

# Raising a Glass, Remotely

You can't go to the vineyard, but some of Napa and Sonoma's best wineries are letting you buy a bottle, then participate in streamed tastings.

By Amy Tara Koch

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If you are bored with your at-home cache of pinot grigio and merlot, Sonoma County and Napa Valley vintners can rescue you with remote tastings that combine virtual guidance with real-world wine consumption.

First you need bottles from the participating wineries, either from your own cellar, a local source (the wineries can usually tell you what stores in your area carry their bottles; then ask for delivery) or shipped straight from the winemakers themselves (shipping usually takes two to three days; some states do not allow direct shipping from wineries).

While sipping from your sofa won't capture the wow of a rosemary-scented, vineyard-front sunset, the experience, which often includes pairing suggestions, a virtual vineyard tour and even recipes from an in-house chef, is an engaging way to expand your palate while supporting wineries that have had to suspend their in-house tastings.

Raise a glass and tune in for free via Zoom or another viewing platform and teleport to the lush hills of Northern California.

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## St. Supéry Estate Vineyards and Winery

Celebrated for sustainability and its 100 percent estate-grown varietals of sauvignon blanc, cabernet sauvignon and red Bordeaux varieties, this Rutherford winery, which is owned by the luxury retailer Chanel, is holding remote wine tastings every Thursday at 3 p.m. and 5:30 p.m., Pacific time, focused on its tasting kit. (You can also just buy an individual bottle.)

The snappily paced 40-minute experience moves from a vineyard stroll and an analysis of the wine being tasted (with the winemaker Michael Scholz) to the kitchen, where the in-house chef Tod Kawachi spotlights a pairing — say, Rutherford Estate Vineyard Merlot with Cocoa Crusted Pork Tenderloin. (The recipe is emailed to participants.) There are also cameos by Steve Sando, an heirloom bean purveyor (beans are a diverse and easy-to-cook pantry staple, I learned) and the renowned vine expert Lucie Morton.

Individual bottles range from \$25 to \$85; the tasting kit is \$267.

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Ideas from The Times on what to read, cook, watch, play and listen to while staying safe **At Home**.



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## Schweiger Vineyards

The charm of this father-son winemaker team is telegraphed through its webcasts hosted by Andy Schweiger (winemaker) and his father Fred (grape grower). The elder Mr. Schweiger has lived and worked on this high-altitude land above St. Helena since 1961. Each 30-minute event, held on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays at 3 p.m. Pacific time (and streamed on Facebook Live and available later on YouTube), focuses on a specific bottle of wine or nugget of wine education — What exactly are tannins? Why do we prefer French oak to American barrels? Why do we dry farm our vines? — with snippets of the vineyard's history woven in.

To keep things lively, the settings rotate from the barrel room to the tasting room to outside, where you can take in sweeping views. Music collaborations add to the fun. Gordon Goodwin of the Grammy Award-winning Big Phat Band will pop by on April 15; Brian Culbertson on April 17; and local a cappella band Straight No Chaser on April 20, 22 and 24.

Individual bottles range from \$28 to \$125.

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## AXR

This small boutique winery, on a pre-Prohibition Era estate in St. Helena, is known for cozy private tastings, and it aims to translate its intimate approach to winemaking through one-on-one remote sessions based on the brand's tasting kits.

AXR's winemaker, Jean Hoefliger, recently deemed "Napa's rising star" by Wine Spectator, will host events on Zoom from the estate's picturesque veranda. (Participants can invite friends to make the event more social.) Videos of the property's fairy-tale setting will be included. Mr. Hoefliger also holds live, open-to-anyone weekly tastings on the AXR Facebook page.

Individual bottles range from \$34 to \$255; tasting kits range from \$175 to \$645.

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## Far Niente

In wine circles, Far Niente conjures images of the grand, azalea-blanketed Oakville estate of the same name built during the California gold rush. But there are five wineries under the Far Niente umbrella, in Napa and Sonoma, and the company's individualized tasting can be tailor-made for customers of each one — or can combine wines from more than one winery.

Here's how it works: After booking, an ambassador reaches out to determine the wine selection (you can pick one bottle or many) and the timing, as well as what's in the participants' pantry, to devise a few shelter-in-place-friendly food pairings.

The one-on-one format has been popular with groups of friends (each party is sent its own bottles) and families looking for an interactive experience to feel connected. For ambiance, special backdrops — maybe a sun dappled vineyard or an underground wine cave — are supplied to liven up blah conference optics.

Individual bottles range from \$40 to \$200.

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## Aperture Cellars

This small but mighty Healdsburg winery — the founder, Jesse Katz, was the first winemaker to make the Forbes 30 Under 30 list — is translating its cool-kid stature into live streams that channel the brand's artistic DNA. The modernist winery and about-to-open hospitality center (which seemingly floats above the vineyard) will be the backdrop for Zoom and IGTV chats each Thursday at 4 p.m. Pacific time, for as long as the shelter-in-place mandate lasts.

Jesse Katz is the first winemaker to make the Forbes 30 Under 30 list.  
Courtesy of Aperture Cellars

Events will profile both wines and food pairings through collaborations with hot-shot Healdsburg chefs like Kyle Connaughton of Single Thread, which has three Michelin stars, and Dustin Valette of the restaurant Valette.

Individual bottles range from \$30 to \$125.

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Other notable wineries offering remote tastings are Comstock, Gary Farrell Vineyards and Hamel Family Wines.

Some states do not allow wineries to sell their wine directly, so check your home state's laws before ordering. Shipments to Ohio and New Jersey are sometimes subject to special regulations that may delay their arrival.

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