single-serving dishes can be found under a section titled 'The Selfie'. >

643 4th Street, Santa Rosa
www.thejaderoomsr.com



The Jade Room

Compline **NAPA**

Equal parts wine bar, restaurant and wine shop, Compline (pronounced kom-plin) opened in 2017, just in time for downtown Napa to undergo a major revitalisation. Master Sommelier Matt Stamp and his partner Ryan Stetins handpicked an extensive selection of Napa and Sonoma wines from boutique and often lesser-known producers, but locals actually flock to their simple and intimate indoor/outdoor space in search of wines that aren't local. The 32-page list spans Virginia to the Pacific Northwest, nine countries in Europe, and the southern hemisphere, but while wine is obviously the focus, food doesn't take a back seat. The burger and duck-fat fries are legendary. Check the calendar before you go. A few Mondays a month, Compline takes wine lovers on a deep dive into a different wine region – from Champagne to Santorini – as part of its World Tour education series.

1300 First St #312, Napa
www.complinewine.com

Photograph: Emma Morris



Compline

The Fig Cafe & Wine Bar **GLEN ELLEN**

From adored Sonoma restaurateur Sondra Bernstein, this cosy little wine bar is a great way to get a taste of her downtown Sonoma hotspot The Girl & The Fig without braving the crowds (a master of farm-to-table before it became over-used restaurant jargon, it's exceedingly tough to get into without a reservation). But The Fig Cafe & Wine Bar, set in the sleepy, under-the-radar Sonoma County town of Glen Ellen, is Bernstein's best-kept secret, serving up many of her hearty French-country dishes –

from fried green tomatoes to steak frites – to anyone who simply walks in. Bernstein's penchant for Rhônes is evident on the wine list, curated with by-the-glass offerings of Grenache, Cinsault, Viognier and Roussanne, all of which are seldom-grown varieties in Napa and Sonoma. On Wednesdays, local vintners pop in to showcase their wines via complimentary tastings, when it's surely the most happening affair in town.

13690 Arnold Drive, Glen Ellen
www.thefigcafe.com

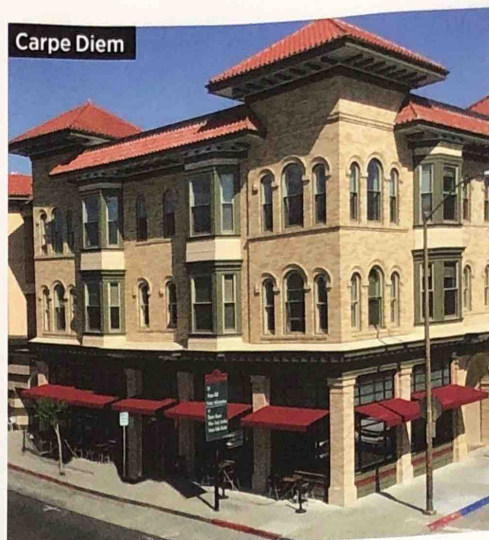


The Fig Cafe



The Fig Cafe

Photograph: Megan Steffen



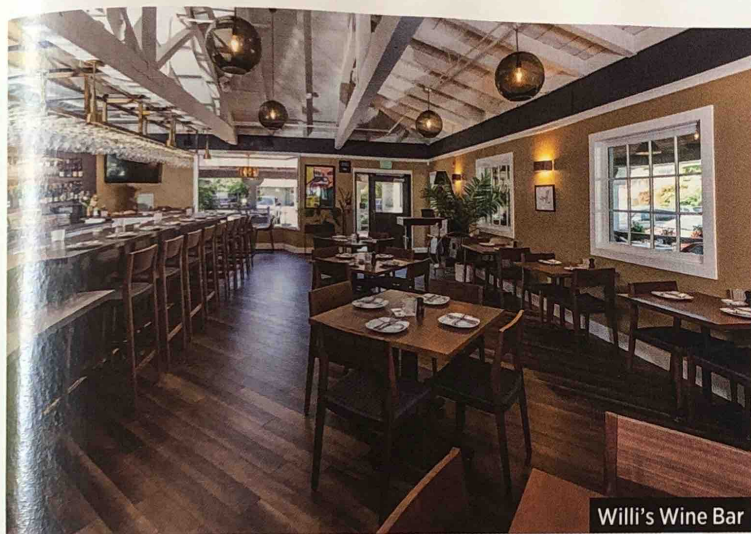
Carpe Diem **NAPA**

A downtown Napa staple for nearly a decade, Carpe Diem received national exposure after the 2014 Napa earthquake, when images of the destroyed wine bar – its awning torn and splayed across spilled bricks on the street – were broadcast across all of the major media outlets. But Carpe Diem took its name to heart and miraculously reopened 10 months later, this time with even more square footage.

A classic, dimly lit wine bar, Carpe Diem isn't flashy or pretentious and the wine list has bottles for every budget (get a magnum of Flowers, Sonoma Coast Chardonnay 2014 for just \$90). The ostrich burger topped with cherry coriander compote and brie is the specialty (order it 'Carpe style' to add an organic poached duck egg) and if you really want to feign that you're a local, ask for the off-menu quack and cheese, a gourmet mac and cheese with duck confit. ➤

1001 2nd St, Napa
www.carpediempna.com

Photographs: www.opentable.com; www.donapa.com



Photograph: Loren Hansen

Willi's Wine Bar

Willi's Wine Bar **SANTA ROSA**

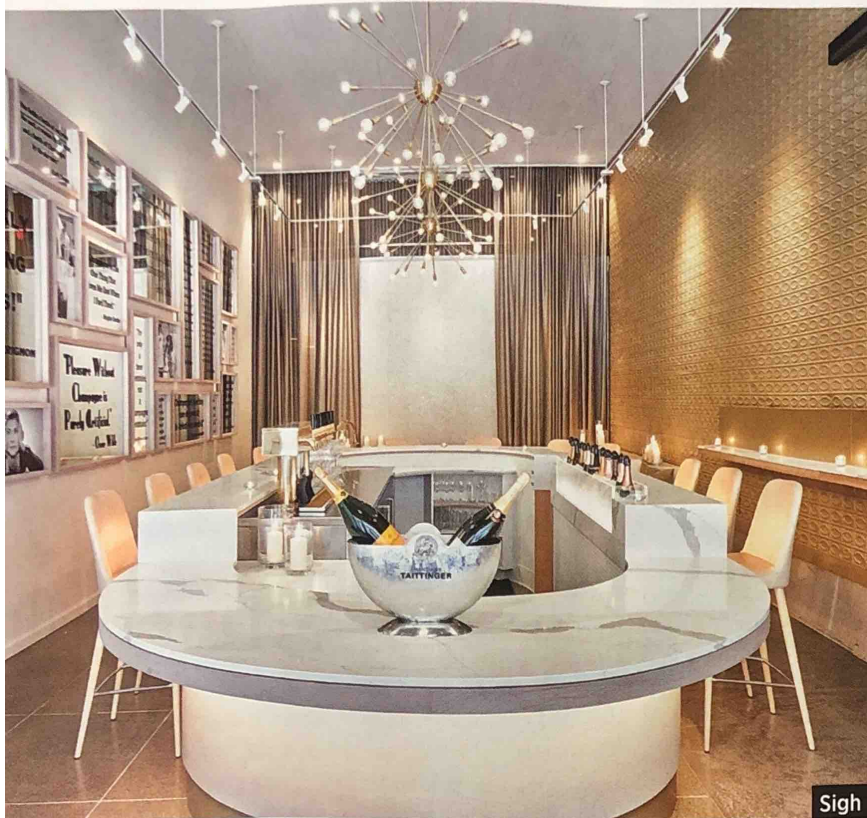
A beloved Sonoma institution for 15 years, Willi's Wine Bar burned to the ground in the 2017 wildfires, but after much pleading from its loyal followers, it triumphantly rose from the ashes, reopening in a new location in spring 2019. From the outside, the sleek and contemporary space located in a Santa Rosa shopping centre might not look quite as homey as the original roadhouse, but Willi's laid-back, friendly spirit that is Sonoma County's signature lives on within – as does a handful of its most popular

small plates, like the Moroccan lamb chops and Tunisian roasted carrots. A mix of hyper-local and international, the wine list boasts more than 50 selections by the glass, a whopping 16 wine flights and a private stash of premium, hard-to-find bottles. While you're there, take a peek above the bar where a single horseshoe hangs. It's the only thing saved from the 2017 wreckage – an inspiring symbol of survival.

1415 Town and Country Drive,
Santa Rosa
www.starkrestaurants.com



Carpe Diem



Sigh

Sigh SONOMA

‘Come quickly, I am tasting the stars.’ These words, famously attributed to Dom Pérignon, are the centerpiece in a wall of bubbly-themed quotes stamped on mirrors at Sonoma County’s original Champagne bar. Located just off the historic Sonoma Plaza, proprietor Jayme Powers (a former wine educator for Napa’s Schramsberg Vineyards) opened Sigh after recognising the need for a dedicated sparkling authority in California wine country. Dripping in gold and silver, the glamorous space fits the theme with luxe lounge areas, an oval-shaped marble bar and mid-century modern chandeliers that mimic the pop of a Champagne cork. A hen-party hotspot on weekends, Sigh serves mostly Champagne and Californian sparklings by the glass and in flights that you can pair with cheese or caviar – and if you tell the staff it’s your birthday, they just might break out the Champagne Gun.

120 West Napa St, Sonoma
www.sighsonoma.com

Photograph: Garrett-Rowland

Cadet Wine & Beer Bar NAPA

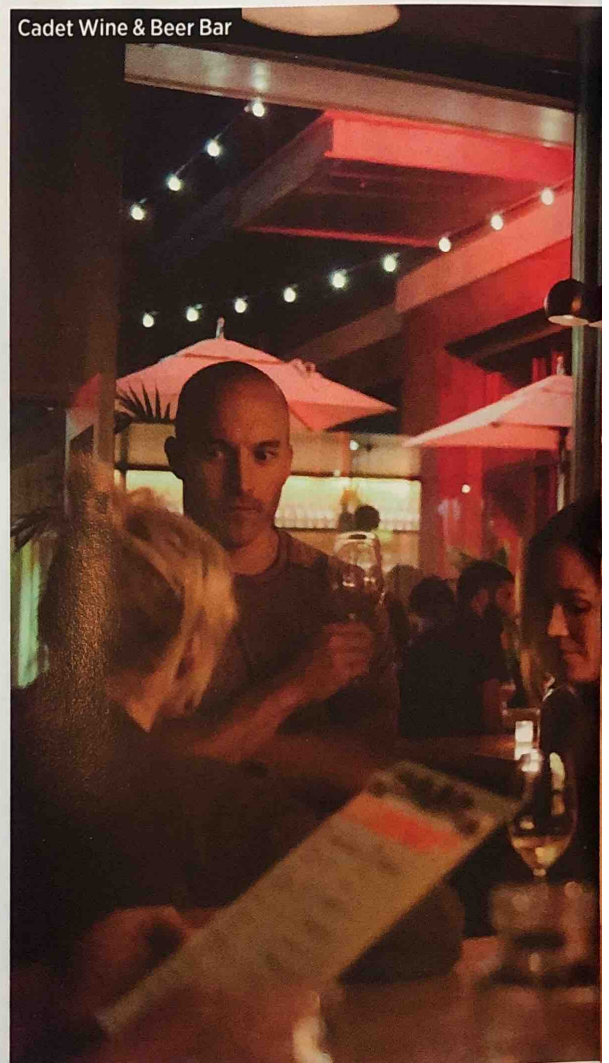
Tucked back into a downtown Napa alleyway around the corner from a Subway, Cadet isn’t the kind of place you’ll stumble upon, and yet it’s almost always busy. Female power-duo Colleen Fleming and Aubrey Bailey run this joint like it’s a nightly house party, popping rare bottles of Champagne, letting patrons pick out vinyl for the record player and grilling up cheesy paninis. Every Wednesday, different producers take over the bar for featured

tastings. It’s usually boutique California wineries that you’ve never heard of, but recently Laurent-Perrier pulled up in a classic pink car full of its prized Champagnes. The parties Cadet throws every few months are total debauchery – picture magnums, costumes, DJs, circus performers and the occasional keg stand, as the bar’s red glow radiates well past curfew.

930 Franklin St, Napa
www.cadetbeerandwinebar.com



Cadet Wine & Beer Bar



Photographs: i8V-Israel Valencia



Fern Bar

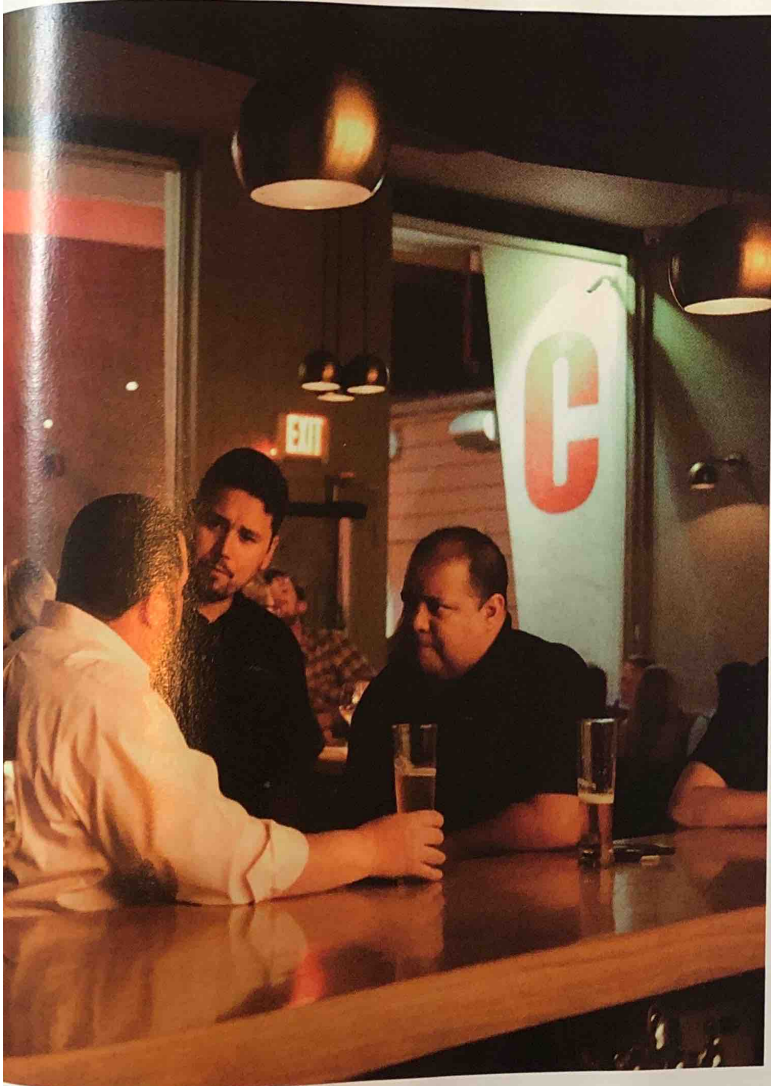


Fern Bar

Fern Bar SEBASTOPOL

Admittedly, Fern Bar is more of a cocktail bar – bar manager Sam Levy left his post at the three-star Michelin Meadowood to run the cocktail programme – but it couldn't be left off this list for two reasons: it's utterly upmarket, and it has one of the only natural wine-focused lists around. Located in Sebastopol's The Barlow, an open-air, industrial marketplace built on the site of an old apple cannery, Fern Bar opened its doors in late 2018 and feels like a library set within a garden conservatory. There's wood and greenery everywhere you look, including a single wall covered in fern-printed wallpaper, but also tufted leather furniture, vintage books and a bevy of taxidermy birds. While this isn't the place to grab a full dinner, the small plates such as bone marrow, fried bread and locally sourced Butcher's Nuggets, make for some seriously delectable hors d'oeuvres.

6780 Depot St, Suite 120, Sebastopol
www.fernbar.com



Goose & Gander

Goose & Gander ST HELENA

This St Helena locale has long been known for its craft cocktails, dating back to its bygone days as the venerable Martini House. The multi-page cocktails and spirits menu comes in a thick, bible-like book, but the wine list is even more epic, compiling more than 100 Napa Valley reds alone and some of the most coveted bottles (\$7,500 for a Screaming Eagle 2007, anyone?). Instead of entering through the front of the 1923 craftsman-style bungalow, walk around to the basement bar – a cavernous speakeasy where the locals hang out. The famous Martini House Mushroom Soup was so cherished that Goose & Gander still serves it today, seven years after opening. Follow it up with The G&G Burger with duck-fat fries. You won't regret forking out the extra \$6 to add the bone marrow on top. **D**

1245 Spring St, St Helena
www.gooseandgander.com

Photograph: www.gooseandgander.com