

E x p l o r i n g

D R Y C R E E K V A L L E Y

*Just beyond Healdsburg, venture into a land of history
and elite, handcrafted wines | By Aimée Oscamou*

As one of Sonoma County's premier appellations, Dry Creek Valley blends rural ease and friendliness with contemporary sophistication. Widely known as the home of California's finest zinfandel grapes and gaining recognition for its bordeaux varietals, Dry Creek is ripe with experiences for gourmet enthusiasts, history buffs and outdoor adventurers.

T. R. Passalacqua Ranch's cabernet grapes — along with other reds — thrive on the warm, red-soiled hillsides of Dry Creek Valley. Above right: Locals and visitors enjoy the cool shade of Healdsburg's plaza.



Healdsburg is Hot | Where to Dine and Stay

RESTAURANTS

Cyrus

This is Sonoma's newest answer to Napa's French Laundry. Cyrus offers extravagantly praised (and priced) food from silky salt-cured torchon with petite warm crumpets to black sea bass resting in a savory dried scallop broth with tender little shiitake caps. Make reservations well in advance.

Les Mars Hotel, 29 North St., Healdsburg
707-433-3311

www.cyrusrestaurant.com

Dry Creek Kitchen

At this sophisticated spot in the hip Hotel Healdsburg, Charlie Palmer, creator of New York City's Aureole, came to the source of the country's best ingredients — such as Hog Island oysters, Redwood Hill Farm cheeses and Liberty duck — and highlights them to the fullest. Pictured below, center.

317 Healdsburg Ave., Healdsburg
707-431-0330

charliepalmer.com/dry_creek/home.html

Willi's Seafood & Raw Bar

Seafood lovers head to Mark and Terri Stark's newest addition to their food fiefdom, which includes two local favorites, Willi's Wine Bar and Monti's Rotisserie. Of special note: New England-style rolls stuffed with lobster, garlic butter and fennel; addictive *pommes frites*; succulent fried oysters with asparagus *rémoulade*. Tapas-size servings include tuna tartare with jalapeños, ginger and cashews in coconut milk. Inventive meat dishes like grilled skewers of minted lamb fill out the imaginative menu.

403 Healdsburg Ave., Healdsburg
707-433-9191

Zin

Zin is devoted to zinfandel and all the hearty food that goes best with it, like applewood-smoked pork chops. It offers a great wine list of all varieties, and plenty of zins by the glass or by the bottle.

344 Center St., Healdsburg
707-473-0946

www.zinrestaurant.com

LODGING

Hotel Healdsburg

Chic and luxurious, this urban-style hotel offers a great Healdsburg plaza location. Amenities entice, from a 60-foot garden pool to room service from the acclaimed Dry Creek Kitchen and a grappa bar. The 55 rooms have private balconies and Frette robes. Pictured, bottom left.

25 Matheson St., Healdsburg
800-889-7188, 707-431-2800

www.hotelhealdsburg.com
Rates: \$310-\$790

Les Mars

Find the ambience of a courtly French chateau just off Healdsburg's plaza. Sip port in the library by the fire. Wake under a canopy bed. The 16 rooms, some with fireplaces, are soothing and appointed with 18th- and 19th-century European antiques and art. Pictured, bottom right.

27 North St., Healdsburg
877-431-1700, 707-433-4211

www.lesmarshotel.com
Rates: \$495-\$995



Nestled along the Russian River, Healdsburg serves as the region's hub city. Gold Rush-era settler Harmon Heald centered the community on a Spanish-style plaza that still serves as the town's social and commercial center; it's now ringed by fine restaurants, upscale lodging, gourmet markets, art galleries, antiques collectives and boutiques offering everything from home décor to children's couture.

Venture just a few miles north of Healdsburg on a casual tour along Dry Creek Road and you enter the bountiful rural world of Dry Creek Valley, with its proud winemaking tradition and warm hospitality. Tip: You'll find red varietals covering the warm, red-soiled hills and white varietals filling the well-drained, morning-misted valley floor.

Family-owned establishments form the core of the Dry Creek community, and you'll find three such wineries along its western edge: Mauritsen, Passalacqua and Lambert Bridge. Each offers handcrafted, award-winning wines, and the wineries share a focus on quality and roots that run deep and intermingle: Jason Passalacqua and Clay Mauritsen were Healdsburg schoolmates from kindergarten on; Lambert Bridge's sales manager Andy Wilcox, Mauritsen's assistant winemaker Heidi von der Mehden and Noelle and Jason Passalacqua all attended Santa Clara University; and Wilcox

Longtime friends have their feet firmly planted in Dry Creek Valley's winemaking heritage. From left: Andy Wilcox, Hallie and Melissa Cash, Clay and Carrie Mauritsen, and Jason, Mariella and Noelle Passalacqua.

entered the wine business with the team at Mauritsen. As you descend from the central hills to the valley floor, you'll find the serene vineyard setting of Mauritsen Family Winery; stop in at the area's newest winery to sample lauded zins, including Rockpile Ridge and Grower's Reserve. Continue north and make a left at Dry Creek's crossing with Lambert Bridge Road to arrive at Passalacqua Winery, where award-winning cabernet and zinfandel are served with friendly conversation and a stunning valley view. Finally, head back onto Lambert Bridge Road and west over its historic bridge and ascend to the wooded ridge above to visit Lambert Bridge Winery. Enjoy its world-class bordeaux-style wines in the rustic redwood barrel room, or step out into the culinary garden to pair zins with your creations in Chef Mugnaini's Italian cooking class.

At each of these stops, you'll find a warm welcome and access to the conversations and private tours that make for the richest experience of wine. Ask about the family photos above the bar, strike up a conversation with the winemaker and jot down the tasting room crew's recommendations. Make yourself at home in Dry Creek Valley.



Photo: Left, middle: Robert Holmes