

DAY TRIP

RUSSIAN RIVER VALLEY



The Pinot Noir and Chardonnay Center of Sonoma

WITH **MARYANN WOROBIEC** {YOUR GUIDE}

MacRostie

Visiting Healdsburg means you're close to one of the most exciting regions for Chardonnay and Pinot Noir: Russian River Valley. The entire appellation encompasses about 10,000 vineyard acres, 50 wineries and hundreds of growers—too much to explore in one day. But using Healdsburg as a base, set your sites on Westside Road, one of the most iconic stretches in the region.

Many vintners see Russian River Valley as a Goldilocks spot,

where the cooling Pacific Ocean interacts with inland Sonoma County; just a few miles in each direction might be too warm to grow Pinot Noir or Chardonnay. Westside Road has a wonderful concentration of outstanding wineries and famous vineyards. Plus, it's a gorgeous drive—winding roads and beautiful scraggly oak trees, many covered in moss and dripping with lichen.

Start your day with a cup of coffee from Black Oak Coffee Roasters, a charming café just off the Healdsburg square. Then,

plan ahead for lunch on the road by stopping around the corner at Troubadour Bread and Bistro for their grab-and-go sandwiches. They are all delicious—my favorite is the baguette with jamón, brie, butter and a drizzle of honey. I also love the sumac roasted carrot with pesto, burrata and arugula. Chocolate chip cookies, or one of their stellar loaves of bread are a must for later, if not sooner.

Heading out of town is simple. Just south of the square you'll find Mill Street, which turns into Westside Road after you pass under Highway 101. Almost immediately, you'll start to see the wild scenery, vineyards and old barns that define the landscape. The road winds and twists, but for the most part, you'll be heading south. Keep in mind that at any point the Pacific Ocean is just 20 to 30 miles due west.

Take note of the sign for the Madrona as the road takes you on a sharp turn to the left. It's a beautiful Victorian inn that's had a recent makeover, making it a lovely place to stay, but it's also a terrific place for lunch, dinner or drinks. The caviar and onion dip served with warm potato chips, the kimchi deviled eggs and one of their signature cocktails would be a perfect refresher after a day of wine tasting.

Just five more minutes down the road and you're at your first stop, Flowers. This winery is known for its estate Pinot Noirs and Chardonnays from the rugged Sonoma Coast—a dizzying drive more than an hour up the coast. But thankfully they brought the Sonoma Coast closer to wine lovers in the form of this tasting room. As the staff rightfully points out, the Russian River Valley is a gateway to the wilder and harsher setting where their grapes grow.

The Estate Vineyard Immersion experience (\$125 a person) pairs four wines (including a library wine) with four curated food pairings; I've never enjoyed winemaker Chantal Forthun's wines more than during one of these presentations.

Less than a mile down the road is MacRostie Winery. Steve and Thale MacRostie founded their winery in 1987, and I've been a fan of their single-vineyard and regional blends of Chardonnay and



The Madrona Martini

Pinot Noir for as long as I can remember. Now in the hands of head winemaker Heidi Bridenhagen, the wines remain stunning, and the tasting room is a great spot to enjoy them. Modern, airy and minimalist, the focus here is the view of the hilly vineyard planted around the tasting room.

Just a mile and a half farther along Westside Road is Rochioli

Winery, founded by one of the pioneering families (and most recognizable names) in the region. Now fourth-generation farmers, they first planted Pinot Noir back in the 1960s, selling grapes to other pioneers in the region—including Davis Bynum and Williams Selyem. The family started making its own wines in the 1980s.

The Rochioli tasting room is among the more modest in the region but no less exciting to visit, surrounded by immaculate gardens and with views of acres of their estate Pinot Noir and Chardonnay. Plus, a visit there means you're tasting Rochioli wines—a huge win in my book.

Practically across the street is Arista, another family-owned property. I love this peaceful,



The hamlet of Forestville

low-key spot that the McWilliams family built. They intentionally left plenty of the region's natural beauty when planning their estate—you can really get a sense of their connection to the land. There are goats, cows and sheep around and this is a good spot to stroll with a glass of wine in

hand—and perhaps nibble on that sandwich from Troubadour. This brand's focus is on Russian River Valley Chardonnays and Pinot Noir—I'm not

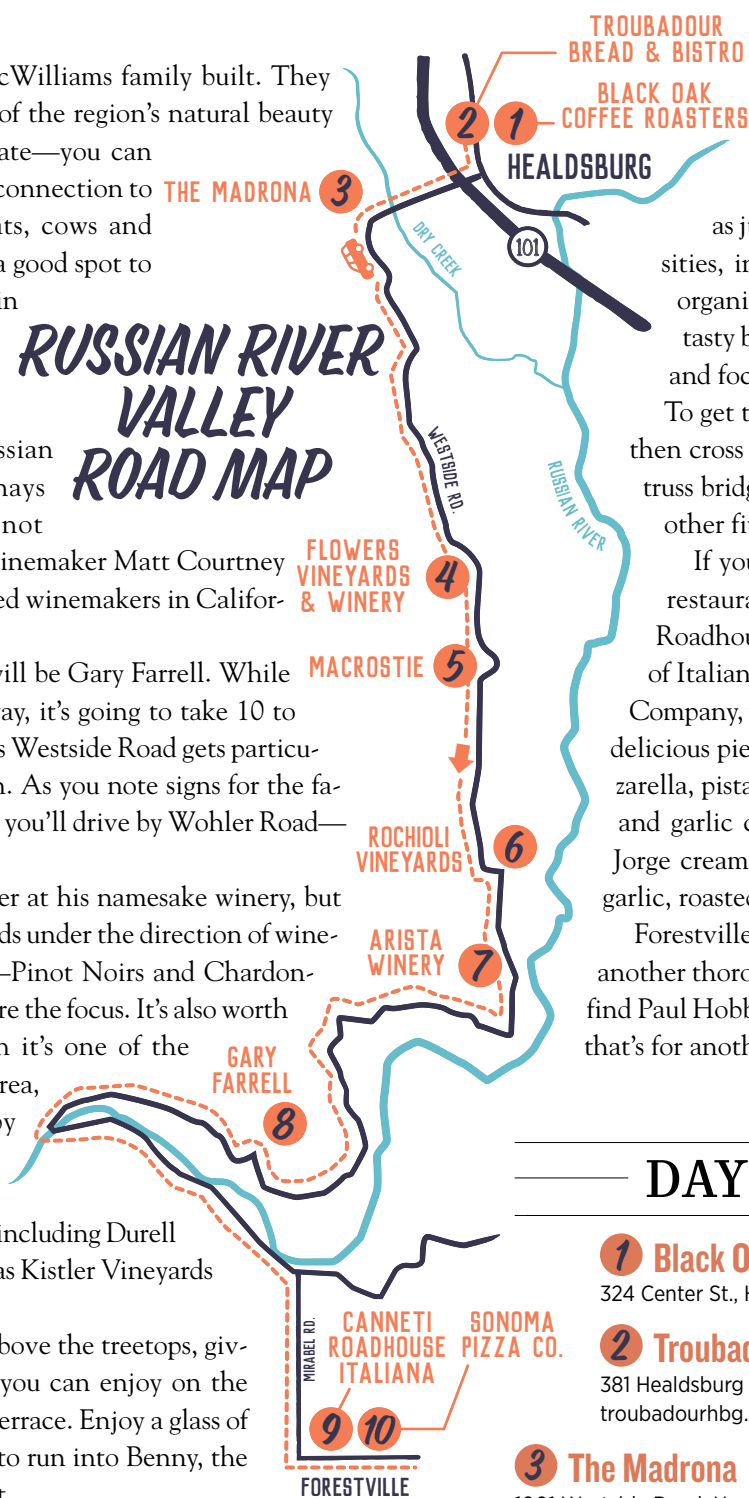
alone in believing that winemaker Matt Courtney is among the most talented winemakers in California today.

Your last winery stop will be Gary Farrell. While it's just a 4-mile drive away, it's going to take 10 to 15 minutes to get there, as Westside Road gets particularly curvy on this stretch. As you note signs for the famous MacMurray Ranch, you'll drive by Wohler Road—note that for later.

Gary Farrell is no longer at his namesake winery, but the wines are in good hands under the direction of winemaker Theresa Heredia—Pinot Noirs and Chardonnays from Russian River are the focus. It's also worth noting that even though it's one of the larger operations in the area, the winery is owned by vintner and entrepreneur Bill Price, who owns iconic Sonoma vineyards including Durell and Gap's Crown as well as Kistler Vineyards and Three Sticks.

The tasting room sits above the treetops, giving it tremendous views you can enjoy on the newly opened Overlook terrace. Enjoy a glass of wine out there and hope to run into Benny, the extremely cool winery cat.

RUSSIAN RIVER VALLEY ROAD MAP



After that, you could head back to Healdsburg, but if you feel like pushing on with your exploration of the area, take a detour to Forestville. It's not so much a town as just a couple of blocks, but it has all the necessities, including an organic coffee spot (Sunshine), organic ice cream (Angela's) and an adorable and tasty bakery (Nightingale Bread) with terrific bread and focaccia.

To get there, backtrack slightly to Wohler Road and then cross over the Wohler Bridge, a one-lane, historic truss bridge that crosses the Russian River. It's just another five minutes from there to Forestville.

If you need a longer pit stop, Forestville has two restaurants that are easy to recommend: Canneti Roadhouse Italiana, which serves up comfort versions of Italian food in a friendly setting, and Sonoma Pizza Company, which is a cheerful, wood-fired pizza spot with delicious pies. Check out the Tati, with mortadella, mozzarella, pistachios, frisee, chives, parsley, oregano, lemon and garlic confit, or the Mushroom Mycopia, with St. Jorge cream, mixed local mushrooms, mozzarella, green garlic, roasted onions and chimichurri.

Forestville will also get you to Highway 116, which is another thoroughfare of Russian River Valley, where you'll find Paul Hobbs, Merry Edwards and Dutton-Goldfield. But that's for another day.

DAY TRIP DETAILS

1 Black Oak Coffee Roasters

324 Center St., Healdsburg; (866) 390-1427; blackoakcoffee.com

2 Troubadour Bread & Bistro

381 Healdsburg Ave., Healdsburg; (707) 756-3972; troubadourhbg.com/cafe

3 The Madrona

1001 Westside Road, Healdsburg; (707) 395-6700; themadronahotel.com

4 Flowers Vineyards & Winery

4035 Westside Rd., Healdsburg; (707) 723-4800; flowerswinery.com

5 MacRostie

4605 Westside Road, Healdsburg; (707) 473-9303; macrostiewinery.com

6 Rochioli Vineyards

6192 Westside Road, Healdsburg; (707) 433-2305; rochioliwinery.com

7 Arista Winery

7015 Westside Road, Healdsburg; (707) 473-0606; aristawinery.com

8 Gary Farrell

10701 Westside Road, Healdsburg; (707) 473-2909; garyfarrellwinery.com

9 Canneti Roadhouse Italiana

6675 Front St., Forestville; (707) 887-2232; cannetiroadhouse.com

10 Sonoma Pizza Co.

6615 Front St., Forestville; (707) 820-1031; pizza@sonomapizzaco.com



Gary Farrell