

WINE COUNTRY WONDER

With dazzling, elevated seasonal fare, it's well-being to the max at Napa's stylish and sustainable Stanly Ranch.

By Wolf Schneider

California's Napa Valley is famed for its viniculture and gastronomic heights, this being the land of the \$5,000-plus Screaming Eagle Sauvignon Blanc and Thomas Keller's The French Laundry. Newly constructed on the rolling hills of a former cattle ranch, the sumptuous Stanly Ranch, Auberge Resorts Collection fits right in. Its modern farmhouse structures are set among silvery olive and eucalyptus trees, rows of fragrant lavender, vineyards growing chardonnay and pinot noir varietals, and a garden geared for its innovative farm-to-table restaurant, Bear.

Opened in 2022, Stanly Ranch is where you want to go for the absolute best. It's where I am for a three-day girlfriends' getaway with my pal Sharona. From the moment we pull up at the valet stand and hear the Americana/country playlist with tunes by Chris Stapleton and Zach Bryan, we're blissed-out. This opulent and earthy place hits all the right notes. The stand is staffed by valets called ranch hands. They're wearing cowboy hats, denim, and cowboy boots. The guests sport sundresses and suede. Leather-medallioned bracelets serve as the room keys. Not far from the quietly elegant accommodations, steers graze.

We arrive a little early for check-in. OK, like, 10 a.m. early. When you stay at Stanly Ranch, you want to make the most of it. We could walk or bike the winding trails, but a Hawk Walk begins now, and that's where we head. Falconer Rebecca Rosen trains the hawks, falcons, and owls that help to keep pest birds from the property's vineyards. Rosen is at the ready with a big leather glove, some chicken morsels, and a softly feathered brown hawk with a yellow beak named Eddie. I extend a gloved arm toward Eddie, who's perched atop a nearby pole. Rosen calls out "Eddie! Eddie!" He swoops down to scarf up the chicken on my glove. Then he remains there, peacefully perched. He's just bigger than a pigeon and weighs about as much as a can of Coke. "They're trained with positive reinforcement. It's all his decision to come. We need to be very, very calm when they fly to us," Rosen says. Joining us on



the Hawk Walk is a well-mannered family with triplet boys, a girl named Blake, and a beautiful blond mom who mutters something about being in Qatar for the World Cup.

Later, I realize she's Aly Wagner, a former World Cup soccer star who's now a television analyst. She's also a prototypical Stanly Ranch guest, along with Tour de France bicyclists and NBA and NFL players. Athletes are drawn to the spa, recovery circuit, and fitness center up on the hill, where there's a monumental infinity-symbol sculpture by Gordon Huether. There's a hyperbaric oxygen chamber for increasing oxygen levels, cold plunge for resetting pain and endurance levels, salt room igloo for purification and negative ions, lymphatic drainage machine, sauna, steam room, outdoor pools, and an array of yoga classes, massages, and facials, along with experiences like mountain lion tracking, fishing on the Napa River, and stargazing at blood moons. Us? Once we leave Eddie and get settled into our fabulous accommodations, we groove on the restorative yoga class, cryotherapy facial, chlorophyll water, candied ginger, and Supergoop! SPF Lip Screen Shine.

Progressive design entices in the 135 guest rooms and suites like ours, with open layouts featuring cream-toned linen couches, vaulted ceilings, wall-mounted control panels, sliding glass walls opening to private patios with firepits, and expansive bathrooms with luxurious outdoor showers. Polished natural wood abounds, along with leather, glass, and exposed stone. Extended suites are available at the villas, where there's even a partial ownership plan.

There's a lot to experience here across the 700 rolling acres, but at the end of a glorious day, everyone ends up at the incomparable golden-hued Bear. With its slanted ceiling, huge tumbleweed-inspired bouquets of dried flowers, and earthy wood-burning stove, the restaurant is the territory of charismatic executive chef Anthony Stagnaro, known for his woodfire grilling, fermenting,

and making sure guests—who include celeb couples like Steph and Ayesha Curry (he's with the NBA; she's with the Food Network)—get one of the best meals of their lives. How does Stagnaro characterize his inspired cuisine? “Elemental,” he says. “We like to focus on one ingredient. If it's a carrot, we like to focus on the best carrot. The best ribeye. How to make it the best. We do a lot with fermenting.”

My craft cocktail dubbed The Wanderer is Bear's take on the Negroni. It has apple-infused gin, thyme-infused Campari, and vermouth. Its smoothness is perfection. Oh, here comes the cuisine! There are delectable preserved baby farm vegetables with cashew-miso dip; Asian-influenced crispy rice with Thai chili; lightly fried maitake mushrooms with an eggplant, fermented pepper, za'atar, and local olive oil accompaniment that's to die for; wood-grilled Mt. Lassen whole rainbow trout; and huckleberry-barbecued quail. For dessert? The only-at-Bear

scrumptious sourdough ice cream made from a 78-year-old starter with caramel sauce. It's insane. It's a must.

We stroll back to our Arbor Cottage on a dark country path under starry skies and promptly follow @bearnapa and @anthony_nicolas_stagnaro on Instagram. It will have to do until our next visit. And there will be one! ★



For more information, visit Stanly Ranch, Auberge Resorts Collection at aubegeresorts.com/stanlyranch.

LAVENDER PICKLED FARM VEGETABLES, CASHEW-MISO DIP, AND A COCKTAIL

CHEF ANTHONY'S LAVENDER PICKLES

What You'll Need

2-quart Mason jar with lid
Jarful of sliced cucumbers, onion, hot or sweet peppers, and/or any baby or cut veggies you like
2 cups filtered water
2 cups white or red vinegar
6 tablespoons local honey

Pickle Spice (bulk)

1 quart lavender, dried
1 pint coriander seeds
1 pint fennel seeds
1 pint pink peppercorn
2/3 cup yellow mustard seeds
2/3 cup red chili flakes
2/3 cup dill weed

For the packet, use 1 tablespoon of pickle spice mix and 1 tablespoon Maldon salt.

Directions

Bring water, vinegar, honey, and contents of spice packet to a boil. Pack veggies into a jar. Pour the liquid solution over the veggies. Let everything cool on the counter before you put the lid on. Cover and refrigerate for a minimum of two days—the longer the better.



CASHEW-MISO DIP

Serves up to 10

2 1/2 cups raw cashews
2 cups water
1/2 cup white miso
3/4 cup rice wine vinegar
2 tablespoons shoyu (white soy)

Blend all ingredients on high until smooth, pass through fine mesh chinois, and reserve.

THE PALOMINO

1 ounce Uno, Dos, Tres Organic Tequila Blanco
1 ounce Dolin dry vermouth
1/2 ounce Catedral de Mi Padre “Espadin” Mezcal
3/4 ounce fresh squeezed lemon juice
3/4 ounce Sauvignon Blanc + Sumac Syrup*

Combine all ingredients in shaker. Shake hard for 10 seconds and fine strain into a chilled sour glass. Garnish with fresh micro flowers, dehydrated grapefruit.

*Sauvignon Blanc + Sumac Syrup

8 ounces sauvignon blanc
1 cup pure cane sugar
2 teaspoons dried sumac (ground)

In a medium pot, add sumac and toast for 15–30 seconds. Add sauvignon blanc to pot. Cover with a lid and bring to a gentle boil. Reduce heat to low and add sugar. Stir to dissolve sugar into mixture. Reduce for 5 minutes.