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The Best Napa Valley Wineries Where You Don't Need A Reservation

BY ESTHER MOBLEY AND JESS LANDER, JUNE 26, 2023



Patrick and Stacey Horn, visiting from San Diego, enjoy a tasting at the winery hosted by Mariah Chavez.
Photo by Brian L. Frank / Special to The Chronicle

Longtime Bay Area wine lovers may recall the days when you could drive up to Napa on a Saturday, pull off at any winery and enjoy a wine tasting. Unfortunately, spontaneity is a rare privilege these days. The vast majority of wineries in Napa Valley now require reservations — a policy sometimes dictated by the business' permit, sometimes simply by high demand. Even more Napa wineries went by-appointment-only after the pandemic began, and most stuck with it.

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But there are still wineries in Napa that welcome walk-ins. You just have to know where to look.

That's where we come in: We've culled through the valley's wineries that are friendly to last-minute travelers and selected our favorites, a mix of urban tasting rooms and vineyard-adjacent estates.

We narrowed this list to wineries where you'd have a very good chance of getting in on a Saturday, which tends to be the busiest day of the week in Napa. (Many other tasting rooms, not listed here, can usually accommodate walk-ins on weekdays.) It's worth noting, however, that even these no-reservation spots can reach capacity on high-traffic days. To ensure your best chance of getting a tasting, you may want to aim to arrive first thing in the morning, often around 10 a.m., or toward the end of the day, closer to 3:30 p.m. — E.M.



The exterior of the new Bouchaine tasting room in Carneros.
John Storey/Special to the Chronicle

On weekends, this scenic estate in Carneros can get busy, and it may not be possible for walk-ins to snag a spot in the winery's recently renovated terrace area (\$75), which is really the showstopper here. But spontaneous visitors can usually still be seated in the original tasting room or the garden, where Bouchaine offers a more casual tasting flight (\$40) of four wines. Pinot Noir and Chardonnay are the main events here, as at many wineries in the bay-adjacent Carneros area, though Bouchaine also makes delectable rosé, Pinot Gris and Pinot Meunier, a light-bodied red that's similar to Pinot Noir. —E.M.

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