

One-Tank Wonder | Calistoga

New luxury in Napa Valley: Playful spirit and pampering

Solage attracts young hearts with adult funds

By *Carolyn Zinko*
CHRONICLE STAFF WRITER

It was my first experience ordering a Jack and Coke while behind the wheel.

Whizzing down Silverado Trail on my way to a working dinner in Napa Valley, I passed Casa Nuestra Winery with its "By Appointment Only" sign and was reminded that I'd forgotten to set a time for my spa treatment at Solage Calistoga the next morning. I called the resort's concierge and asked if he could make it. Not a problem, he said. I hung up, but dialed again: Could I please order a cocktail for my boyfriend who was hunkered down in our room,

alone for the night? The concierge again complied graciously — complete with a note to Dan from me wishing him a happy evening.

An 89-room hotel and spa that opened in July, Solage is a low-maintenance resort that easily caters to high-maintenance guests, one of a new breed of casual-upscale lodging for those looking for great service and relaxation, but who also want to leave the coat and tie at home. And despite the upscale vibe, the price is right: I've paid twice as much for a whole lot less.

I booked the two-night "Fall Wine Country Escape" in October and, for \$275 a night, we got a Vega studio room with the latest in electronic gear, a continental breakfast for two and the spa's signature "Mud Slide" treatment with mineral bath and a vibrating chair. The room alone runs \$425 to \$525 in high season; the mud bath costs \$95 per person. (That special ended Nov. 30, but future specials are planned).

Tim Harmon, whose father founded Auberge du Soleil, one of Napa Valley's finest inns, created Solage. But unlike the stodgier Silverado or Auberge, Solage is for the Bluetooth-using crowd, not the blue hairs. And both its restaurant and spa are open to the public (the latter with a day-use fee), if you can't spring for the full package.

It's set between two mountain ridges on a property dotted with mature olive trees and a variety of native plantings, with an architectural style described as "San Francisco loft meets Napa barn." Low-lying cottage-like buildings boast pale yellow exteriors and sleek, city-chic interiors in neutral tones. Bocce ball courts greet guests at the front of the hotel, as does a rectangular cement fountain, which turns into a chic fire pit by night. The property is anchored by an enormous swimming pool at one end and a spa and workout center on the other. The Solbar restaurant offers breakfast, lunch and dinner.

Our room didn't have the private outdoor soaking tub that more pricey units have, but it did have a large shower stall, a king-sized bed, an outdoor patio with modular chairs, a coffee maker and refrigerator with snacks to buy (as well as Crayola crayons and a coloring book.)

It also sported a flat-panel TV

with cable TV, movies on demand, DVD player and a separate iPod docking station for the high-tech gadgetry, and two Electra cruiser bicycles tethered to a rack outside our room for use during our stay.

We skipped dinner the first night to go to a friend's for dinner, but could have dined on gnocchi with butternut squash, mushrooms and pancetta or chateaufort-coated salmon with escarole and polenta or short ribs with risotto, gremolata and watercress. We did, however, succumb to the firepit's temptation on our return to the hotel and sat under the stars sipping a nightcap, basking in the golden glow.

Next morning, we ate breakfast outside — a tomato, cheddar, spinach and bacon omelet for him and chilaquiles (cooked tortillas with scrambled eggs, black beans and jack cheese) for me. I'd misread the Web site and was unaware that my package included a continental breakfast; my account was credited for the extra meal at checkout.

We dipped into the pool and hot tub before pedaling on the bikes into Calistoga, a flat, easy ride of about 2 miles, and walked the sidewalks window-shopping. On a side street, we discovered the City Hall — in use since 1902 — and the charming Sharpsteen Museum of Calistoga History, created by a former employee of Walt Disney whose family lived in town.

Before our jaunt, I'd asked the concierge to change our spa appointment from 2 p.m. to 3:30 p.m., and he did, without a hitch. At the Mud Bar, a bartender mixed up customized mud with one of four scented oils, using volcanic soils from Calistoga and South America. Designer dirt pails in hand, we were led into a heated room where we smeared the mud onto ourselves (and had a mini mud-fight) and then baked for 20 minutes. We rinsed with showerheads that streamed water down onto us from the ceiling.

The third step was soaking in a mineral bath, where we were treated to cocktails from the Mud Bar, and finished by sitting in a private room in reclining chairs that vibrated to New Age-y music playing in headsets. The chairs, we were told, were created by NASA and allegedly assist with "cellular healing." Whatever the case, it was a relaxing way to end the afternoon.

When we got back to our room, we found a handwritten note from the concierge. He apologized for not getting back to me sooner — I'd asked earlier that day if they had spare goggles for lap swimming in the pool. He said there were no loaners, but noted the spa stocked goggles we could buy, and wished us a pleasant stay.

He didn't have to: With all that dotting, we were as pleased as we could possibly be.

One-Tank Wonder is an occasional series on easy trips where dining, lodging and leisure are close at hand. To comment on the story online, go to sfgate.com/travel and follow the links.



BRANT WARD / The Chronicle

Cozy cabins with stylish interiors and complimentary bicycles with maps to wineries are part of the appeal of Solage Calistoga. For more photos with this story, go to sfgate.com/travel.

If you go

All locations are in Calistoga.

GETTING THERE

Solage Calistoga is in Napa Valley, about two hours north of San Francisco via Highway 29 north, Larkmead Lane east and Silverado Trail north.

WHERE TO STAY

Solage Calistoga, 755 Silverado Trail. (866) 942-7442, www.solagecalistoga.com \$325 to \$775, Nov. 1-March 31. Two-night minimum stay on weekends; e-mail specials available. Dogs welcome; notify resort when making reservations.

WHERE TO EAT

Solbar, at the resort (see above). Napa Valley bistro fare with organic, locally grown seasonal foods. Breakfast from \$8 to \$17; lunch from \$9 to \$23 and dinner from \$17 to \$29.

WHAT TO DO

The resort includes bocce ball courts, adult pool and children's pool, yoga and fitness room, and free bikes (map of local wineries provided in room). The spa's treatments include Mud Slide, \$95 per person; massage \$115 to \$170; facials (men and women), \$65 to \$300; waxing \$25 to \$70; manicure-pedicure, \$30 to \$85. Day-use fee for nonguests is \$25.

Sharpsteen Museum of Calistoga History, 1311 Washington St. 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. daily. Free entry but \$3 donation suggested. (707) 942-5911. www.sharpsteen-museum.org.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Napa Valley Conference and Visitors Bureau, www.napa-valley.org.



TODD TRUMBULL / The Chronicle