

WHISKEY • TANGO • GLOBETROT

Wine Tasting Workouts in Sonoma's Dry Creek Valley

By Spencer Spellman



As much as I love going to my kitchen for a craft beer from the fridge or whipping up a craft cocktail, there's just something about a unique or exclusive experience that culminates with a glass of beer, whiskey, or wine. It's the pot of gold at the end of the rainbow, and that's exactly what I sought out on my recent trip to Sonoma's Dry Creek Valley when teaming up with Dry Creek Valley.

But I didn't just want your token Sonoma wine tasting experience. I wanted to feel like I had worked for my wine. And so that's exactly what I did. So today I'm coming to you with how I worked (and worked out) for my wine in Sonoma's Dry Creek Valley.

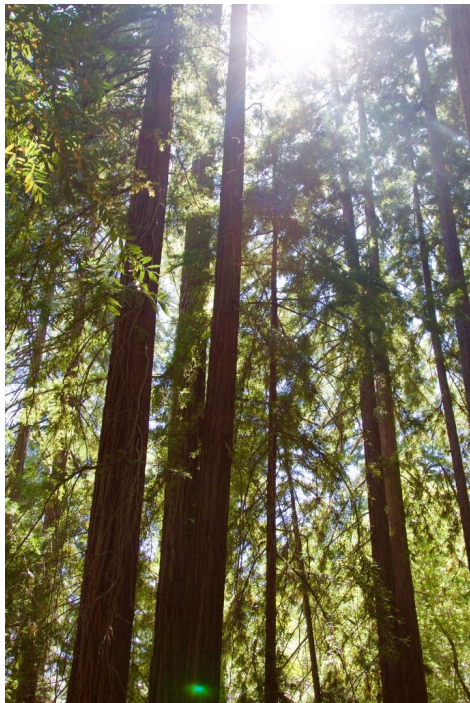
Yoga in the Vineyards

What's better than starting your day with yoga? Starting your day with yoga in a vineyard....and then followed by a tasting flight and brunch at Comstock Wines Estate Vineyards. Yes, I am completely serious. I, too, shed a tear when I first heard about it.

“Yoga in the Vines” goes down the first Sunday morning of every month at Comstock Wines, which is one of the newest wineries in Sonoma’s Dry Creek Valley. Opening just last year, Comstock is one of the first wineries you see when you come into the Dry Creek Valley, and is set against a beautiful backdrop of the valley and rolling hills. Thus, it’s just the perfect setting for starting your day with yoga.



The class is an hour, taking place just behind the tasting room amidst the vineyard, and followed by a flight of Comstock wines (of which their varietals include Zinfandel, Cabernet Sauvignon, Pinot Noir, Merlot, Sauvignon Blanc, Viognier, and Chardonnay). The proverbial icing on the cake is the breakfast that’s paired with the wine flight on the patio overlooking the vineyards. Talk about zenning out.



Vineyard Hike

Ask locals how they describe Sonoma County’s Dry Creek Valley, and many of them are going to respond with an adjective like “off-the-beaten-path.” Well if that’s the case, then Fritz Underground Winery is completely off-the-beaten-path. I believe if your winery has its own redwood grove, like Fritz does, then it qualifies as off-the-beaten-path, and seems like as good of a place as any to go for a hike.

Fritz is one of the most unique wineries in the Dry Creek Valley, and not just because it has a redwood grove (yes, seriously). The winery dates back more than 30 years to 1979, and is partially located underground, on a 112-acre property. Therefore it affords opportunities that you can’t just have anywhere, such as a vineyard hike along its own pond, past vineyards, and up through a redwood grove.

On this particular day I was lucky enough to hike with co-owner Natalia Fritz, who runs the food side of Fritz, and is the brains behind the delicious sweet potato tomato sauce and extra virgin olive oil made from olives that are grown on the property. Leading

the hike was Fritz's winemaker, Brad Longton, who showed me a number of their different types of vines, explaining the history of the vineyard and the science behind their award-winning wines.

Moments after walking through one of their hillside vineyard rows, however, we were all of a sudden in a redwood grove. It didn't get much more of an off-the-beaten-path wine experience than that. The hike then culminated with a tour of the winemaking facility and a seated tasting on their outdoor patio. Now that's what I call working for your wine.

Fritz Underground Winery's hike is offered at 10 a.m. by appointment only.

Bicycling Dry Creek Valley

This only left one more thing to do: A self-guided bicycle tour of Dry Creek Valley. And by "self-guided bicycle tour," I mean bicycling just about the entire Dry Creek Valley, starting in Healdsburg. It was exhausting, and awesome, and is it just me, or does wine just taste better when you've bicycled miles across a valley for it?

The goal was simple: Pick up my bike in Healdsburg from Wine Country Bikes and bike west across the valley before making my way back to Healdsburg slowly, stopping at 3 wineries with an intermission at Dry Creek General Store. It was a 25-mile bike-for-my-wine itinerary. I got this.



That is until two miles into my ride and I had already made a wrong turn. Even still, it made for one of my favorite wine experiences to date, of which all three of the wineries (Zichichi, Martorana, and Mill Creek) are among the most photogenic wineries I've visited in Northern California.

My first Dry Creek Valley winery stop, however, was at Lambert Bridge Winery (where my friend Bill Smart is GM), and which is equally photogenic. I stopped at Lambert Bridge for a water break, which turned into a photo shoot for a few fellow bikers. I had actually done a proper tasting at Lambert Bridge Winery the day before. And I'm glad I had, since Lambert Bridge Winery is hella classy, and where you could easily spend half the day, especially for one of their cellar tastings. But I had a bike route to stick to.

What I loved about each of the wineries I visited was that they all had their own unique characteristics, making for great stops on a bike ride of Sonoma's Dry Creek Valley for different reasons. Zichichi has one of

the best patio views in Dry Creek, overlooking the vineyards, valley, and rolling hills, while their flagship wines are unique in that they sell out before they're even bottled.



The view from Zichichi Family Vineyard

Just a couple miles down from Zichichi, Martorana Family Winery is another 30-year-old Dry Creek Valley winery, which had one of the best outdoor spaces of any of the vineyards, including a natural patio on the roof of their tasting room, dubbed the “living roof,” as well as a picnic area by Dry Creek itself and bocce ball courts.

Lastly, before rolling back into Healdsburg, I stopped at Mill Creek Vineyards and Winery, which couldn't have been any more charming if it tried. It dates back more than 40 years, and features a barn-like tasting room, mill pond, water wheel, and adjacent outdoor patio. Talk about unique!

Mornings spent zenning out and hiking, afternoons spent bicycling. Now that's working for my wine. I don't know if it could've been a more active Sonoma County wine vacation if I tried. And all in one of the most off-the-beaten-path wine destinations on the West Coast.

<http://whiskeytangoglobetrot.com/work-wine-sonomas-dry-creek-valley/>