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## A NEW WAVE IN ITALY WOMEN LEAD THE WAY IN PIEDMONT



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WINE LOVER'S GUIDE TO NAPA**

# THE - CHANGING FACE - OF NAPA

Downtown Napa is shining brighter than ever,  
with plenty of highlights for wine lovers

BY MARYANN WOROBIEC | PHOTOGRAPHS BY NAT & CODY

Located on the rooftop of downtown Napa's new Archer hotel, Sky & Vine is a casual spot for a snack and a glass of wine.



Any night of the week, Compline is humming. A combo wine bar, restaurant and wineshop, this cozy spot in downtown Napa has buzz among wine lovers thirsty to drink from its international list, pairing the wines with friendly foods like mushroom gnocchi and duck fat french fries. It still has a few vacant storefront neighbors in the newly developed First Street Napa complex—but not for long.

Compline co-founder Matt Stamp describes a renaissance he's observed in the city of Napa. "We saw a movement in the right direction. More people start and end the day in Napa," he says, adding that the city is more receptive to Compline's global focus than more Napa-centric spots up-valley. "There's a cosmopolitan element in Napa. Well, cosmopolitan with a small 'c,'" he smiles.

"Cosmopolitan with a small 'c'" is a terrific way to describe Napa's continuing evolution from a drive-by town to a vibrant destination for visitors to Napa Valley. Since our story last year on recent development in the city ("Downtown Renaissance," Sept. 30, 2017), there has been another surge of growth, most of it found—as Compline is—at First Street Napa.

Located in the heart of downtown, First Street Napa is a three-block, 325,000-square-foot mixed-use complex, designed to encompass 45 retail shops and restaurants, as well as office space. Compline, which opened last autumn, was the first tenant, joined shortly thereafter by the five-story Archer Napa, a luxury hotel that's a game changer for the city.

Napa has never had anything like Archer. The design and decor evoke an urban lodge, beginning with an atrium-peaked lobby done in stone and natural wood, with a fireplace, comfortable leather furnishings and an enormous three-dimensional topographical map of Napa Valley on one wall. The on-premise Charlie Palmer steak house draws locals and tourists alike, crowding the seats during happy hour for \$7 glasses of wine paired with lobster corn dogs or veal and ricotta meatballs. Above, the hotel's rooftop restaurant Sky & Vine offers casual bites and stunning views.

"There were so many positives around downtown Napa, with a gaping hole in the middle," says Todd Zapolski, one of the developers of First Street Napa. "This enhances everything else."

With people now excited about downtown, opportunities for additional new venues are bubbling up. One local supporting the growth is vintner Joe Wagner of Copper Cane Wines and Provisions. He recently purchased the historic Fagiani bar on Main Street, which had been vacant for nearly 40 years before housing two short-lived restaurants. Wagner plans to revert the façade to its original 1908 look, and the space, scheduled to open in 2019, will include a bar, lounge and tasting room for his Copper Cane line of wines.

Wagner points as inspiration to the recently reimagined town of Bordeaux as an epicenter for that famous wine region, and suggests that Napa is headed in the same direction. "It's exciting to see Napa doing it right. It's becoming a youthful cultural hub. Hopefully we can be part of that movement."

Another local project is NapaSport. Just south of downtown, the venue is divided into two parts: One side is an energetic, high-end sports bar, while the other is a quiet dining room focused on food—especially steak—and wine. Founder Michael Galyen is a veteran of Morimoto Napa and Bistro Don Giovanni. There's a basketball gymnasium floor, and the scoreboard over the bar houses



Compline co-owners Matt Stamp and Ryan Stetins

a chandelier of Riedel glassware. "Napa's never seen something like this," says Galyen excitedly.

In addition to the growing number of steak houses, Napa is also embracing the exploding craft beer movement, making the town more appealing to non-wine drinkers. Fieldwork Brewing Company occupies a lively corner in the Oxbow Market; Trade Brewing and Tannery Bend Beerworks are nearby. The newly opened Stone Brewing's Napa taproom is located in the historic Borreo building on Third Street. Originally built in 1877, the stunning stone structure was once a grain and feed company. Now, roll-up glass doors connect inside dining and lounge areas to a large patio overlooking the Napa River.

Greg Koch, co-founder of the San Diego-based brewery, believes that wine lovers enjoy a spectrum of beverages. "I reject the notion that people who love and appreciate great wine aren't sophisticated enough to enjoy and appreciate great beer," he teases.

Of course, there is still plenty of wine all around. The burgeoning downtown is now home to more than 20 tasting rooms, each with a distinct personality. Jam Cellars has a rock 'n' roll vibe, offering live music and decorated with *Rolling Stone* covers, while just down the street is the sleek modern furniture and art collection of Acumen. Nearby is Ackerman Heritage House, in a restored 1888 Queen Anne Victorian that hosts not only wine tastings, but also traditional tea service on Sundays.



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One of the most impressive examples of Napa's evolution is the refurbishment of the Napa Valley Wine Train. Not only are the vintage cars getting a makeover, but the whole program has been refreshed by new owners. Two years ago, local development firm Brooks Street and Noble House Hotels & Resorts took over the rails, adding a new range of tours, improving the food, tripling the frequency of excursions and adding stops at high-end wineries such as Charles Krug, Robert Mondavi, Inglenook, Beringer and Domaine Chandon. Open-air cars provide an alfresco riding option. "We are elevating the train experience, just like the rest of the valley," says Scott Goldie, a partner of Brooks Street.

Ridership is up, with 110,000 people taking the wine train last year (which has also provided some relief to the car traffic up and down the valley). There are plans to further develop the current, modest train station in the Oxbow area on the east side of downtown, with a \$100 million project in the works to build a grand glass atrium and 148-room luxury hotel with a rooftop restaurant, a tiki bar and private wine club. "It will be unique," explains Goldie. "Visitors could be at our hotel for the weekend and never have to get in their car."

Also getting a makeover is the 2-mile corridor of semi-industrial backyards that the wine train passes through in downtown Napa.



The area has been reimagined as the Rail Arts District, with new murals painted and dozens more planned, as well as unique art installations to wrap around switch boxes.

Inspired in part by the success of Archer, several other hotels are in the works. The Vista Collina Resort, near the Meritage Resort & Spa at the southern edge of town, opened this year, bringing 145 guest

rooms, a large lawn and a village housing nine tasting rooms.

All of this development has come in the wake of challenges for Napa in recent years, including an earthquake, flooding and of course the recent wildfires. The heavy demand for construction following the fires might slow development projects in the short term, but the long view promises more and better venues to come.

Mayacamas winery, which lost its visitors center on Mount Veeder during the fires, is scheduled to open a new tasting room at First Street Napa by the end of this year; tastings will begin at \$50 and include opportunities for guests to try rare and older vintages. John Schwartz, proprietor of Amuse Bouche, watched as fires and smoke surrounded his home and vineyards on Atlas Peak, but notes that the label's tasting room in downtown Napa is busy with customers who have come to show support. In the words of Clay Gregory of the Napa Visitors Bureau, "The number one thing you can do is come and have a great time."



TOP: BIRDMAN PHOTOS



Charlie Palmer Steak Napa

## ARCHER HOTEL NAPA

1230 First St. **Telephone** (707) 690-9800 **Website** [archerhotel.com/napa](http://archerhotel.com/napa)  
**Rooms** 183 **Rates** \$239–\$899

This chic five-story hotel with private balconies overlooking First Street changed the Napa skyline. But its elemental design fits into the landscape, with rich textures and natural materials and a grapevine chandelier dripping with crystals hanging from a skylight atrium.

The open lobby is a comfortable gathering place, shared with the lively Charlie Palmer restaurant. Guest rooms feature premium linens, an espresso maker and a wine fridge (there's a wine expert on staff 24/7) and many have a gas-burning fireplace. Cozy robes, slippers and a selection of books to read add to the charm, as do details that are special to Napa, such as original local art on the walls, caramels from Napa confectionary Anette's, and rubber ducks for the bathtub in the shape of grapes. The rooftop restaurant Sky & Vine, with firepits and comfortable lounge chairs, is open to the public, while a ledge pool, private cabanas and a spa are reserved for hotel guests. Archer also brings some much-needed event space to the area, with 17,000 square feet of modern rooms.

## CHARLIE PALMER STEAK NAPA / SKY & VINE

Archer Hotel Napa, 1260 First St. **Telephone** Charlie Palmer Steak: (707) 819-2500; Sky & Vine: (707) 819-2490 **Websites** [charliepalmersteak.com/locations/napa](http://charliepalmersteak.com/locations/napa); [skyandvine.com](http://skyandvine.com) **Open** Charlie Palmer Steak: Dinner, daily; Sky & Vine: Breakfast, lunch and dinner, daily  
**Cost** Charlie Palmer Steak: Expensive; Sky & Vine: Moderate  
**Corkage** Charlie Palmer Steak: \$50; Sky & Vine: \$35

Chef Charlie Palmer operates two separate concepts in the Archer. At lobby level is the fifth iteration of Palmer's steakhouse concept; Sky & Vine is Napa's first rooftop bar, with a spectacular view of downtown Napa and the mountain ranges beyond. Each has its own menu and wine list.

The more formal steak house offers both typical and inventive fare, from oysters and Caesar salad to an American Waygu beef carpaccio accented by crisp shiitakes, jalapeño, soy-lime and kimchi tapioca. The strength is in the steaks: perfectly cooked, 21-day dry-aged porterhouses, bone-in New York strips and rib eyes. Sides are executed just as well; potato gnocchi with sage brown butter and Parmesan was a standout on a recent visit. The chimichurri sauce option for the steaks paired well with a rich Napa Cabernet. Half of the 400-selection wine list comes from Napa, with plenty of offerings from Burgundy and Champagne as well.

Sky & Vine has both table seating and comfortable lounge seating around firepits, making it easy to linger and soak in the atmosphere. The compact menu features satisfying casual fare such as a fried chicken sandwich, a muffuletta panini, and tender braised octopus on a bed of English peas and fava beans, accented with chorizo. The California-heavy wine list includes offerings on tap and in cans, with most selections under \$100. There are some fun twists; a "reverse" happy hour starts at 9 p.m. every night, and on Brown Bag Wednesday, the staff picks a bottle of wine, brown-bags it for blind tasting and asks guests to guess vintner, varietal and vintage. One correct guess means 10 percent off the bottle, two correct guesses is 50 percent off, and all three means the bottle costs only \$1.



Archer Hotel