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Day Trippin'

By Fran Miller



Healdsburg's luxurious Hotel Les Mars is the perfect spot to end a day of sightseeing.

Photos Fran Miller

in its historic location at 344 Center Street. The realization of a dream for hometown brothers Chef Dustin Valette and Aaron Garzini, Valette is located in a building once owned by Valette's great grandfather. Chef Valette brings to his new restaurant the strong relationships with local farmers and purveyors that he cultivated for six years as executive chef of Dry Creek Kitchen, just across the plaza.

Valette's interior features reclaimed wood tables, a spectacular redwood bar fashioned from a 300-year-old felled tree, and a scene-stealing custom-made charcuterie locker made by a third brother. Try the "Trust Me" portion of the Valette menu, and Chef Valette will surprise and delight you with creative selections from his eclectic menu. Our six courses with wine pairings enjoyed within an ambience of warmth and soul ensured an unforgettable restaurant experience.

For more informal fare, consider Pizzando, headed by Chef Louis Maldonado of Spoonbar fame. Guests may recognize Maldonado from his 2014 appearance on "Top Chef" where he wowed judges with his mastery of wood fire cooking, a technique that takes center stage at Pizzando. Try his pizza, cooked to perfection with blistered edges surrounding the freshest seasonal ingredients. Pizzando is located at 301 Healdsburg Ave., off the plaza.

Treasure hunters will love the 22 galleries and 50 boutiques in town - places such as Studio Barndiva at 237 Center Street, a sensory-overload art gallery and bar. The large space features wire art, paintings, sculptures and eclectic one-of-a-kind collectibles.

Skip a few streets over to 30 Mill Street to quench your thirst at Sonoma Cider, handcrafted organic ciders produced from freshly squeezed organic apples by locals David Cordtz and his son

Placing second on Smithsonian Magazine's 2014 list of America's Top 20 Small Towns, Healdsburg is the epitome of charm. With its central tree-shaded plaza, 'conscientious' cuisine, abundance of wineries, boutiques and galleries, visitors typically find more activities of interest than can be packed into a day, or even an overnight stay.

Central to the town's appeal is Healdsburg Plaza. Named by Travel & Leisure Magazine as one of America's most beautiful town squares, the plaza has through the years retained its importance as a central gathering spot since it was established in the 1850s. While the plaza remains largely unchanged, surrounding retail has evolved over the decades.

Gone are the hardware and feed stores from long ago, and the overall-clad farmers who frequented them. But the agricultural essence of the area remains and is found in the offerings of the area's artisan food purveyors and restaurateurs ... places such as SHED, a market and eatery desiring to bring us closer to the foods we eat. Featuring a café, a pantry stocked with kitchen basics, and outdoor wood-fired grilled items on the weekend, SHED, at 25 North Street is a lively, communal gathering spot.

Every corner features a restaurant better than the next. Newcomer Valette serves creative dishes

Robert. Limited tastings are by appointment only. Email info@sonomacider.com to schedule.

The Plaza area has become a wine-lover's paradise with wine-tasting rooms and lounges at every turn - two per block to be exact, a limitation decreed by City Hall. La Crema, Banshee, Kendall Jackson, Thumbprint Cellars, and Ferrari-Carano are just a few of the many within walking distance.

For those desiring a sip straight from the source, visit one or more of the many wineries in the four celebrated Sonoma County wine regions nearby: Alexander Valley, Russian River Valley, Dry Creek Valley, or Chalk Hill, home of Chalk Hill Winery, owned by proprietor Bill Foley who also owns Healdsburg's luxurious 16-room Hotel Les Mars and its restaurant, Chalkboard, at 27 North Street.

Guests at Hotel Les Mars are provided access to other Foley-owned wineries, such as Roth and Lancaster. Hotel Les Mars' staff will effortlessly plan the perfect wine-centric day, including tours, tastings and a picnic lunch, followed by dinner back at Chalkboard with Chef Shane McAnelly, formerly of Va de Vi.

As one of only 520 Relais and Chateaux hotels and restaurants worldwide, Hotel Les Mars is all about service: room-delivered continental breakfast, afternoon wine and cheese, a half bottle of champagne at check-in. But the sumptuous interior is itself a draw. Furnished with stately French antiques, Carrara marble bathrooms, and hand-carved canopy beds enveloped in lush linens, Hotel Les Mars is the perfect spot to end your day or weekend of wining, dining and sightseeing.

Charm, luxury, artisan foods, world-class wines and treasures galore - Healdsburg has it all.



Hometown brothers Dustin Valette and Aaron Garzini have realized their dream with restaurant Valette, housed in a building once owned by Valette's great grandfather.



The eclectic Gallery Barndiva features one-of-a-kind treasures, and a very cool corner bar.



SHED is a farm-centric communal gathering spot featuring home goods, artisan grocery items, a coffee bar and restaurant.

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