

WINE, DINE, & WED

Tie the knot while nestled amid the sweeping natural beauty of Northern California at one of these premier resorts. *By Bekah Wright*



verdant views A sliding glass wall in the solstice barn at Solage Calistoga provides wedding celebrants with a full view of its wine country surroundings.

Talk to a vintner and they'll tell you it's Northern California's extraordinary landscape that makes for a perfect vintage. Couples heading to the altar, though, will say the wine country's breathtaking terrain makes for a picture-perfect wedding with topography that ranges from redwood forests to grassland, mountains to coastline. At these three wine country locales, nature is at its best and will sweep you and your guests off your feet.

SOLAGE CALISTOGA

Just beyond the sleepy town of Calistoga, an idyllic apparition suddenly materializes. In the middle of a horse pasture, a bevy of modern cottages the color of deer grass stand out against the Palisades and Mayacamas Mountains. A guest whizzes by on a beach cruiser, breaking this frozen-in-time reverie, bringing attention to a game of bocce ball underway and the sound of the pool's surface being broken as someone dives in. This is no mirage. This is the Solage Calistoga.

Ceremony and Reception The first week Solage Calistoga opened, a couple from Italy forewent their native wine country in lieu of Calistoga's, buying out the resort to host their wedding. Family members cycled on beach cruisers to and from various wedding events, contentedly at home in this romantic oasis all their own. Indeed, the property is just right for weddings, particularly with its solstice barn and lawn. Couples can wed on the verdant lawn, the berm of which is awash in colorful wildflowers, while the Palisades Mountains provide a backdrop. After the ceremony, guests can move beneath the shade of the birch-branch pergola for cocktails. Dinner hour commences in the modern, barn-like structure with its sliding

DESTINATION **WEDDINGS**

glass wall that allows for a view of nightfall over the mountains. Congratulations and speeches resound among the building's wooden rafters. As the music begins, the party can spill onto the surrounding patios for slow dancing by the glow of the fire pit until the midnight hour.

Couples who prefer to marry in a church will find many choices nearby, including St. Helena Catholic Church, Our Lady of Perpetual Help Catholic Church, and Black Swan Lake.

Rehearsal Dinner Solage Calistoga's Solbar provides an intimate setting for a rehearsal dinner. The restaurant's main dining and lounge area has contemporary décor warmed by natural elements. Executive chef Brandon Sharp's wine country cuisine, featured on a two-sided menu that highlights both healthy choices and pure comfort food, appeals to all taste buds. The venue has several seating options including two private dining rooms, Spectera East and West, which open into one large space. Both have floor-to-ceiling windows that can be curtained off for privacy or left open for views of the sunset. The best seats in the house, though, are on the patio, from which you can see the Calistoga sky come alive with stars and hear the gentle sound of the fountain intermingled with guests' laughter. After dinner, the group can settle in by the fire pits for glasses of dessert wine and well wishes for the forthcoming nuptials.

The open-air Solage Bathhouse is also available for hosting a rehearsal dinner fete. For smaller groups, a spot beneath the centuries-old oak trees near the spa makes a beautiful setting. Or couples can combine fun and festivities with a cocktail reception around the bocce ball courts.

Accommodations The 25-acre property was opened in July 2007 by Solage Hotels and Resorts, a new brand from Auberge Resorts. In step with the resort's green philosophy, 89 contemporary cottages feature environmentally friendly solar panels and sustainable landscaping. Inside, open studio floor plans with vaulted ceilings are outfitted with sleek, contemporary furnishings, strategic natural lighting, luxuriant textiles, original artwork, iPod hookups, complimentary Wi-Fi, and 37-inch plasma televisions. Bathrooms feature pebbled flooring and steam showers. Sliding glass doors lead outside to private patios with comfy seating under the shade of willow arbors.

Brides and grooms can check into the one-bedroom Capella Suite, which boasts a fireplace and a deep-soaking tub. The suite's sizeable private patio is ideal for a pre-wedding midnight snack followed by a relaxing dip in the outdoor Jacuzzi. And, like all of Solage Calistoga's one-bedroom suites, the Capella comes with a complimentary cabana by the pool.

Activities Solage's 130-foot adult pool plies guests with cabanas and poolside service including Evian water spritzing and thirst-quenching cocktails. A nearby children's pool keeps things rollicking for the younger set. This is also the site of Wednesday night family barbecues topped off with popsicles and ice cream. Parties can extend their fun to the bocce ball courts.

Solage guests are supplied with Electra bicycles for whizzing around the property or into town. The resort's fitness center, a frequent stop, is stocked with state-of-the-art equipment. Steps away, the fitness studio offers everything from Spinning to Pilates Reformer classes.

Most wedding parties will want to set a course for Spa Solage to indulge in decadent treatments. Two for the betrothed to try: the spa's signature Mudslide, based on the Calistoga's historic mud baths; and Love Shot, an outdoor, aphrodisiac soak followed by a massage. The Kate Somerville facials and naptime in the zero-gravity sound chair are two activities guests won't want to miss. The adjoining salon offers hair, makeup, manicures, and pedicures for bridal party members looking to glam up for the occasion.

A bike ride into downtown Calistoga for an afternoon of window-shopping should include stops at Zenobia and The Silver Grape. Guests can see nature in action on a trip to the Old Faithful Geyser or wander among three-million-year-old petrified logs in The Petrified Forest.

Other fun destinations include area vineyards such as the Frank Family Vineyards, which has a new tasting room, and Schramsberg, where visitors can sip sparkling wine and compose future toasts to the happy couple. To sample myriad varietals, head south on either the Silverado Trail or Highway 29 to neighboring St. Helena, Rutherford, and Yountville vineyards. The Napa region offers countless vineyards. Hop aboard the Napa Valley Wine Train for a leisurely gaze at the picturesque surrounds over a glass of wine. Foodies in the group will appreciate the wine and food exhibits and special events at COPIA, the American Center for Wine, Food & The Arts.

The concierge at Solage Calistoga can arrange such tours as well as hot-air balloon, golf, horseback riding, and cycling outings for the gang. A perfect way to bring the wedding party together under the night sky and over some fine wine and a good film is by treating them to an airing of Sterling Vineyard's Silver Screen Series, held throughout the summer. Riding on the vineyard's aerial tram to the series' hilltop location is a bonus.

To learn more about the Solage Calistoga, call (866) 942-7442 or visit www.solagecalistoga.com.

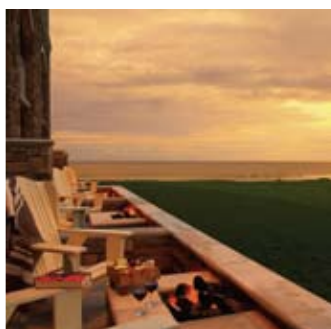
THE RITZ-CARLTON, HALF MOON BAY

There's a magical moment that occurs just before dusk at The Ritz-Carlton, Half Moon Bay. Waves crash against rugged cliffs and the aroma of a wood fire intermingles with the salt air as the fog rolls in, colliding with the waning sun to create a sunset unlike any other. It's not surprising such stunning landscape inspires couples to choose the resort as the location of their wedding. What may surprise some, though, is that this seaside paradise is also set in Northern California wine country.



where vines meet the sea

Atop a seaside bluff, The Ritz-Carlton, Half Moon Bay offers romantic wedding panoramas of the Pacific and sprawling fairways.



DESTINATION **WEDDINGS**

At Half Moon Bay, the Santa Cruz Mountains meet the Pacific Coast—a marriage that brings about varietals lauded the world over for their distinctive taste. Taking advantage of this happy synchronicity is The Ritz-Carlton, Half Moon Bay. Perched on a bluff overlooking the ocean, the seven-year-old resort blends with its natural surroundings through architecture reminiscent of a 19th-century seaside lodge. Panoramas of the Pacific and the fairways of Half Moon Bay Golf Links can be had at every turn, not only from guest rooms and common areas, but also from Adirondack chairs lining a terraced hillside. This is California romance at its best.

Ceremony and Reception When it comes to views, the north and south bluffs at The Ritz-Carlton, Half Moon Bay are as good as it gets. Both are ideal places for being pronounced man and wife with the surf crashing against the cliffs and seabirds providing a winged audience from a rock in the bay. After sharing their first married kiss, couples can lead their party to the Miramontes Terrace for cocktails around the fire pit at sunset. Guests can spill into the intimate Miramontes Room for dinner, then dance under moonlight filtering through the windows of the octagonal observatory.

The rectangular Gazebo Lawn, surrounded by manicured shrubs and flowers in eye-popping shades of pink, red, and white, is another exquisite setting in which to exchange vows. The bride can walk down a petal-strewn path to join her groom in the gazebo, with the Pacific Ocean stretching endlessly before them like years of bliss in store. The party can make a toast in the twilight on the Ocean Terrace. As nighttime falls, the group can head indoors to The Ritz-Carlton Ballroom for a candlelit dinner. The lounge-like foyer will become a thoroughfare for guests seeking out the honeysuckle-scented air of the heated outdoor terrace. The newlyweds can gaze out at party members warming themselves by the stone fireplace or take in the Santa Cruz Mountains, freezing the moment of happiness in time.

Off-site, couples who prefer to marry in a church have many options. Some to consider: Coastside Lutheran Church, Our Lady of The Pillar Catholic Church, and Mariner's Church.

Rehearsal Dinner For couples marrying on the North Bluff, The Ritz-Carlton Suite is a perfect venue in which to host an intimate rehearsal dinner. The suite's elegant dining area sets the tone for the day ahead with French doors opening onto a balcony that overlooks the picturesque

site of the forthcoming nuptials. Close friends and family members are seated in high-backed white leather chairs around a sleek mahogany dining table. Light from a rectangular chandelier provides ambience and reflects off crystals embedded in the champagne leather wallpaper.

Larger parties can convene at Navio, The Ritz-Carlton, Half Moon Bay's fine-dining restaurant that was built to look like the interior of a wooden 17th-century Portuguese ship. A private dining room seats 12 and encircles guests with windows overlooking the shore. The Chef's Table is tucked away from other diners and offers a prime view of Navio's display kitchen. The Fireplace Room boasts tall windows, a crackling fire, and several small booths with curtains that allow the bride and groom private time. On the menu: Northern California cuisine paired with wine from the Santa Cruz Mountains vineyards.

Couples seeking to augment a wine theme can host their rehearsal dinner in the stately library adjacent to the ENO wine room and arrange an "Eno-Versity" session for their guests in which flights of wines are paired with cheeses and chocolates. A collective moment at sunset awaits in the adjoining Conservatory Lounge. End the evening outdoors on the bluff, where guests can share blankets on Adirondack love-seats while sipping hot chocolate and roasting marshmallows around a fireplace.

Accommodations The AAA Five Diamond resort has 261 rooms, including 22 suites, all with dazzling views that can include the Pacific Ocean, two championship golf courses, or the Santa Cruz Mountains. Wedding guests will enjoy rooms on the ground floor that open onto terraces with fire pits. The fifth floor houses Club Lounge rooms with private access to the spacious lounge, its dedicated concierge, and five daily complimentary food and beverage presentations. Other accommodations feature fireplaces, window seats, or balconies. Room décor is sophisticated, eclectic, and cozy all at once with details such as personal wine cellars and featherbeds. Keeping guests tapped into the outside world are HD televisions, DVD players, and Wi-Fi.

Three cottage houses—The Fairway House, Ocean House, and Cypress House—feature telescopes and binoculars so guests won't miss ships on the horizon. Golfers can practice putting in-room with the provided putter and balls.

For utterly unforgettable wedding digs, the bride and groom can check into The Ritz-Carlton Suite. The suite is pure elegance with white,



timely manor At the historic MacArthur Place, paths meander through seven acres of Victorian gardens dotted with whimsical sculptures and fountains.

silver, and blue/grey décor that contrasts with the mahogany wood floors. Outstanding views prevail, including those from the living and dining areas (more on that later). Throughout the suite are contemporary pieces with traditional touches that furnish each room. Opulent master and guest bedrooms provide rapturous vistas to linger over in bed. Two expansive bathrooms make getting ready for the main event a snap.

Activities Even non-golfers will be seduced by the striking terrain of Half Moon Bay Golf Links' two 18-hole championship golf courses—The Old Course and The Ocean Course. Guests can also enjoy the sea breeze on a walking path to the beach or on a coastal jogging and biking trail that they can explore on complimentary bicycles.

Adjacent to The Ritz-Carlton, Half Moon Bay's main building is the Colony Club's enclosed swimming pool. Also in the vicinity are six lighted tennis courts and a basketball court, as well as a fitness center with cutting-edge equipment, an aerobics room, and a heated yoga studio. Fitness pros lead classes in yoga, Pilates, tai chi, and Spinning.

A great place to catch up with wedding guests is The Ritz-Carlton Spa. Within the locker rooms, group relaxation is offered via whirlpools and steam and sauna rooms. The men's locker room houses an additional cold plunge pool. Fireplaces warm from both the men's and women's separate lounges, which are enhanced by barrel ceilings, natural tones, and ocean elements. A rotunda-like lounge with a Roman mineral bath and tsunami showers allows for coed relaxation. Spa-goers begin the zone-out process by the glow of flickering candles and firelight while lounging on daybeds. In addition to treatments at The Spa, bridal parties can schedule time for

hairstyling, makeup application, manicures, and pedicures in the Beauty Salon.

Groups can have fun during “Eno-Versity” wine tasting classes at the ENO wine room. The Ritz Kids program for children ages 5 to 12 is perfect for wedding guests with little ones. Among other activities, kids in the program can play in the family recreation room, which offers foosball, video games, and a pool table; the resort also holds special Ritz Kids programs for weddings and events.

Off-site itineraries might include sampling vintages from The Santa Cruz Mountains Appellation at locales such as Thomas Fogarty Winery and Vineyards, Bonny Doon Vineyard, and Burrell School Vineyards. The concierge at The Ritz-Carlton, Half Moon Bay can arrange wine tours and nearby whale-watching, sailing, sea kayaking, deep-sea fishing, windsurfing, and horseback-riding outings.

Group outings can take in some of Northern California’s natural highlights. A trip to the Fitzgerald Marine Reserve promises tide pool exploration; Ano Nuevo State Reserve is home to an elephant seal colony; Pescadero Marsh

Natural Preserve rewards bird-watching; and Purissima Creek Redwood Open Space Preserve encourages hikes among towering redwoods.

For more information about The Ritz-Carlton, Half Moon Bay, call (650) 712-7000 or visit www.ritzcarlton.com.

MACARTHUR PLACE

Just when it seems California wine country can’t get any more beautiful, a white picket fence appears, signaling the entrance to MacArthur Place, Sonoma’s Historic Inn and Spa. At the entrance to the country estate, a cascading mayten tree shades the reception house and a line of bicycles stands ready for the use of guests checking in. Overseeing check-ins is AJ, the property’s furry gray CFO (chief feline officer).

Past the library, seven acres of Victorian gardens wait to be discovered. Mixed in with the crepe myrtles, French lavender, and jasmine is a bit of modern whimsy in the form of oversize bronze sunflowers and tulips as well as birdhouse water fountains and a giant outdoor chess set. Hidden away in various nooks and crannies are swings just right for a future husband and

wife to take in the twilight while surveying what will soon be their wedding site.

Ceremony and Reception The grounds of MacArthur Place provide many romantic settings for saying “I do.” In the Veranda Garden, evergreens and vibrant flowers grow near a stone wall, creating the sense of an outdoor chapel. Flanking the lawn are two brick patios where guests can watch the proceedings under the shade of a pergola on one end and umbrellas on the other. Espaliers of Gravenstein apple trees on the garden’s border create a curtained path for the bride. Giving a nod to this blessed occasion, a brick path stretches up to a Victorian steeple from the late 1800s.

Vows exchanged, the party can move into the adjacent Veranda with its bright white wainscoting, plantation shutters, and beamed ceiling. Skylights let in moonbeams, and screen windows give the perception of being outdoors. There’s ample room for the entire wedding party to show off their moves on the dance floor.

The property’s Koi Garden is just right for small weddings. A flagstone path meanders among juniper trees, leading to a rectangular

DESTINATION WEDDINGS

pond where lily pads float and a dragonfly sculpture holds court. After the ceremony, a permanent table in the garden waits with a candlelight dinner. The bride and groom can reflect on their day from a nearby swing.

Providing a bit of pomp and circumstance is MacArthur Place's West Lawn. To use this space, wedding parties must rent the surrounding accommodations. The verandas and porches of these buildings provide prime viewing of the proceedings. Indeed, the happy couple may want to take their vows from a central balcony. After rings are slipped on fingers, the lawn is transformed for dinner. An ongoing game of croquet along with cake, toasts, and dancing under the stars make for a perfect day.

Numerous options are available near the resort for couples who prefer to marry in a church. Two to consider are St. Francis Solano Church and Sonoma Valley Community Church.

Rehearsal Dinner MacArthur Place's library often becomes a meeting place for groups. Its friendly atmosphere is charmed by an iron fireplace and starlight filtering through dormer windows. This space, along with the library's courtyard, is ideal for hosting a rehearsal dinner. Guests will feel like they're seated in a tree house beneath the branches of four Chinese tallow trees that create a bough above the terrace. The trickling fountain and soft music playing on the outdoor stereo system keep festivities relaxed and serene.

Twinkle lights glow from big leaf maple trees at the entrance to another potential rehearsal dinner site—Saddles Steakhouse and Martini Bar. Located in a 100-year-old barn, Saddles creates a sense of intimacy with dark wood floors, stairs, and walls. The western theme, with dim lighting, a wine wall, and various fireplaces, provides contrast to the garden tone throughout the rest of MacArthur Place. Private rooms are also available for parties within the barn.

Accommodations Sixty-four rooms and suites are set on MacArthur Place's lush acreage. Most are within structures built to mimic the Edwardian-style Victorian manor house, circa 1850s. Others are dreamy cottages tucked in fragrant gardens. Special touches abound, like window seats for reading a selection from the library, wraparound porches for a rocking chair sojourn, and paw prints across the porch of one suite, compliments of Rugby the dog. Many accommodations have separate fenced-in yards. Some feature outdoor showers or, in the case of in the Spa Suites, large outdoor teak tubs inside open-air pagodas.

The betrothed may want to check into the very private Jasmine or Garden Cottages or the Manor House's romantic Burris Suite. All accommodations have wood-burning fireplaces, 37-inch LCD televisions, DVD players, and hydrotherapy tubs for two with heated backs and 40 jets. A free continental breakfast is available to all guests at Saddles Steakhouse and Martini Bar.

Activities Wedding groups will find themselves convening in MacArthur Place's library, where board games, books, and a DVD collection are free for guest use. Tastings of local wines and cheeses also take place here nightly.

The property's former pool house has been transformed into the Garden Spa, which is surrounded by a fragrant garden. A departure from a typical Zen spa, the Garden Spa awakens the senses with a palette of sunny greens and yellows, with quaint touches like a sunflower showerhead and robe hooks fashioned from garden tools and hose nozzles. Many of the spa's treatments use products made from MacArthur Place's herb garden. The "Red, Red Wine" treatment gets guests in touch with the wine country locale with a scrub, bath, and massage using grapeseed oil.

Just steps from the spa, near the inn's swimming pool and whirlpool, loungers call for reclining and a ping-pong table begs challenges of skill. A small fitness center is in the same complex.

Spending time in the gardens is a must, whether you get lost in the boxwood maze, play a game of checkers, or seek out seating areas discreetly situated for private tête-à-têtes. An audio tour will familiarize the group with MacArthur Place. Afterward, hop on a fleet of bicycles and head into town to learn more Sonoma history.

Sonoma's charming town square is four blocks north of MacArthur Place, making it an easy walk or bike ride away. The plaza has numerous outstanding restaurants to sample, including the girl & the fig, El Dorado Kitchen, and Café La Haye. Browse in local shops and partake in wine tastings at places like Sonoma Enoteca and Baksheesh. Within Sonoma Plaza, the eight-acre Sonoma State Historic Park offers opportunities for guest tours of California's last mission, Mission San Francisco Solano de Sonoma; the home of General Mariano Guadalupe Vallejo, built in 1852; the Mexican Barracks; and the Depot Museum.

Those with a penchant for historical icons can visit Jack London State Historic Park in Glen Ellen to wander the grounds of author Jack London's famous Beauty Ranch as well as his homes, The House of Happy Walls and Wolf House.

Fans of the "Peanuts" comic strip can review the progression of Charlie Brown and the gang over the years at the Charles M. Schulz Museum and Research Center in nearby Santa Rosa.

The concierge at MacArthur Place can arrange for activities ranging from hot-air ballooning to horseback riding. A favorite outing among wedding parties: renting limousines and touring

Sonoma County's 30 wineries and vineyards. Some to include on the itinerary are Gundlach-Bundschu, Chateau St. Jean, and the Gloria Ferrer Champagne Caves. Team-building cooking classes at Ramekins Sonoma Valley Culinary School pair local wines with delectable cuisine.

For more details about MacArthur Place, call (707) 938-2929 or visit www.macarthurplace.com. 