

Weekend getaways

Rutherford retreat

By Fran Miller



Rancho Caymus Inn courtyard

Photos provided

It's natural to think of the Napa Valley as one 'place.' But the 30 north to south miles that comprise this verdant valley feature distinct towns, each with its own personality. At the northern most portion is Calistoga, the famous mud baths of which promote a laid back and relaxed vibe. Driving south on Highway 29, St. Helena comes next where an old-fashioned main street features high-end boutique shopping and the famed Model Bakery, the English muffins of which are an Oprah fave. At the southern end is downtown Napa, where a recent renaissance includes luxury hotels and numerous wine tasting rooms that stay open past dark. Just north of this is Yountville with its quaint walkable downtown and Michelin-starred restaurants. And smack in the middle of the valley is Rutherford. With a population of just a few hundred, this hamlet is known primarily for its concentration of Cabernet Sauvignon producers. Add a luxury boutique inn, a restaurant that's a fave of both locals and visitors, and tiny Rutherford becomes an ideal weekend retreat.

Designed and opened more than 30 years ago by the late vintner, designer, pilot, and renaissance woman Mary Tilden Morton (of Berkeley's Tilden Park and Morton Salt families) Rancho Caymus Inn is an off-the-radar gem. Current owner George Altamura Jr. completely remodeled the place a few years ago while retaining and elevating Morton's original Spanish aesthetic. The vibe is charming and luxuriously intimate. Rooms and suites surround the central swimming pool and feature heritage wood ceilings, fireplaces, living areas, private patios, and hacienda-style furnishings.

Enjoy complimentary evening wine tasting Thursday, Fri-

day and Saturday evenings, and a spectacular complimentary daily breakfast buffet featuring, among a number of delicious items, Model Bakery baked goods. The kitchen also serves snack and meal items that can be enjoyed poolside, in-room, or in the small dining area.

Steps away from Rancho Caymus Inn is one of the valley's most beloved restaurants, Rutherford Grill, where both locals and visitors gather for American comfort fare and hearty pours of local varietals. Sit at the bar for lively conversation, or hide out in a comfy booth. If weather permits – and it almost always does – choose a patio table. Don't miss the seasonal grilled artichoke, the barbecue pork ribs, or a classic cheeseburger. The wine list is a great Napa Valley read – featuring some of the area's most prized labels.

For something more casual, don't miss La Luna Market & Taqueria directly across the street from the Inn. Locals rave about the made-to-order burritos and enchiladas, which can be picked-up to-go, or enjoyed at the picnic tables located in front.

Also within walking – and aroma – distance of Rancho Caymus Inn are a number of fabulous wineries. Beaulieu Vineyards' fermentation tanks are directly behind the Inn – as is its tasting room. Elizabeth Spencer's family and dog friendly tasting room and quaint gardens are directly across the street. Round Pond's palm-tree lined estate is about a mile away, as is Alpha Omega and its beautiful Vineyard Terrace where the hospitality is refined and relaxed. Enjoy their premium wines while gazing at the majestic Mayacamas Mountains. Visit one; visit all. A Rutherford stay makes it easy to enjoy the spoils of this bountiful wine growing region.



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