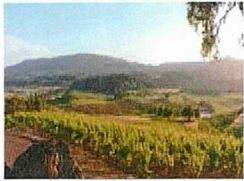


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Kunde Mountain Top

Credits: Kunde

SONOMA SERIES PART DEUX

By [Nanci Saper](#), LA Destinations Examiner

After the sublime experience at Paul Hobbs, Chad of OneSizeRide drove us into pure fantasy at Francis Ford Coppola's vineyard. There was a giant swimming pool filled with kids of all ages. The outdoor patio overlooking the vineyard was lovely. Chris and I met a fun couple and after eating a delicious Arugula, Prosciutto pizza, said we had to experience their Chocolate Mousse and Port. The mousse was so thick that a spoon stood solid in the middle of the cup. The rich, dark chocolate flavor went perfectly with the excellent Port.

Wine tasting at Hotel Les Mars complimented the day. Ramon took exceptional care of us. Christine joined Ramon in the Library and Chad stopped in too. Next was dinner at Willis's Seafood and Raw Bar. Willis's restaurant is practically next door to the hotel.

Healdsburg is a lovely place; it is romantic, fun and most of all charming. Willis is considered a hot spot in Healdsburg, positioned front and center across from the square. The restaurant is lively and known for its small plates. There are so many choices it was hard to begin, our waitress Kelsey was terrific and was happy to share how amazing their Flash Fried Fresh Calamari with Orange Chili Gremolata was. She was correct - they were outstanding. Christine and I were off, ordering away... Kobe Beef Crudo, Truffle Mayo and Pickled Shitakes, how could we resist? Tuna Tartare was served with Jalapenos, Cashews, Ginger and Coconut Milk, which had a nice amount of spice. Every dish had its own unique blend of spices and culinary infusions. The Uni Mac & Cheese with Chives and Sweet Bay Scallops was rich. The Caramelized Butterfish melted in Christine's mouth. They have Lobster Rolls and Steamers. Ceviches, Crudos and Tartares. Delectable desserts were both inventive and tasty. Hang out with the locals at Willis!

www.starkrestaurants.com/willis_seafood.html

The next morning was culinary insanity and we didn't mind it one bit! Bags packed, we sadly left Hotel Les Mars; it was not an easy thing to do! For pure pleasure and elegance, visit Hotel Les Mars.

www.hotellesmars.com

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We could not leave Healdsburg without eating at Costeaux French Bakery and Café. In my personal opinion, this place is pure heaven on earth. Not only do

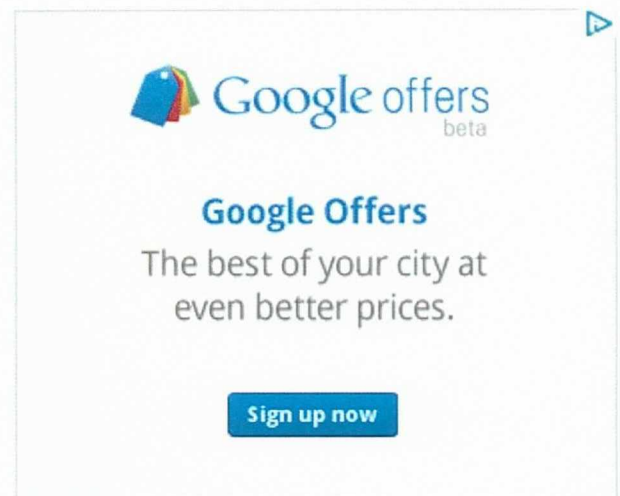
they make homemade bread for the finest restaurants in Healdsburg, it is an award-winning bakery that creates incredible dishes. Nothing is too much trouble for the owner Will or Chef Taylor. They are there to please the customers, which are more like guests. They serve a Frangipane that can change your life. It is addicting with its rich, delicate and buttery elements. We started with their morning bun. This is no ordinary bun, the further you dig into it, the better it gets. The gooey goodness, inserted into the fluffy bun makes it unforgettable, leaving nothing on the plate. Pastry Chef Mairin is a Goddess. The BLT Eggs Benedict on Costeaux Foccacia bread with Crème Fraiche, sliced tomatoes, bacon, and arugula and the poached egg with Hollandaise was a mouth full of enticing, delectable goodness.

The eggs Christine ate were light and airy. Chris said it is not easy to create eggs with great flavor and texture and they were spot on. The French toast is a definite crowd pleaser. You cannot leave Costeaux without having their Princess Cake. The Marzipan, crème, and heavenly cake made it very difficult to stop eating. Well established in the community, Costeaux's respect the residents and care for every person that comes in. They also cater; I just wish they catered Frangipane to Los Angeles!

www.costeaux.com

Ready and waiting was OneSizeRide. Chad drove us to the beautiful vineyards of Chalk Hill, owned by the Foley Family. We started our experience at Chalk Hill in the garden. The estate is three hundred magnificent acres. Their process of winemaking is a holistic one. Founded in 1972 by Fred Further, The Foley family purchased and expanded it to now 1277 acres.

The Vineyard Manager has been the Vice President of Vineyard Operations for over thirty years and knows it like the back of his hand. Recognized as its own Appellation, Chalk Hill is soil compressed, volcanic ash, all organic, sustainable, utilized in their natural habitat, producing healthy soil. Vegetables know what to do provided the right soil, water and air. The Foley philosophy is to put more in then they take out over the four-year process of growing crops in the vineyard. Natural foods such as Buckwheat protect the soil from Sun erosion and crowds out the weeds that want to grow there. A natural product such as garlic oil spray is used for pest control and keeps the bugs away. Pepper spray also knocks back bad bugs. They are careful with the spray they use as a green garden and vineyard. They showed us beautiful Lavender and Sunflowers. When we were there, they were harvesting luscious heirloom tomatoes, Italian Heirloom Eggplant and traditional Eggplant, Black Mission Figs, and Blackberries - plump and sweet. Eatable flowers were also being harvested such as Borage, which is also used as a natural anti-depressant. It has a cucumber, melon flavor. The sensational selection continues with Garlic, Squash, Beets and Cabbage. Sun Jewel is an Asian melon and portrays flavor like Honeydew, along with exquisite golden Raspberries. The buttery flavored Italian Beans, grow along side traditional and Blue Lake Green Beans. Long and enticing,



they are complimented by the earthy notes of the mushroom logs and shitakes.

In the wintertime they chose the variety of crops with the Chef. What will do well and what the Chef likes is set for planting the following years.

At Chalk Hill, you can have a private event or go horseback riding through the vineyards and then have a wine tasting or have a three course cheese and wine pairing with Cowgirl creamery cheeses and Chalk Hill wines. Can you say romantic?

Our Culinary Tour was prepared by Estate Executive Chef Didier Ageorges who worked at The Ritz Carlton in San Francisco until Peggy Furth convinced him to be a Private Estate Chef. For Chef Didier everything on the plate is there for a reason - to compliment the wine.

We started with Grilled Vegetable & Goat Cheese Terrine with Sweet Pepper Coulis. Straight from the garden, this was a beautiful blend of textures and flavors. The 2008 North Slope Pinot Gris was paired perfectly with this delectable dish.

Our second course was Wild King Salmon with Porcini Veloute, Beans, served with Chalk Hills' 2009 Estate Bottled Chardonnay. Overlooking the glorious terrain and dining at the beautiful Villa, added to the sensational tasting.

The final course was a Szechuan Pepper Crusted Duck Breast and Ragout, with a phenomenal fig and plum chutney, sangria sauce and served with the complexity of, the Chalk Hill 2007 Estate Red. It was time to leave Chalk Hills expansive views and intricate food and wine pairings. Oh, just one more bite and sip, to retreat a little bit longer in the extraordinary surroundings and culinary moments, which were marvelous.
www.chalkhill.com

After a beautiful and refreshing drive, we arrived at Bodega Bay Lodge. www.bodegabaylodge.com The Inn is very family friendly. Bodega Bay Lodge presented us with a lovely cheese tray and bottle of wine. As soon as we entered the large room over looking the bay, we saw two deer outside our sliding glass door. We gently opened it so Christine could take photos and they stayed in their position, looking at us as though we were a reflection in a mirror. It was quiet, lovely and a gentle calm surrounded us. Then the deer in unison turned and walked away. It was a brilliant beginning to our stay. There was an unforgiving fog that came our way, and it brought coolness to the area as we walked the stone path nestled by nature, greenery and flowers to dinner at Bodega Bay Lodge's Duck club Restaurant.

Christine and I started off with Oysters Rockefeller. The Oysters were fresh and had nice flavor with the added touch of heat from the Cayenne. The Mixed Local Organic Green salad with Roasted Beets, Organic Carrots, Pepitas and Local Wildflower Honey Dijon Vinaigrette was vibrant and tasted sensational. Ordering the main course... Christine chose the Pan-Roasted Half Rocky Jr. Chicken with Summer Vegetables. She said it was comfort food at its best. Delicious, she said. The Chicken was moist, juicy and tender. She had the Jordan Chardonnay Russian River '08 which featured crisp fruit and complimented the chicken. I had the Grilled Lamb T-Bones with Roasted Cauliflower, Mint Golden Raisins and Pine Nut Couscous. Anything on the bone is going to deliver flavor, and the Lamb did just that. I ordered it medium-rare and it was cooked perfectly. Believe it or not, we actually ordered and ate dessert. The standout was the Seasonal Fresh Fruit

Crisp. The Cherry Crisp was homemade and decadent. Fruit never tasted so good. The fog disappeared and the sky faded to pink and purple, meeting the bay as night fell. It was a cozy, comfortable resting spot before heading off to hiking the Redwoods with Beth Snow, the Marketing Director for Sonoma Tourism.

www.sonomacounty.com

Armstrong Redwoods State Natural Reserve is phenomenal. The breath-taking views start at the very beginning, and at the very top, one can oversee Mother Nature's handiwork. Giant trees that have lived lifetimes before us, created a natural wonderland, as I took to skipping through it. We enjoyed climbing on trees, hiding in tree trunks, sitting on wooden benches. The sun shone brightly that day and it was glorious.

We then drove to the Fairmont Sonoma Mission Inn and Spa for a luxurious

Willow Stream Spa Treatment. The pool, which is nestled in the grounds, was a great place to relax before a spa treatment. Bathing rituals take place before treatments, so make sure you come early to take a dip and sauna, then relax with a cup a tea before your sensational treatment begins. The resort is one of the only luxury spa's to have its own source of thermal mineral water. Walking into a tranquil setting, which pays homage to ancient Egyptian, Greek and Roman civilizations, creates an instant feeling of calm.

I discovered Willow Stream Elements which offered the traditional restorative elements of nature: Earth, Air, Water and Fire. It began with a mud wrap (Earth) followed by a mineral bath and a shower (Water) with so many shower heads that the water sprayed on all sides and levels in every direction. It was amazing. The grape seed oil and aromatherapy (Air) in the room was intoxicating. The last element, (Fire) combined a centuries-old medicinal moor-mud wrap and a therapeutic deep tissue massage that took me to another place, it was that good. I breathed my way through and my body followed. My mind, body and spirit were served with a cup runneth over feeling.

We then went to Roche, a family-owned winery in Sonoma. They converted a home into their tasting area, with a barrel placed in the center of the room, allowing people to taste wine straight from it. We sat on the front porch dining on appetizers catered from next door. They also make beautiful Olive Oil. www.roche.com

Arriving at Kenwood Inn and Spa was something like a Fairy Tale. Ivy grows over what looks like a small castle. *Conde Naste named it one of the best small resorts in the USA.* Nestled within a vineyard, oak groves, walnut orchards and fruit trees, this beautiful, intimate inn is a peaceful wonderland for grown ups. It is perfect for a private get-away and or to celebrate a special occasion. They also have parties, business events and weddings at this majestic place.

We were given a room that overlooked the vineyard. It was upstairs and below us was a bungalow room, with patio. Our room had a quaint terrace to lounge and sip wine. The room was large and masterful. A fireplace in the middle of the room was right between the two windows that showed the vineyards. The featherbed complete with Italian linens for both bed and bath, made it difficult to get out of bed! But when you venture into the bathroom with a marvelous sunken Jacuzzi tub and shower, you become revitalized.

The courtyard has a lovely fountain that makes way to the bar and restaurant.

The restaurant serves breakfast daily. Breakfast is included and a definite treat. They will bring breakfast to your room, but I highly recommend going to the restaurant. The restaurant is exclusive to Kenwood guests. The people are friendly and the breakfast food and coffee are delicious. They have a variety of items to choose from and a Chef cooks to order a daily special. They also bake their own pastries and get their bread from Costeaux! The very best is served at Kenwood Inn and Spa. The refreshing pool is placed near suites and the spa. There is a bar, too. The pool is unique with water coming from above like a waterfall and perfect for a relaxing afternoon. After spending some time by the pool, meeting other guests and enjoying the coolness of the water against the gorgeous sunny day, I went to get pampered at Kenwood Spa. Kenwood embraces the powerful antioxidants and penetrating qualities of the grape and use it to promote health and healing. Their facials look to be superb. That day I was in need of a massage and was taken good care of. She used new techniques and lengthened my body with different movements along with the massage. Quality and expertise was shown with every stroke. I recommend the spa, and believe a combination of both face and body are the way to go.

In the afternoon, we had a great treat going into town, and in the midst of the town square we met Karin Campion, Owner of Sonoma Syrup at Eldorado Kitchen, a great restaurant and bar with a fantastic outdoor patio. Christine and I sat outside with Karin. You may have heard of Sonoma Syrup, they were on the Today show, and are featured in William Sonoma, Gourmet Shops and Sonoma Syrup on line. Sonoma Syrup caught my eye on the Today Show, when the hosts showed a clear dirty martini with Sonoma Syrup's clear Olive juice. I am a fan of a good dirty martini and to see a clear one that tasted great impressed me. Now here we are having a dirty martini with the creator and owner of Sonoma Syrup Karin Campion in Sonoma - it doesn't get better than that. We found out it can get even better when you taste everything else that Sonoma Syrup has produced. First let me say that the Eldorado Kitchen did an amazing job with the food that they presented to us. First, the clear dirty martini showed up with the bling of crystals on top, and chilled perfectly. We also had Ice Tea so that we could taste the Lavender infused, Mint and Vanilla Syrups that make Ice Tea a whole other beverage. Karin created these fabulous syrups because she was tired of not only seeing all the sugar that was at the bottom of the glass, but that her children were drinking that sugar. She wanted something natural, and could not find what she wanted, so in her kitchen she created what now is on the shelves of the best culinary shops.

The natural syrups are also sold in drizzler straws, (like a honey stick) and you can buy an assortment of these sensational flavors and easily drink up! I found out that Sonoma Syrup has a plethora of artisan delicacies. They have the ultimate in cheese drizzler's. Once you taste their Candied Fig and Vanilla cheese drizzler, you will never go back to eating cheese alone. In addition to the candied fig are the sumptuous Black Current Berry and the Meyer Lemon with bits of lemon rind. Cheese drizzler's are also good on a variety of foods and for cooking. Speaking of cooking, Sonoma Syrup has created a Vanilla Bean Crush. From Cocktails, to cooking to celebrating with friends, Sonoma Syrup Artisan Infused products are exceptional. It was a pleasure to meet Karin. Her high energy and fun personality makes one wish continued huge success for the single mother who took her talents and desire for natural products from her home to your home. Over the holidays, Sonoma Syrup is perfect for entertaining and gifts. www.sonomasyrup.com

For dinner, Christine and I visited a restaurant that is a local favorite for farm to table cuisine. The Vineyard Inn just celebrated their 30th year in the industry. You can hang out at the bar or sit in the porch. Regulars

talked up this restaurant and while at Kenwood a young couple who are vegetarians dined here and loved it. If you love green foods this is your kind of place. Fresh fish that was caught daily is served at the table. Owner and Chef Esteban was very proud to serve us his creations, from the fire broiled artichoke, to the fresh Kale grown in their garden for a green gazpacho special. They harvest in the morning and pick things that will compliment each other. All organic and all local, this local haunt served beautiful fresh oysters that were right on the money. Using his Spanish influence, Chef Esteban made flavorful Paella. They also serve homemade ice cream. It is a very casual atmosphere with top-notch service. www.vineyardsinn.com

In the evening we returned to the lush greenery and luxurious setting of Kenwood Inn and Spa. This quaint Inn opened the bar for us after it had closed. Christine ordered a glass of wine and we sat outside and enjoyed the quiet romance that would be perfect for a couple of any age. We had a great time, as women do, chatting away.

The next day we visited The Epicurean Connection, owned and operated by Sheana Davis. She makes her own cheeses and showed us her talents in the adorable shop with all sorts of goodies. We tasted Triple Cream Cow Milk blended with fresh Goat Milk. It won best fresh cheese in the county. This was a huge honor as it was only her second year. We drank Sonoma County Martinelli sparkling cider while tasting her Crème de Fromage, Pure Cow Milk, triple crème, similar to a Crème Fraiche. Both luscious and mellow, in fact it turned Christine into a cheese lover. She could not get enough of Sheana's fresh homemade cheeses served on fresh local baguette bread with Sonoma Valley Olive Oil. sheana@vom.com

Christine had to adjust her schedule and leave a day early, so OneSizeRide dropped me off at Kenwood and took her to the airport. As I enjoyed a rich bath in my marble bathroom and sunken tub Jacuzzi, I reminisced on what an amazing experience and place Sonoma is. One last meal and visit to Kunde Winery and the trip was over.

For dinner I dined at Kenwood's exclusive restaurant. For my appetizer I ordered a wood-fired flatbread with black mission figs, prosciutto and chevre and wild baby arugula. It was luscious! My first Wood-fired Prime Rib eye was incredible. A man-sized dish served with roast fresh Porcini mushrooms, marble potatoes with bacon lardon. It left me wanting more than my stomach could hold. It was cooked to precision. This superb cut of meat was beyond flavor and nestled in heavenly richness; it had the utmost in savor. The red wine was a perfect match. When I returned to my room I found the most amazing chocolates made especially for Kenwood. They come in dark and milk Belgium chocolate, covered over silky Carmel with French sea salt. They also serve the extraordinary Le Belge chocolates that melt in your mouth!

The next morning was my last, and as I packed to say good-bye to this intimate hide-away, I was thrilled to be going to see Jeff Kunde and Kunde vineyards. Kunde creates some of my favorite wines, and their breath-taking view has been the backdrop for celebrity weddings. You can even go horseback riding and picnic through the majestic vineyard. The Kunde's fourth and fifth generations are hands-on proprietors and oversee the sustainable winegrowing operations and 700 acres of estate vineyards. Kunde is a historic estate of over one hundred years. Sustainable wine growing is their passion and green is their motto. They have won the State of California's highest environmental honor – the Governor's Environmental and Economic Leadership Award in 2008. In 2010 the Kunde family received one of the first "Certified California Sustainable Wine growing" certifications.

First planted in 1879, viticulture pioneers imported Chateaux Margaux and Lafite Rothschild. Their historic

estate stretches 2 ½ miles and rises from the valley floor 1,400 feet up into the Maycamas Mountains. It is a stunning view over looking the valley. The majority of the estate is farmed on volcanic hand of “Red Hill” soil derived from lava flows formed over 5 million years ago. Iron rich soil is a premium in grape growing and creating flavor profiles that are unique to Kunde’s handcrafted wines.

Kunde grows and produces a variety of wines. Sauvignon Blanc, Viognier, Chardonnay to Merlot, Syrah, to their over 120 year vines for Zinfandel, which is one of my favorites. Kunde 2007 Century Vines Zinfandel scored 92 points out of 100 with Wine Enthusiast. Another favorite is their bold and rich Cabernet. Wine Enthusiast gave the 2007 Reserve Cabernet, Sonoma Valley, 90 points!

The Kunde family is impressive. They are dedicated to sustainable wine growing and the quality in each and every bottle. They have an integrity that shows when you visit their tasting room, cave, take a tour and with each bottle you purchase. Tim Bell is the Winemaker for Kunde. He stated that the Kunde family goal is that each wine expresses an authentic core of flavors and aromas that convey the true essence of the varietals that reflect that land that they are grown on.

Leonard Land gave the tour which lead to the cave, an enchanting place for a private event and very cool to visit. Television has used the romantic space for different shows. If you want to impress your friends, take them to Kunde! Dick Perman is the Tasting Room Manager and he generously took me to see the house they updated for brides to get ready on their big day and for business meetings and private dinners and BBQ’s. The house is magnificent and certainly effective for a business meeting followed by a casual BBQ or first rate catered dinner. We went to the top of the vineyard to see Chairman Jeff Kunde. The view is outrageously stunning. A place one could hang out all day. A company was having lunch there at the time and he kindly took time away to meet with me. We discussed the exceptional view, wine food and wine again. Jeff always says... any food goes with Kunde wine! He is one of nicest guys you will ever meet.


Kunde wines are not only sensational; they are at an affordable price. www.kunde.com

Sonoma is an amazing place to visit, and I cannot wait to return. It is hard to leave and a definite must see if you have not been here before.

Thanks for joining me; I look forward to sharing more great destinations with you soon.

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 Nanci Saper, LA Destinations Examiner
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