

# FORK IN THE ROAD

## Napa, the city, comes into its own

A local shares  
5 great culinary  
tips — and more

By **BOB ECKER**

Special to Tribune Newspapers

NAPA, Calif. — Finally, after many years of fits and starts, the city of Napa can claim to be worthy of its Napa Valley moniker. No longer simply the county seat and place where locals work, shop and live, Napa has become a destination for dining and drinking. Here are five food places that have gotten the notice of this local diner.

**Morimoto:** Set on Napa's waterfront, Morimoto is Napa's latest place to see and be seen. Chef Masaharu Morimoto of "Iron Chef" fame delivers his East meets West meets Morimoto style. Foodies have been drawn to such wild creations as deconstructed gyozo, foie gras takoyaki or the "chef's choice" multicourse tasting menu. Don't miss the rock shrimp tempura appetizer with wasabi aioli. This upscale restaurant has an urban feel and a cool bar where you can sample one of Morimoto's specialty beers. [mori.motonapa.com](http://mori.motonapa.com)

**Fish Story:** This seafood-oriented restaurant, which overlooks the restored Napa riverfront, comes from the Lark Creek Restaurant Group. Expect fabulous clam chowder, lobster, local crab and sumptuous ahi tuna tartare. Don't overlook the seafood and meat combos like the day boat scallops with kurobuta pork belly. Fish Story also now brews its own beer. [fishstory.napa.com](http://fishstory.napa.com)

**Grace's Table:** A local find, Grace's Table is packed nightly with folks seeking global comfort cuisine at moderate prices. Great service, friendly atmosphere and quirky combos make Grace's an underground hit. Plus their Sunday brunches are legendary. [gracetable.net](http://gracetable.net)

**Oxbow Public Market:** Filled with delicious, well-known artisan and specialty purveyors, Oxbow Public Market is Napa's



PHOTO BY BOB ECKER

The eccentric, one-of-a-kind Quixote Winery, in the Stags Leap District of Napa Valley, was designed by Viennese architect, artist and philosopher Friedensreich Hundertwasser. Behind the whimsical facade, the winery is serious about its wine.



"Duck, duck, goose," a dish at Napa's upscale Morimoto, exemplifies the creative East-meets-West cuisine of "Iron Chef" star Masaharu Morimoto.

true gourmet outlet. Vendors include the Hog Island Oyster Co., C Casa, Tillerman Tea, Kara's Cupcakes, the amazing Three Twins Ice Cream and tasty Ca' Momi enoteca. Bands appear on Friday nights, and a local farmers market operates Tuesdays and Saturdays. Some merchants join in on Tuesday's Locals Night, which offers all kinds of specials. There's always something new to see and taste. Local hint: The Fatted Calf ([fattedcalf.com](http://fattedcalf.com)) on the north side of Oxbow offers the most amazing meats and charcuterie. Pick up some Spanish style chorizo, buy a fresh baguette at

the Modern Bakery next door and you're all set for a picnic. [oxbowpublicmarket.com](http://oxbowpublicmarket.com)

**Quixote Winery:** You must visit at least one winery, so don't miss the amazing Quixote Winery in the nearby Stags Leap District. Designed by Viennese architect/philosopher Friedensreich Hundertwasser, Quixote is an eccentric winery that turns the tables on what you might think about architecture — and wine. Quixote is serious about petite sirah and features an impressive example of this varietal. [quixotewinery.com](http://quixotewinery.com)

### If you go

**Where to stay:** Unlike in years past, there are many fine hotels right in town. One hidden gem, which abuts the Napa River, is the bucolic Milliken Creek Inn & Spa ([millikencreekinn.com](http://millikencreekinn.com)). Twelve refined, lovely rooms look out to the meandering river, tailored gardens and lawns. Like a sculpted scene from Provence, visitors are transported to another time and place yet within walking distance (or a quick drive) from town. Superb breakfasts and a tranquil spa make Milliken Creek a destination.

Other fine Napa hotels include the professional Westin Verasa ([westin.com/VerasaNapa](http://westin.com/VerasaNapa)), the cool Avia Hotel ([aviahotels.com/hotels/napa](http://aviahotels.com/hotels/napa)), and the Meritage Resort & Spa ([themeritageresort.com](http://themeritageresort.com)), which by next summer will be the second-largest property in Napa Valley (plus it offers a wonderful underground spa cave).

**What to do:** The Uptown Theater ([uptowntheatrenapa.com](http://uptowntheatrenapa.com)) is a former movie house turned top-notch live entertainment venue and offers big-name musical and comedy acts. Local hint: Grace's Table is a half-block away and very popular pre-show.

The Napa Valley Opera House ([nvoh.org](http://nvoh.org)), originally constructed in 1880, has been fully restored and presents all sorts of musical and theatrical shows. Stop at the nearby Bounty Hunter ([bountyhunterwinebar.com](http://bountyhunterwinebar.com)) for excellent pre- or post-show wine selections and decent charcuterie plates.

Dressed in spiffy period costume, resident George Webber leads a lively walking tour of downtown ([napawalkingtour.com](http://napawalkingtour.com)). Webber brings Napa's past (and there is real history here) to life in an engaging and informative fashion.

An inexpensive way to visit and sample wines downtown is by purchasing the Downtown Wine Tasting Card ([napadowntown.com](http://napadowntown.com)). For \$25, visitors can check out various spots and sample wines for 10 cents a pour.