



THE VINTNERS RESORT

A SLICE OF TUSCANY IN SANTA ROSA

| BY TRACY ELLEN BEARD

The Vintners Resort, located in Santa Rosa, California, rests in the heart of Sonoma County's wine country. Although the resort is just minutes off Highway 101, the moment you pass through the entrance, it feels like you've stepped into a lovely village in Tuscany. The resort features three exciting dining options: John Ash & Co., River Vine, and The Front Room Bar & Lounge. There is plenty to do: play a little bocce ball, relax in the spa, meander the immaculate grounds, discover hidden statues and fountains, or wander the pathways and appreciate the climbing ivy at this upscale property that boasts an old-world vibe. This lush oasis is perfect for a solo retreat, romantic getaway, or girls' weekend.

THE ACCOMMODATIONS

Suites and rooms are well appointed, come in different sizes, and have various amenities. My room featured a California king-sized bed, a fireplace, a spacious bathroom, complimentary Wi-Fi, and an exquisite balcony with a decorative iron rod balustrade complete with two comfy chairs and a table. Each morning I curled up in the chair near the fireplace. As soon as the previous night's darkness dissipated, I sat on the balcony with a blanket, sipped my morning coffee, and watched the fog lift off the vineyard while the morning sun warmed my face.

THE PROPERTY

A one-mile trail weaves through the vineyard and is perfect for a morning

walk before the day gets too hot. The trail entrance is behind the Fontana wedding pavilion.

The Vintners Resort is a Green Property, awarded the Environmental Level in the California Green Lodging Program by the State of California's Department of General Services. The property met all seven of the program's criteria: waste minimization, reuse/recycling, energy efficiency, conservation and management, waste management, freshwater resource management, hazardous materials management, and environmentally and socially sensitive purchasing policies.

THE SPA

The Vi La Vita Spa offers a full spa menu, a fitness room, a relaxation lounge, an indoor caldarium with a heated soaking pool, and an adults-only outdoor swimming pool. The changing rooms for both men and women feature steam rooms, robes, and sandals.

I opted for the 120-minute Island Retreat Massage. Arriving early, which rarely happens, I had the opportunity to lounge in the heated soaking pool in the caldarium. The staff at the check-in desk offered me a glass of bubbles that I graciously accepted, an excellent way to begin a spa treatment.

The masseuse used coconut milk and honey body butter for my massage. I love the smell of coconut; it reminds me of lying on a beach in the tropics.

Already relaxed from my soak in the tub, the deep tissue massage removed any remaining tension my body held. The masseuse used a matching scented oil for the scalp massage portion of this treatment. I forget how much stress I hold in my head, and I don't always have the luxury of time to deal with my hair after such a glorious treatment. After a soothing yet revitalizing massage, I headed to the showers to wash the oil from my hair and make myself presentable for the rest of the day.

THE GARDENS & GROUNDS EXPERIENCE

With 92 acres of vineyards and carefully landscaped gardens and grounds, the Vintners Resort's grounds and garden manager, Chris Connell, and his staff have created a Tuscan paradise. Resort guests can freely roam the gardens or book a guided tour.

My friend, Judy, who lives nearby, joined me for a tour with Chris. Chris explained that his seasonal vegetable rotation leads to the most significant yield of herbs, flowers, and produce. Chef Schmidt uses the bounty from the garden in the three resort restaurants: John Ash & Co., River Vine, and The Front Room Bar & Lounge.

Chris said, "We want to grow interesting food. It is fun to watch guests taste things in the garden and then go inside and enjoy Chef Schmidt's preparation of the ingredients. And vice versa, the same guests often en-



joy something in the restaurant and realize how much they love something like the figs. Then they come out to the garden and pick from one of our 72 fig trees.”

Chris hopes to inspire people to eat locally and support their local farms. He and his crew plant seasonally, and this past summer he raised several varieties of tomatoes, beans, and lettuce that we sampled during our tour.

THE FINE DINING RESTAURANT

Executive Chef Thomas Schmidt orchestrates every aspect of the culinary scene at the Vintners Resort. Chef Schmidt has an intuitive understanding of complementary flavors, textures, and colors, and his herbs, flowers, and produce could not be more “locally” grown than on the resort grounds. John Ash & Co. is the fine dining restaurant onsite and offers an a la carte menu with food and wine and a delicious tasting menu with paired wines. Dine inside the beautifully decorated restaurant or outside on the patio and tented lawn. The restaurant opens at 5 pm on Wednesday through Sunday.

Chef Schmidt’s culinary journey began at age eight in the kitchen with his mother when he assisted her in preparing the family meal for eight people. He studied culinary arts at Contra Costa College and then took the helm as executive chef at a restaurant in Woodside, California. Chef Schmidt spent time in Europe working at Topaz in Germany to further his skills. He increased his experience and expanded his repertoire of culinary dishes by adding German, French, and Italian cuisines. Judy joined me for dinner, and we opted for

the tasting menu. The four-course menu was reasonably priced, as were the savory wine pairings. Annie, our server and sommelier for the evening, was exceptional.

Many of the ingredients used in our dinners were grown in the gardens on the resort’s property. We dined on mixed garden lettuce with grilled peaches, pistachios, and goat cheese. The herbed potato gnocchi were tasty, and I loved the Angus beef. The dessert, hibiscus buttermilk panna cotta with strawberries and Meyer lemon crumble, was delectable.

THE DAYTIME DINING OPTION

Breakfast, lunch, and brunch are available at River Vine restaurant. This venue is open from 7:30 am to 2 pm each day. You can sit inside the stylishly decorated restaurant or on the patio underneath the umbrellas. Views from the terrace include the Fontana Wedding Pavilion and the stunning vineyards.

I enjoyed breakfast one morning on the patio. A hot cup of coffee, orange juice, bacon, eggs Benedict with smashed avocado, oven-dried tomatoes, and a Meyer lemon hollandaise served with Cajun-spiced potatoes was a fabulous way to begin the morning.

THE COZY BAR

The Front Room Bar & Lounge is open daily from 3 pm to 9 pm. The bar is adjacent to John Ash & Co. and is a popular gathering place for locals and guests of Vintners Resort. This bar is a fabulous place for people to unwind together and enjoy one of the best happy hours in town.



The Front Room offers small plates in a warm and inviting setting. One afternoon my friend, Alyson, joined me for a drink and dinner.

We had a variety of savory small plates: grilled fish tacos with handmade tortillas, chipotle salsa and slaw, hummus and pita bread with olives, and truffle Parmesan fries with roasted garlic aioli. Everything was scrumptious, and we finished the dining experience with a mini key lime pie with a graham cracker crust—yum! Happy hour can be lively, and it’s best to arrive early any day between 3 pm to 5 pm.

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There is so much to see and do in Sonoma County wine country. Book a stay at the Vintners Resort, a slice of paradise in Santa Rosa. Relax on your balcony, walk the grounds, indulge in a spa treatment, and enjoy a cocktail in the bar at the end of the day. This resort is perfect for an extended vacation or a quick weekend getaway. ♦

