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## America's best wine country restaurants

**TRAVEL  
+LEISURE**By **Bruce Schoenfeld**

November 5, 2010 12:08 p.m. EDT

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Farmstead, in St. Helena, California, showcases produce, meat, wines and olive oil from Long Meadow Ranch.

### STORY HIGHLIGHTS

At Root 246 in Solvang, California, guests can enjoy seaside-fresh squid

White-tail venison with dried cherries is served at Blu in Glen Arbor, Michigan

Moro's Table in Auburn, New York, offers an ever-changing selection of wines by the glass

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**(Travel + Leisure)** -- Eating well has always been easy in wine regions. It makes sense: people who pay close attention to what they drink don't typically settle for fast-food cheeseburgers. But *dining* well is different from eating well, and in many wine areas it has become possible only recently.

As wine tourism has flourished, many American destinations have followed Napa Valley's lead, creating an ambitious culinary scene to attract visitors. The past few years have seen a particularly compelling crop of restaurants spring up, featuring chefs with recognizable names, kitchens filled with locally sourced ingredients and hearty, unfussy cooking -- rabbit is particularly in vogue -- that happens to go perfectly with wine.

### Farm to Fork, Dundee, Oregon

The combination restaurant/deli/market at the year-old [Inn at Red Hills](#) has so quickly become a part of daily life in the Willamette Valley, it's a wonder the area ever managed without it. You'll spot winemakers and vineyard owners at breakfast and lunch, but chef Shiloh Ficek shines at night, when his bright, vivid cooking takes on a European flair.

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**What to eat:** Braised leg of locally farmed rabbit -- here a robust, earthy meat, not just a chicken cognate. The touch of wildness makes it a winning match for Oregon Pinot Noir.

**What to drink:** The selection changes frequently, but look for underrated 2007 Pinots from Cristom and Domaine Drouhin. Dinner for two \$80.

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### **Root 246, Solvang, California**

This kitschy, mock-Danish community of year-round Christmas lights and ebelskiver has never seen anything like Bradley Ogden's latest venture, a destination restaurant as polished as its gleaming walnut floors.

Still, the emphasis is local: Ogden, cofounder of Marin County's Lark Creek Inn, shops at Solvang's Wednesday farmers' market, and the wine list is devoted to the Central Coast. The cooking is at once mature and witty, from a blue-cheese soufflé with fresh figs to a handcrafted foot-long hot dog.

**What to eat:** The exemplary fritto misto contains seaside-fresh squid and shrimp jacketed in an evanescent batter.

**What to drink:** Tyler Winery bottles two Pinot Noirs from the Dierberg vineyard; the strawberry-scented Block 3 (\$85) can fill a room with its perfume. Dinner for two \$120.

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### **Farmstead, St. Helena, California**

Chef Sheamus Feeley grew up on an Arkansas farm with cows, chickens, and pigs, then received his tutelage in seasonal produce while living in Peru. Such a market-driven orientation is perfect for Farmstead, the restaurant outpost of Long Meadow Ranch, which produces beef, vegetables, fruit, olive oil, and wines in Napa's Mayacamas Mountains.

**What to eat:** Feeley's updated versions of Ozarks favorites -- chicken and dumplings; whole-hog barbecue -- have gained attention, but he really excels with lighter, more composed dishes such as sole with Romano beans, sweet corn and Meyer lemon butter.

**What to drink:** An extensive selection of California Chardonnays is priced to sell, and the more balanced among them -- such as a 2006 Stony Hill (\$48) -- match Feeley's treble-toned flavors. Dinner for two \$90.

### **Scopa, Healdsburg, California**

Named after one of Italy's most popular -- and loudest -- card games, this understated Sonoma County trattoria telegraphs authenticity and delivers with cooking that gets the details right. One bite of tomato-braised tripe or marinated sardines is enough to conjure up every trip to Italy you've ever (or never) taken.

**What to eat:** Sauces, confits and ragùs stand out, including the wild-boar Bolognese served with house-made tagliatelle.

**What to drink:** The wine list is a delightful amalgamation of the unsung, obscure and hard-to-find, including Germano Ettore's fragrant, versatile 2007 Langhe Nebbiolo (\$42), declassified Barolo from the latest in a string of superb vintages. Dinner for two \$60.

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### **Blu, Glen Arbor, Michigan**

The Leelanau Peninsula's bracing Pinot Blanc and Pinot Gris -- and its spectacular scenery -- have begun drawing wine tourists to the eastern edge of Lake Michigan.

At his 10-table lakefront dining room tucked beside a condominium complex, Randy Chamberlain emphasizes regional ingredients -- down to the fir-needle soap in the restroom -- and cooks perfectly composed dishes for diners ogling sunsets over the water.

**What to eat:** White-tail venison with dried cherries and port-wine jus is a house standard.

**What to drink:** Brys Estate's 2007 Signature Red, a lush three-grape blend from the Old Mission Peninsula across the bay (\$58). Dinner for two \$120.

### **Moro's Table, Auburn, New York**

Edward Moro did stints in Napa and Oregon wine country before becoming head chef at the Mirbeau Inn & Spa, in the Finger Lakes resort town of Skaneateles. This summer, he opened the informal Moro's Table in nearby Auburn, serving an eclectic mix of small plates, sushi, and robust main dishes that showcase his wide-ranging talent.

**What to eat:** Daily specials such as slow-cooked veal with risotto (Wednesday) and lobster bouillabaisse (Friday) reflect Moro's affection for Continental comfort food.

**What to drink:** An ever-changing selection of wines by the glass, priced from \$5.50 to \$14, always includes at least half a dozen from the Finger Lakes, including top producers such as Glenora. Dinner for two \$70.

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