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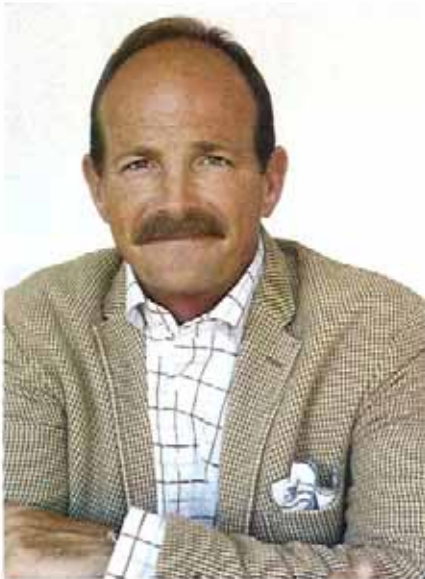


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Of course traveling is a blast for adults, but it also helps expose our children to the world. And it reminds us all over again why we live here.

Much of what we talk about in the pages of *San Francisco* magazine is how great the Bay Area is—how lucky we are to live, work, eat, play, run, love, ride, surf, and raise children here.

It's so wonderful here, in fact, that often we don't leave for long periods of time. And that's not a good thing. Staying in the same place all the time narrows your perspective. Plus, it's boring!

As an East Coast transplant 12 years ago, I immediately became an observer and student of the West Coast lifestyle and mind-set, more specifically the "NorCal" version and its unique perspective on just about everything. When you think about it, the Bay Area really *does* have just about every environmental, ecological, and socio-cultural condition one could ask for: ocean, mountains, lakes, bustling cities, and open space, not to mention every culinary option imaginable. But staying put just isn't the same as actually going to a different city or state or country. You have to get out every so often and explore.

Of course traveling is a blast for us adults, but it also helps us expose our children to the world out there. And it reminds us all over again why we live here. After all, to truly appreciate something, it's necessary to experience something different. I know that every time I get on an airplane or in a car for a road trip somewhere, no matter how wonderful the trip is, I'm always very happy to get back home.

So if you haven't guessed by now, May is our spring travel issue. While we don't jet you all over the world, travel editor Sarah Mueller Bossenbroek (who also doubles as our managing editor) and the edit team escort you to some very cool and interesting places in the west end of the country,

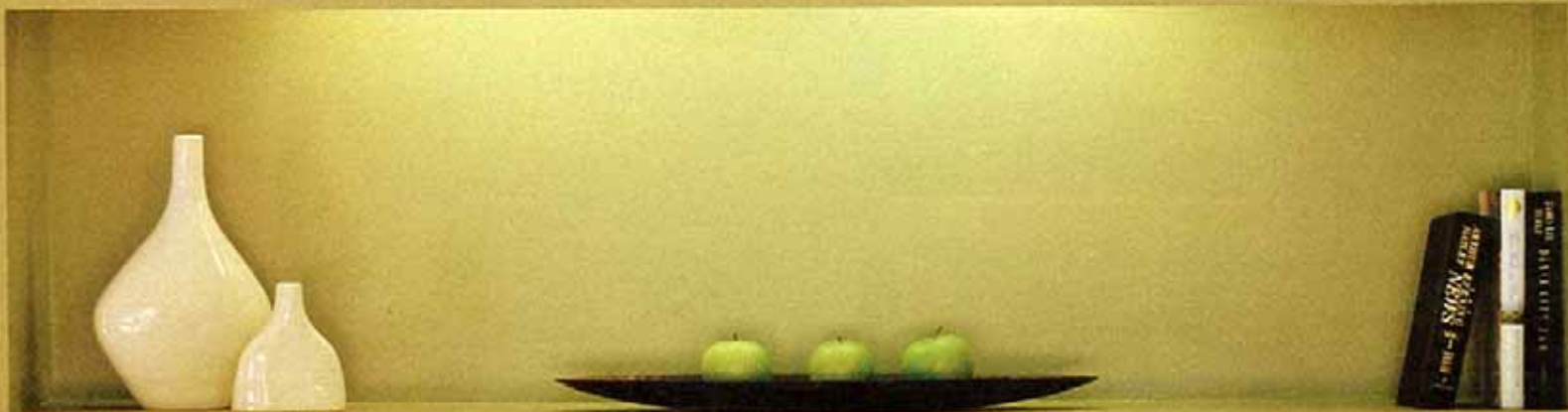
including the new Nick's Cove & Cottages in Marshall and Solage Calistoga. Also in this issue, Critic's Table takes an intriguing look at the new chef at PlumpJack Cafe, who is creating some amazing food. My other favorite is Street Detail, a snapshot of Oakland's Grand Lake district near Lake Merritt.

Finally, in March I wrote about one of my pet peeves, the phrase "no problem," and many of you responded with support. It sounds like if we band together, we can change this trend. You're welcome!

I'll see you at Bar Crudo. Thank you for your readership. ■

**SCOT BONDLOW**, PUBLISHER  
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This page: sleek interiors mesh with farmhouse exteriors at the new Solage Calistoga. Opposite: blazing harvest vineyards in Paso Robles.



## Solage Calistoga, Napa Valley

Ah, crush. Most Bay Area residents let less-seasoned visitors scramble for the hotel rooms in October. But this harvest season, there's a new resort that makes the trip worth battling the masses.

Tucked into a former horse pasture at the northernmost tip of Napa Valley, **Solage Calistoga**, an Auberge resort opening in June, has been envisioned and designed by architect extraordinaire Howard Backen (of Kokkari and Pottery Barn) as a colony of barnlike studios, and features a decor touted as "Napa barn meets SoMa loft." It's true: cottages dropped down amongst the old oak trees bring to mind a quaint country retreat, but inside each, you'll find pebbled shower floors, eco-friendly bedding and furniture, and local art you'll actually spend some time looking at. The guests playing bocce or pedaling around on the complimentary cruisers, as well as the kids and pets that are welcomed, should contribute to the whimsically agrarian air.

But this is no Old MacDonald scene—the resort's **Mud Bar & Bathhouse** spa will be a modern twist on Calistoga mud baths. Clients will have a "mudtender" mix them up a customized batch of mud and essential oils, which is then painted on (no gloppy tubs full of "used" mud here). After you've rinsed off the muck, lounge in one of the sunning areas or have a seat in a vibrating sound chair, which gives a feeling of weightlessness.

The jewel in this campus's crown is the 130-foot geothermally heated pool, one of the biggest in the valley. During the day, the private cabanas will be the spot to lounge with some frozen grapes, Wi-Fi access, and chilled towels to take the edge off the Indian-summer heat. Imagine sipping an Arnold Palmer in the comfort of a chaise longue before wandering in to dinner at the casual bistro, **Solbar**. The pool and Solbar will be the hub of the resort, and may well serve as the night-life hub for the entire northern end of the valley. When you are tempted to roam, those cruisers will come in handy for pedaling to nearby wineries like **Sterling, Twomey, and Clos Pegase**. —SMB

SOLAGE CALISTOGA, 755 SILVERADO TRAIL, CALISTOGA, 866-942-7142, WWW.SOLAGECALISTOGA.COM; RATES: \$325-\$875.



## Paso Robles, Central Coast

While Paso's vineyards are hardly undiscovered, its magnificent country roads aren't as clogged during the harvest as those to the north. Visitors to the central coast's wineries often opt to stay nearer to the ocean, in Cambria or Cayucos, and drive over for the day. But last month's opening of a new boutique hotel has given Paso's downtown a shot in the arm, and now travelers are tempted to linger.

The small (just 16 rooms) **Hotel Cheval** was designed by husband-and-wife owners Robert and Sherry Gilson. The rooms are artfully appointed with paintings by Richard Tullis, as well as luxe linens and Temple Spa bath and body products. Fireplaces in the courtyard garden ward off the chill from the evening fog (good for the grapes, less fun for you).

The rooms are named after famous racehorses, and if you stay on a weekend, you can take a loop downtown in the hotel's complimentary carriage, drawn by Chester, a Belgian draft horse. Hop out for dinner at **Artisan**, which has impressed palates since it opened last October. Combinations like grilled Pacific escolar with braised pork belly and caramelized endive embody the best of California cuisine. Don't miss out on a side of shoe-string fries—you'll get hooked on the housemade ketchup that comes with them.

But consume in moderation, as there's a lot to pack in the next day. Must-visit wineries in the area include **Halter Ranch** and **Wild Horse**, both of which follow sustainable practices (Wild Horse has a resident llama, Floyd), and **Tablas Creek**, which organically grows Rhône varietals like mourvèdre and roussanne. Best of all, at this time of year you'll get a prime view of the excitement surrounding harvest. —SMB

HOTEL CHEVAL, 1021 PINE ST, PASO ROBLES, 805-226-9995, WWW.HOTELCHEVAL.COM; RATES: \$225-\$425. ARTISAN, 1401 PARK ST, 805-237-8084, WWW.ARTISANPASOROBLES.COM

## Clear Lake, Lake County

If you grew up in Northern California, you might have spent a few Indian-summer days at Clear Lake, paddling into the cool water when it was 90 degrees out or tangling with your first bass. But Lake County remains obscure for most Bay Area residents. Not for long, though, as the wine industry has a foothold in the region, and the word is slowly getting out.

True, some clutter and garishness mar the south end of the lake, but keep driving. The long, pure stretches of water, the flocks of birds flapping across it, and the gently rising, mostly unblemished mountains explain why the Pomo Indians made this their home. And now there's a tasteful hotel in Upper Lake that gives travelers much more than a place to lay their heads. The **Tallman Hotel**, dating back to the 1890s and elegantly refurbished by a couple of San Franciscans in 2005, has everything you'd want in a country inn—and more: cushy bedding, wrap-around porches, hand-painted egrets on the walls, and Japanese soaking tubs. The hotel also offers several dream-vacation packages, including a fishing excursion and the Aviator, which takes you flying over vineyards and Mount Konocti in an open-cockpit, World War II Stearman biplane.

Winemakers have discovered this region, but it might be a while before tasters flock here en masse. A few wineries have made a big splash: at the lovely Mediterranean-style lakefront spread **Ceago del Lago**, owner Jim Fetzer farms according to the phases of the moon and raises chickens that produce the best eggs you've tasted. At **Brassfield Estate**, Jerry Brassfield is busy drilling out caves to draw visitors. **Steele Wines** is run by Jed Steele, the guy who helped make Kendall Jackson a household name. And **Langtry** (formerly Guenoc) staked its vines here over a century ago.

The area may not have the panache of its wealthier neighbors to the south, but it's a treat for travelers who like to poke around and find their own way, perhaps stopping to sip a crisp white in the converted schoolhouse that holds **Shannon Ridge's** tasting room or at the redwood-lined **Blue Wing Saloon** (next door to the Tallman). End of day brings the prospect of dinner at the **Saw Shop Bistro**, where you can savor rack of lamb, or duck with creamy polenta. In short, a visit to Lake County no longer means roughing it. —PN

TALLMAN HOTEL, 9550 MAIN ST, UPPER LAKE, 866-709-5253, WWW.TALLMANHOTEL.COM; RATES: \$109-\$199. SAW SHOP BISTRO, 3825 MAIN ST, KELSEYVILLE, 707-278-0129, WWW.SAWSHOPBISTRO.COM