



WINE COUNTRY

SECOND HARVEST

Two historic structures in the heart of wine country, one a former stagecoach stop and the other a 19th-century family estate, have each been reborn as an elegant, intimate inn and spa.



Photo: Marvellen McGrath

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A STOP TO REMEMBER

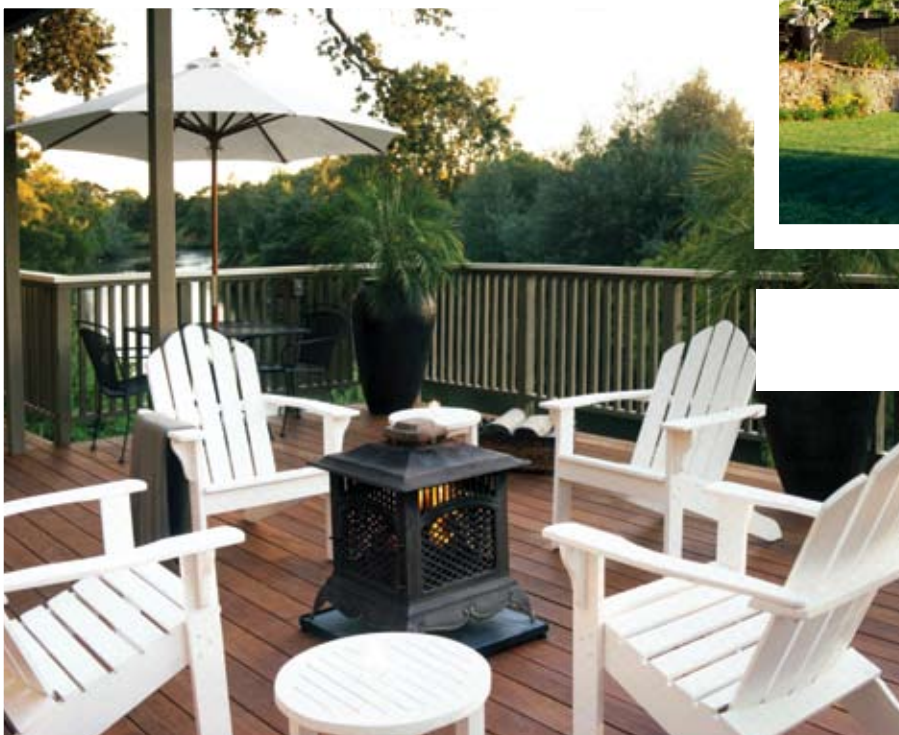
Whether you're escaping to a second home or simply slipping away for a weekend, the wine country is a prime destination for relaxation and rejuvenation. And when one thinks wine country, the Napa Valley quickly springs to mind.

On the outskirts of downtown Napa, a one-time stagecoach stop along the historic Old Mountain Road, now the famous Silverado Trail, has found a new life as Milliken Creek Inn & Spa (www.millikencreekinn.com). Dating from the mid-1850s, the building is comfortably nestled amid a lush three-acre landscape of verdant gardens and green lawns overlooking the Napa River.

The property's proximity to the winding river and fledgling town of Napa made it the perfect resting stop for fortune seekers during California's gold- and silver-rush years. Today, sophisticated travelers find the location convenient to scores of vineyards, as well as to Copia: The American Center for Wine, Food & the Arts. And the waterfront setting might be even more restorative now than it was 150 years ago.

Having witnessed many changes and varied uses since it served as a stagecoach stop, the historic structure was purchased in 2000 to be converted into an inn. Although the building underwent an ambitious renovation and expansion, its original living room was restored and now serves as the inn's lobby. The stairway is also original, and a fireplace mantel imported from England in the mid-1860s anchors the inn's gracious lobby.

A true boutique inn and spa, Milliken Creek features 12 guest suites, each distinctive in terms of furnishings and attention to the smallest of details. Rooms feature fireplaces, canopy beds with the finest linens, rain showers and oversized hydrotherapy soaking tubs outfitted with green-tea bath salts and specialty balms. A color palette of dark chocolates, warm neutrals and green hues combines with elegant fixtures and fabrics to imbue each guest room with serenity and a sense of style.



Milliken Creek Inn and Spa boasts a series of gracious outdoor terraces overlooking the meandering Napa River.

FOR BODY AND SOUL

Culinary offerings and daily wine tastings add to the inn's unique charm. Milliken's "Magic Hour" is an afternoon celebration highlighting a distinctive California wine. Each evening around sunset, one of the local wineries from across the valley shares its vintage reserves and latest offerings. Many of these visiting vintners are appointment-only proprietors, so these specialty tastings allowing inn guests the opportunity to sip, swirl and converse with professional wine makers in an intimate and relaxed setting.

The next day's morning meal is meant to be an equally memorable affair. A gourmet breakfast is delivered to the guest room, a cloistered terrace or a private corner of the garden overlooking the river. Offerings include Belgian waffles with strawberry compote, a specialty quiche, a healthy medley of yogurt and granola or fresh pastries from Bouchon Bakery, part of Thomas Keller's renowned French Laundry restaurant family.

Fusing holistic therapy with a relaxing riverside setting, the boutique spa features peaceful rooms for an array of treatments, such as a soothing combination of warm stones and aromatherapy massage, or the "Milliken Trio," which focuses on the head, hands and feet. Other signature offerings include outdoor massages by the river, a grapeseed body polish and a two-and-a-half-hour ultra-private "couples circuit." The Milliken Creek spa caters solely to inn guests to ensure privacy and individual pampering.

This sophisticated aesthetic, with its focus on the finer points, permeates the inn's lush three-acre landscape of redwood trees and Japanese maples, cloistered courtyards, flowering seasonal gardens, and hidden retreats for conversation and reflection. Throughout the property, water features and fountains fill the hushed gardens with the melody of falling water.



Catering solely to inn guests, the Milliken Creek Spa offers signature treatments and aromatherapy massages in a private garden setting.

FROM FAMILY ESTATE TO ZEN RETREAT

Located in a splendid Sonoma Valley setting and accented with an exotic flair, Gaige House (www.thompsonhotels.com) is a refined and stylish inn and spa that's small enough to offer personal service and retain its singular charm. The tranquil inn is also a historic jewel and one of the wine country's best-kept secrets.

The Sonoma Valley was first settled in the 1820s as a mission site. The town of Sonoma — built in the Pueblo style, with a traditional square — flourished thanks to fertile lands, creeks, natural mineral springs and a near-perfect climate. Several small towns blossomed there during the California gold rush and 19th-century west-ern migration.

Set on three tranquil acres of lush gardens along the meandering Calabazas Creek, on the outskirts of Glen Ellen, Gaige House has had many incarnations since it was built in the 1890s as a private estate.



Inspired by Asian architecture, the renovated Gaige House offers a sophisticated setting for rest and rejuvenation.

The house was first converted to a quaint bed-and-breakfast inn nearly 30 years ago. In 2005, architect Paul Discoe and interior designer Paul Davis teamed up on an ambitious renovation and expansion to transform the property into a truly elegant boutique inn and spa. Then, in 2006, the historic property was acquired by Thompson Hotels, which is continuing the tradition of the Gaige House as a welcoming wine-country retreat away from the hustle and bustle of the city.

Drawing inspiration from Asian architecture and the ancient inns of Kyoto, Discoe and Davis merged traditional Japanese design aesthetics, building techniques and Zen philosophy with contemporary demands and

luxury comforts. Two new pavilions frame the original Victorian-era house to create a composition that merges redwood-shingle style architecture with custom-crafted Japanese joinery.

Gracefully blending old and new, the pavilions define a series of private Zen garden squares. Sculptures by local artists and Asian pieces are displayed in public areas and the cloistered courtyards. This compound arrangement offers a total of 23 guest accommodations — 10 deluxe rooms in the restored Victorian main house and 13 luxury Zen suites in the two pavilions.

Throughout, interior finishes and furnishings are Spartan, contemporary and uncluttered. Reflecting Asian and Indonesian influences, the gracious lobby, dining room and individual guest rooms are decorated with custom fixtures and include art and furniture collected abroad. The luxury suites feature custom-finished woodwork, fireplaces, luxurious stone soaking tubs for two, double-headed showers and private courtyards.



Courtesy of Sonoma County
Convention & Visitor's Bureau

EASTERN INFLUENCES AND ATTENTION TO DETAIL

In keeping with the spirit of the design, dining at Gaiге House gives a nod to Asian influences. Breakfast is prepared daily by chef Charles Holmes, a Napa Valley native who spent time in Thailand learning the art of layering the complimentary and complex flavors of the East. His three-course breakfast menu is ever-changing, ranging from pistachio-and-artichoke blini with smoked salmon, to yellow-corn polenta rounds with fromage blanc and fresh figs, to asparagus and saffron-cream crisp. In the evening, the congenial lobby provides a restful atmosphere in which to enjoy late-afternoon wine samplings from local vineyards and offerings of Sonoma artisan cheeses, olive oils and chocolates.

The spa also reflects Zen influences in terms of both spirit and stance. The tranquil surroundings create a memorable spa experience, with a full range of services and personalized treatments offered in peaceful en suite settings or on a private roof-top terrace. Spa sta-

tions with heated massage tables are scattered across the rambling landscape dotted with Japanese maples. The inn also features a heated swimming pool and hot tub within its garden setting.

Autumn is peak season in the wine country: the grapes are picked, colors of the harvest abound, the weather is perfect and thousands of wine enthusiasts descend to sample the best of the best. But throughout the entire year, regardless of the season, these two boutique inns offer an array of activities and diversions that extend beyond wine — to yoga by the river, or balloon excursions, or culinary events or bike rides along beautiful nature trails. Equally important, however, is that each inn just as successfully fosters the vanishing art of doing nothing at all. Sit in a chair and watch a lazy river roll by, read a book on a shaded terrace or nestle next to the fireplace. And of course, savor a glass of wine from a nearby vineyard in a sophisticated setting with a sense of history. ■



Luxury suites at the Gaiге House feature elegant baths with deep soaking tubs and private Zen courtyards.

Photos courtesy of Thompson Hotels



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