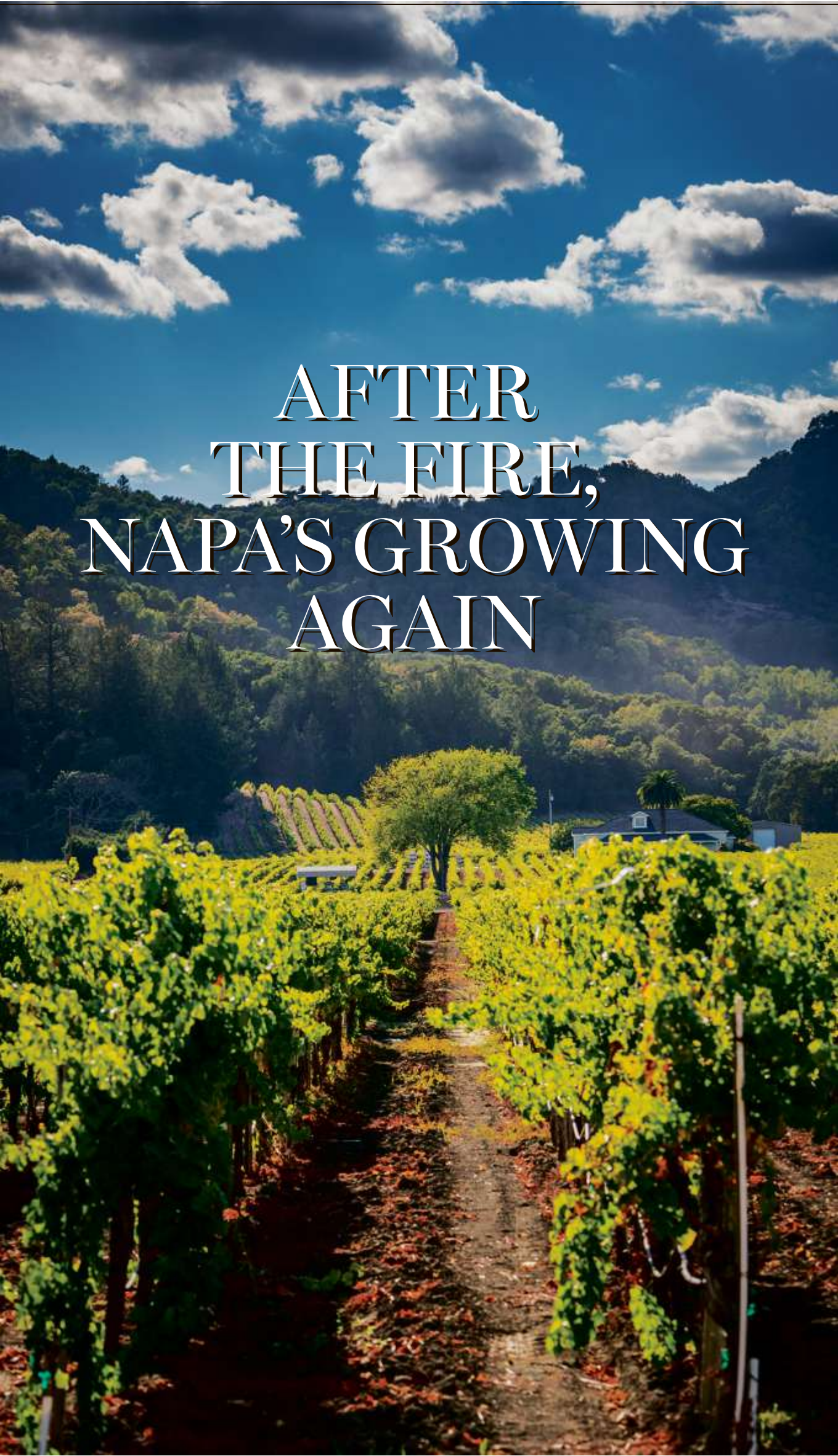


The Concierge

TIPS FOR TOURING HERE AND ABROAD



AFTER THE FIRE, NAPA'S GROWING AGAIN

By Christopher Muther
Globe Staff

After a devastating fire burned through 100,000 acres of Napa Valley last fall, there were ashes and diamonds. No, really. That's not a sappy, poetic euphemism. A new winery and tasting room called Ashes & Diamonds opened just weeks after the fires, and it is a marvel of midcentury architecture.

The winery's tasting room looks like something lifted from Rat Pack-era Palm Springs. Opened shortly after the fires (the name had been chosen pre-fire) it looks like nothing else in Napa Valley.

It's one of several new hotels, restaurants, and tasting rooms to emerge since the October fires destroyed hundreds of homes and businesses.

I visited the Napa Valley for the first time last summer and was absolutely smitten. I may have been smitten because I was slightly drunk from a steady week of wine tastings. But I'm fairly certain that I was also taken with the scenery, the food, and the sunshine.

I feared that the fires would be a death knell for Napa tourism. But 90 percent of Napa and Sonoma were unaffected by the blaze. No Napa hotels were damaged by the fires, and the region's 400 tasting rooms were running shortly after the last of the flames were extinguished. During my visit last year, I stayed at a comfortable boutique hotel called the North Block in Yountville, and then at the insanely elegant White House Napa Valley Inn. Both survived. Also still intact was Auberge du Soleil, where I enjoyed my favorite Napa Valley meal (roasted local lamb with goat cheese-stuffed squash blossoms, thank you for asking).

But the most encouraging news is how the fires didn't deter new growth. Here are a few recent arrivals in Napa:

Ashes & Diamonds — It's not just the millennial-friendly architecture and the décor that are striking. Owner Kashy Khaledi, a former music executive, assembled two of California's biggest winemaking talents — Steve Matthiasson (of Matthiasson Wines) and Diana Snowden Seysses (of Snowden Vineyards) — to craft his wines. Tasting options range

from \$35 to \$150. 430 Howard Lane, Napa, 707-666-4777, ashesdiamonds.com.

The Archer Hotel — The five-story luxury boutique inn opened this spring and in addition to 183 guest rooms, there are beautiful views from the expansive 7000-square-foot Sky & Vine Rooftop Bar.

Rooms start at \$259 per night. 1230 First St., Napa, 707-690-9800, archerhotel.com/napa.

The Francis House — After more than two years of renovations, the historic Francis House opens next month as a luxury inn. The mansion was abandoned for nearly 50 years before the current owners, Richard and Dina Dwyer, purchased it in 2015 and began restorations. It was

initially built as the home of prominent merchant James H. Francis in 1886. It then served as the city's hospital from 1919 to 1946. The registered landmark is now accepting reservations for the end of August.

Rooms start at \$495 a night. 1403 Myrtle St, Calistoga, 707-341-3536, thefranchishouse.com.

Vista Collina Resort and The Village at Vista Collina — Opened this week, the Vista Collina Resort has 145 posh rooms, including 39 suites with full kitchens. The Village at Vista Collina has nine tasting rooms focusing on Napa Valley boutique wines and microbrews, plus a Food & Wine Center for culinary classes and wine seminars.

Rooms start at \$379 a night. 850 Bordeaux Way, Napa, 888-965-7090, www.meritagecollection.com/Vista-Collina.

Gran Electrica — It's an unlikely new arrival, but Brooklyn-based Gran Electrica has opened its second restaurant here and is now serving its authentic Mexican menu in downtown Napa. The beverage offerings are more focused on mezc and tequila than wine.

1313 Main St., Napa, 707-258-1313, www.granelectrica.com.

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VISIT CALIFORNIA/DAVID COLLIER

HERE

VT. MUSIC FEST DRAWS BIG NAMES Don't miss Jackson Browne and Ani DiFranco at Grace Potter's Grand Point North Music Festival in Vermont this September. The two-day event, taking place at Burlington's Waterfront Park, features Potter, Browne, DiFranco, Mt. Joy, Darlingside, Clever Girls, and others on Sept. 15. Joining Potter on Sept. 16 will be Nathaniel Rateliff and the Night Sweats, The Magpie Salute, Caroline Rose, Sister Sparrow and the Dirty Birds, and more. Vote for your favorite Vermont musician or band to open this year's festival (nomination period: July 9-15; vote July 16-22) and be entered to win two weekend passes to this year's festival. Tickets currently on sale: \$59 for single-day pass; \$89 for two-day pass; children 12 and under free. 802-652-0777, www.highergroundmusic.com.

FAMILY FUN AT R.I. BALLOON FESTIVAL

Soar over southern Rhode Island in a hot air balloon during the 40th South County Balloon Festival in Kingston, July 20-22. Enjoy stunning aerial views of the coastline by day and glow balloons at night as they illuminate the evening sky. The event, which takes place at the University of Rhode Island's Bradford R. Boss Arena, includes tethered balloon flights 6-8 a.m. and 7-9 p.m., weather permitting. The three-day festival also includes wildlife shows, a flying trapeze, a kite show, and live music by local bands, including Roomful of Blues. A kids area features a fishing pond, inflatable rides, a train ride, and a rock-climbing



wall. Admission: \$10 per person; children 10 and under free. \$20 per person for a balloon flight. Proceeds benefit local communities. 401-379-4298, www.southcountyballoonfest.com.

THERE

BUDGET STAYS IN BEAUTIFUL SPOTS

Looking for budget lodging and camping during your summer adventures — and beyond? The American Alpine Club (AAC), the country's largest non-profit climbing organization, offers discounted access to more than two dozen inns and hostels in the United States, and at backcountry hut systems in Europe, New Zealand, Chile, and Canada. You don't have to be a climber to stay at them (or to join the organization), but you get a better rate if you become an AAC member (\$45-\$80 fee per year). Stay at a historic ranch inside Grand Teton National Park for just \$10 per night (\$17 for non-members) or at Notch Hostel in New Hampshire's White Mountains

starting at just \$30 per person per night. The new Rumney Rattlesnake Campground in Rumney, N.H., has camping spots and a six-person coed bunkroom in a house with full kitchen, bathroom, and WiFi. The AAC has also added the new Gunks Campground in Gardiner, N.Y., with more than 50 drive-in and walk-in campsites, showers, and WiFi. 303-383-0110, www.americanalpineclub.org.

OPRAH INSPIRES A NEW WAVE OF TRAVELERS

Join one of O, The Oprah Magazine's new Adventure of Your Life cruises,

which celebrate the magic of travel and bring passengers together with the magazine's editors and other leading innovators and entrepreneurs. The seven-day Alaska Roundtrip Seattle cruise aboard Holland America Line's Eurodam departs Aug. 11, featuring five editors from O magazine, psychologist Shefali Tsabary, and New York Times best-selling author Laura Lippman — and visiting Juneau, Glacier Bay, Sitka, and other stunning places. Or join the seven-day Eastern Caribbean cruise on the recently renovated Nieuw Amsterdam, which takes passengers to Grand Turk, St. Thomas, Puerto Rico, and Holland America's private island at Half Moon Cay in the Bahamas. That trip departs Oct. 28. Oprah Winfrey will also serve as godmother of Holland America's new ship Nieuw Statendam and will join a three-day Girls' Getaway cruise departing Jan. 30 (now full, but put your name on the wait list just in case). Rates start at \$649 (Caribbean) and \$1,099 (Alaska). 855-932-1711, www.hollandamerica.com.

EVERYWHERE

BRING A KAYAK ON YOUR NEXT ADVENTURE

Take Advanced Elements' new AdvancedFrame Ultralite kayak on your adventures and you can explore lakes, rivers, and protected coastlines. The 17½-pound single kayak comes in a travel bag with backpack straps so you can carry it to the airport or into the wil-



derness with ease (there's extra room for stashing a trail lunch and paddle, too). The kayak sets up quickly and easily: Unfold, insert two aluminum "ribs" into the bow and stern, and then use a hand pump (sold separately) to quickly inflate the boat's air chambers. The 10½-foot-long boat tracks well thanks to its built-in skeg and rigid design, and proves quick to maneuver, making it easy for paddlers of all levels to navigate. It's made with a durable three-layer ripstop nylon that resists puncture, in case you graze a hidden branch or have a rough beach landing. The Ultralite comes with bungee deck lines for stashing a bilge pump, paddle float, and water bottle (those items not included), an inflatable foot support that's handy for longer trips or for bracing in choppy water, and a comfy adjustable seat. It holds kayakers up to 225 pounds. The company makes a variety of paddles that break down to four pieces for portability, ranging from a \$45 Ultralite paddle to a \$250 full-carbon touring paddle. \$540 for kayak. 866-262-9076, www.advancedelements.com. KARI BODNARCHUK

