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Festival Napa Valley Fuses Arts, Food and Wine into a Luscious 12-Day Celebration

By Jenny Peters



Luncheon in the St. Supery Estate Vineyards was one of the highlights of the 2016 Festival Napa Valley. Photo by Bob McClenahan, courtesy Festival Napa Valley.

The [Napa Valley](#): what better place on earth could you go to

celebrate the fusion of the fine arts paired up for 12 days with world-class culinary experiences and amazing wine?



The 2016 Festival Napa Valley featured plenty of music, food and wine over 12 days in the famous California wine valley. Photo by Paul E. Richardson, courtesy Festival Napa Valley.

That's just what took place from July 13 to July 24, 2016, during the eleventh iteration of [Festival Napa Valley](#). The newly branded event, which until this year has been known as the Festival del Sole, combines classical music, jazz, ballet and opera in a series of shows, with luncheons, dinners and after parties filled in before, during and after.

The result is a heady mix that fills the most beautiful wine valley in America from bottom (the town of Napa) to top (Calistoga) and everywhere in between. Gorgeous summer scenery frames most of the events, from the Twilight Preview Concert with Naomi O'Connell at the tony [Calistoga Ranch](#) resort that kicked off this year's festivities to the closing night dinner held at the iconic [Robert Mondavi Winery](#) in Oakville.



Jazz at the Castello di Amorosa featuring Sergio Mendes drew a big crowd during Festival Napa Valley on July 20, 2016. Photo by Bob McClenahan, courtesy Festival Napa Valley.

We were sad to miss that closing night on July 24, as Sophia Loren joined the packed audience at the [Napa Valley Performing Arts Center at Lincoln Theater](#) in Yountville for the Opera Gala, in which her son Carlo Ponti conducted stars Michael Fabiano and Isabel Leonard in a night of arias and duets. Loren, who attended the festival in 2015 as well, also celebrated with sax player Dave Koz and vocalist Monica Mancini at the sold-out Tribute to Margit Mondavi held the evening before at the spectacular [Far Niente Winery](#) in Oakville.



The elegant Festival Napa Valley V. Sattui dinner in the winery's barrel room, held on July 18, 2016. Photo by Bob McClenahan, courtesy Festival

Napa Valley.

There were so many events to choose from (over 60 different ones, with 100 wineries involved) that no one could do them all. But making the Festival Napa Valley a mini-vacation road trip from Los Angeles is a perfect way to combine a relaxing visit to the valley with a few exemplary festival experiences.



Conductor Carlo Ponti, singers Isabel Leonard and Michael Fabiano and the legendary Sofia Loren attend the Opera Gala at the Festival Napa Valley on July 24, 2016. Photo by Paul E. Richardson, courtesy Festival Napa Valley.

Choose the [Meadowood Napa Valley Resort](#) in St. Helena as a home base and luxuriate in their brand-new spa, a gorgeous forest hideaway that offers a full line of treatments to guests of the resort. And be sure to save a night for dinner at [The Restaurant at Meadowood](#), for Chef Christopher Kostow is whipping up three-star Michelin meals in that elegant eatery.

Or stay at the lovely [Vintage Inn](#) in Yountville, and you'll be across the street from the French Laundry, another famed Napa Valley

restaurant. Plus, the Lincoln Theater is only five minutes away, where many performances during Festival Napa Valley are held. Plus, they have a massively wonderful champagne brunch every morning that is included in the cost of the room.



Gino Quilico performs at V. Sattui Winery at the 2016 Festival Napa Valley on July 18, 2016. Photo by Bob McClenahan, courtesy Festival Napa Valley.

Our Festival Napa Valley included some sublime experiences, starting with being serenaded by famed opera singer Gino Quilico while sitting under the stars at [V. Sattui Winery](#), followed by a cozy dinner prepared by Michelin-starred chef Stefano Masanti and served inside their barrel room. Combinations like the mushroom risotto served with the V. Sattui 2013 Doctor's Pinot Noir helped make that a memorable night.





Sergio Mendes and Brazil 2016 performing at Castello di Amorosa during the 2016 Festival Napa Valley. Photo by Bob McClenahan, courtesy Festival Napa Valley.

More arts and culinary memories followed, with a spectacular luncheon prepared by chef Britny Sundin and served at shaded tables in the vineyards of [St. Supery Estate Vineyards and Winery](#). Sundin and longtime winemaker Michael Scholz paired sips of the St. Supery 2015 Napa Valley Estate Rose with a shrimp, melon and Padron pepper salad for a striking taste combination, as well as a juicy pork tenderloin with ratatouille made straight from the winery's garden paired with their exquisite 2012 Rutherford Estate Vineyard Cabernet Sauvignon.



A stunning setting for the Alpha Omega Patron Dinner, part of the 2016 Festival Napa Valley. Photo by Bob McClenahan, courtesy Festival Napa Valley.

There's a reason that the winery's offerings are so beautifully balanced, as Scholz explains. "We grow everything on the estate here in Rutherford and we are certified Napa Green. We really have

complete control over the whole process, from soil and vines to crush and bottling.”



Sarah Chang performs as part of the 12-day 2016 Festival Napa Valley. Photo by Paul E. Richardson, courtesy Festival Napa Valley.

Control was evident later that day, too, as violinist Sarah Chang put on a virtuoso performance in concert at the Lincoln Theater, accompanied with the Festival Orchestra NAPA, of Astor Piazzolla’s “The Four Seasons of Buenos Aires” tango compositions. Later, at the Full Moon After Party at chef Charlie Parker’s Harvest Inn, more delightful food, wine and music rounded out a beautiful Festival Napa Valley day.

And we had one more, that began at the [Castello di Amorosa](#) in Calistoga, that Tuscan-style castle built by Dario Sattui as his homage to Italy – and a place where he could craft classic Italian wines. But it was a Portuguese band that packed the castle’s courtyard and overlooking balcony on July 20, as Sergio Mendes brought his “Brazil 2016” nine-member band to the stage and wowed the crowd with classics from 1966 to today. From “The Look

of Love” to “Never Gonna Let You Go” and “The Fool on the Hill,” the concert was packed with tunes that had the rapt audience singing along.

Later, at the Patron Dinner held outdoors by the lake at the spectacular [Alpha Omega Winery](#) in Rutherford, Mendes joined in the festivities there, which included the whole smoked cochon (pig) that owner/vintner Robin Baggett had spent the whole day preparing. As the happy crowd dug into that savory smoked pork and sipped the Alpha Omega 2012 Proprietary Red blend along with it, Sergio Mendes voiced what most Festival Napa Valley attendees felt, too.

“Coming to play in the Napa Valley is always a wonderful experience,” Mendes said with a broad smile.

The 2017 Festival Napa Valley happens from July 14 to 23; we’re hoping to meet Sophia Loren next year!