

EXTRAORDINARY LIVING FOR EXTRAORDINARY LIVES

# LUXURY

## LAS VEGAS

### BEYOND THE *Vines & Wines*

THE NAPA VALLEY EXPERIENCE

BY MARILYN LAROCQUE

Nearly three million wine enthusiasts taste their way up one side of Napa Valley and down the other every year, determined to “do” as many of the almost 300 wineries as they can and still drive.

Since driving the 30 miles between Napa and Calistoga usually means coping with slow, two-lane traffic, with few passing opportunities, particularly during summer and the crush season (August-October), you may wind up spending more time in your car than tasting.

However, there are many ways to minimize frustration and maximize your enjoyment of the Napa Valley experience. Hopefully, these vignettes will help.

#### FAR NIENTE and NICKEL & NICKEL Caves, cars, and carriages

Gil Nickel and his brother, John, “grew” his family’s nursery business in Oklahoma to become the second largest wholesale nursery in the U.S. Redirecting his horticultural interests in 1976, Gil relocated to San Francisco to study winemaking at the University of California, Davis.

He subsequently purchased and restored two historic properties in Oakville, Far Niente (1885) in 1979 and the John C. Sullenger farmstead (1865) in 1998, and turned both into successful super-premium wineries.

Abandoned for decades, both properties required total restoration. Far Niente is another massive stone winery of the late 19th century. It’s also the first North American winery to develop new wine caves in the 20th century. The winery produces only ultra-premium Chardonnay and Cabernet Sauvignon.

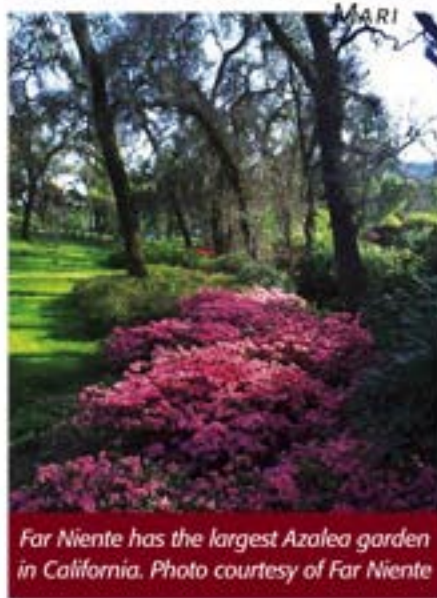
The tour includes the Carriage House, where Gil Nickel’s collection of luxury GTs, fast sports cars, track-hugging racers, and vintage BMW motorcycles recalls his championship vintage auto racing days. One highlight is a 1951 Ferrari 340 America.

A horse-drawn carriage is the transportation symbol of Nickel & Nickel at the Sullenger farmstead.

The farmstead buildings were restored with meticulous attention to historic detail. The original exterior fish scale, sunburst, and rosette elements have been preserved on the Sullenger House. The new chimneys are constructed of



Nickel & Nickel makes only single vineyard 100% varietal wines and is known for its Cabernet Sauvignon. Photo courtesy of Nickel & Nickel



Far Niente has the largest Azalea garden in California. Photo courtesy of Far Niente



A vintage panel truck is the “sign” at Far Niente. Photo by Marilyn LaRocque

brick authentic to 1880s architecture. The interior design recreates the decor of the home of an affluent 19th century farmer.

The circa 1770 Gleason hay barn arrived, in pieces, from Meriden, New Hampshire. The original hand-hewn hemlock and white pine beams were re-assembled in post-and-beam, wood-pegged construction. The haylofts and animal stalls now house offices and a laboratory.

It’s hard to believe the fermentation barn is “new.” It’s built of reclaimed century-old fir beams held together by wooden pegs. Inside is state-of-the-art winemaking technology.

#### WINE TREASURES:

##### Far Niente:

Far Niente Cave Collection wines, dating back to the mid-1980s, are included in tastings. For example: 2002 Chardonnay and 2000 Cave Collection Chardonnay; 2001 Cabernet Sauvignon and 1999 Cave Collection Cabernet Sauvignon. The sumptuous late harvest “Dolce,” concludes the tasting.

##### Nickel & Nickel:

Nickel & Nickel produces only 100% varietal, single-vineyard wines that express the terroir of their site. The winery’s “Terroir Tour” pours several wines of the same varietal and vintage



Part of Gil Nickel’s car collection at Far Niente. Photo courtesy Far Niente

but grown in different Napa Valley vineyards. It’s fascinating to taste the differences.

Far Niente  
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(707) 944-2861  
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Tours and tastings by appointment

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