

“Although there are a number of guidebooks covering the California Wine Country, I have one particular favorite: the Fourth Edition of *The California Directory of Fine Wineries* (Wine House Press). It provides detailed descriptions of sixty-two of the most unique Napa and Sonoma wineries. Features of special note, such as picnic areas, barrel tastings, art collections, cooking classes and wine seminars, gift shops, and more, are all noted, along with an excellent narrative on each estate. This bestselling hardcover guide is widely available at Borders Book Stores, Barnes & Noble, and Amazon.com. The cost is \$19.95.”

# My Bucket List: *A Wine Country Pilgrimage*

BY ROBYN ROEHM CANNON

**E**very once in a while, life gives you a perfect moment to reflect upon. One of my favorite memories, which I regularly dust off and review, is of something that happened one sunny autumn morning a dozen years ago. It was just after my husband and I had finished a Napa Valley winery tour and we were laying out the makings of an impromptu picnic in the middle of the estate's garden. We had chosen a beautiful spot under the shade of a massive weeping willow, near a pond with a fountain rising from its center. A family of ducks swam leisurely on the water, and, just then, a giant monarch butterfly fluttered into the picture and perched on the rim of my wine glass. The vineyards surrounding us were covered with orderly rows of plump grapevines turning various shades of crimson and gold—it was just days from harvest, and the warm air was heavy with their scent. In the distance, the mountains looked liked cardboard cutouts, set off by a perfectly clear blue and cloudless sky.

“This,” Don said matter-of-factly, as he swirled and sniffed his inky cabernet sauvignon, “is just like Disneyland...for adults.” We looked at each other and nodded because, even if we had hired Central Casting and the guy who

won “Best Set Design” at the Academy Awards to pull this scene together, it could not have been more exquisitely staged.

Anyone interested in enjoying the best food, wine, art and architecture in the middle of breathtaking scenery and superb weather should put a trip to the California Wine Country at the top of his or her “Bucket List,” and make plans to go as soon as possible. Because it is certain that, once you've visited, you'll want to return again and again, as we have—every year—since 1997.

In the dozen years that have passed, the area has experienced some great expansion, so it helps to understand the geography as well as some of the protocols for visiting wineries. A little preplanning can help you to make the most enjoyable use of your time, ensure that you are warmly welcomed, and keep you from being overwhelmed by the many available choices.

Napa and Sonoma are two separate valleys, each just thirty miles long, linked in the center by the Mayacamas Mountain Range. The area is relatively compact, and each valley is made up of a string of towns that have