



Wine, Food and Music at Yountville Live

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Visiting the Napa Valley can be a little overwhelming. With literally hundreds of wineries from which to choose, a staggering array of exceptional dining experiences, charming farmsteads tucked so deep into the landscape they're hardly visible from the road, olive groves, chocolatier ateliers, boutique shops and galleries... well, I can't help but feel I've missed something each time I visit the region.

The thoughtfully curated event, [Yountville Live](#), held recently in the small, picturesque town of Yountville and other locales throughout Napa Valley, satiated my desire to discover something new and inspiring about this singular place.

Claire Parr and Bobbie Hach-Jacobs, the extraordinarily talented duo behind one of the nation's most exclusive, semi-private curated events, "Live in the Vineyard," are now lending their talents to this multi-day event. Parr and Jacobs have a rare gift for creating a nearly rapturous holy trinity for the senses: delivering several times over that instance when a great glass of wine, a stirring piece of music and a delicious meal collide, and call one immediately into a present bursting with pleasure and gratitude—that's a rare talent.

As dusk fell over Napa Valley on opening night, a line-up of impressive chefs—[Graham Elliot](#) (Top Chef), Mathew Peters and Harrison Turone (of [Per Se](#) and the 2017 gold winners of the Bocuse d'Or), Kevin Miller ([Vintage Estates](#)), Bob Hurley ([Hurley's](#)) and

Chris Kollar ([Kollar Chocolates](#))—presented a stunning, multi-course dinner on the grounds of the town’s now iconic [V Marketplace](#) (formerly known as Vintage 1870). An enthusiastic, diverse crowd sat inside a whimsically decorated tent, as each course was served at a relaxed-yet-efficient clip. Typically, with larger, tented dinners, the presentation of the plate itself can appear somewhat impersonal, and the food can lack focus and precision because of crowd size. Not the case here; an extremely well-trained service staff was attentive, yet never intrusive. My table mates all raved about how pretty each plate looked. And each course was a knock out—might as well have been sitting in a quiet restaurant owned by one of the above chefs.

Minutes after the dessert plates were all cleared, flamenco metal-heads [Rodrigo y Gabriela](#) took to the stage. Proving the wines and food served earlier in the evening did indeed inspire a relaxed and joyous mood among the audience, guests suddenly rushed the stage and began to sway and dance to the electrifying, pulsating rhythms of this Dublin, Ireland-based, Mexican duo. Instant house party, wine-country style. Among the many choices of curated experiences available to guests over the course of the long weekend, several highlights will remain with me for some time.



The next morning, while some folks I'd met the night before went off to a chocolate-making class with Chris Kollar, I headed over to [Azur](#), the highly-exclusive estate vineyard that respected winemaker **Julien Fayard** shares with wife, **Élan**. After learning how to make salumi from chef Massimiliano Boldrini of the popular [Riva Cucina](#) in Berkeley, a small group of us retired to the Fayard's open-air salon, enjoying a few of chef Boldrini's signature dishes paired with a rare line-up of brilliant Azur wines. Nearby a few raptors circled above their vineyard while a neighbor's horse whinnied occasionally.

Following this satisfying visit, I hopped on over to Yountville for a private stroll through Jacobsen Orchards, where [Peter Jacobsen](#), known as "The Chef's Farmer"—he provides produce to [The French Laundry](#), as well as [SPQR](#) in San Francisco—led a small group of us through his garden and orchards. As he traipsed along, feeding us bergamot, fava leaves, nasturtium flowers, chickweed, daikon and other freshly picked wonders, Jacobsen shared with us an assortment of highly corny and unusual jokes that made our visit all the more eccentric and memorable.

Around mid-morning, I headed over to [Trefethen Family Vineyards](#) for a private cooking class with Claudia Sansone. Sansone, who bears a striking resemblance to Helen Mirren, served a delicious, homey meal she prepared before our small group, while telling us about the [United Village Transformation](#)—an organization she co-founded in Malawi, Africa. UVT provides essential nutritional education and culinary techniques to villagers, allowing them to better utilize ingredients like sweet potatoes and goat's milk—ingredients already available there, but not historically viewed as staples. She teaches the women and men of Malawi how to prepare viable, nutritious meals for themselves and their families—fighting back against the effects of stunted growth in children due to malnutrition is vital to Sansone.



I took a little afternoon breather at [Stewart Cellars](#) in Yountville while listening to country music up-and-comer, Chris Bullard. He performed a stripped-down set off his old-school country debut release, "It's Me." Even though Bullard's quickly gaining traction on the country charts, he made time to stick around after his set to engage in small talk with his enthusiastic audience.

Following this brief reprieve, I boarded a well-appointed shuttle van that carried a group of us up to Small Table Farms, the homestead and farm of chef Emily Buller, a fourth-generation Napa Valley native. Buller greeted us, literally, at her front doorstep. Before entering her farmhouse, which has been in her family since 1909, she introduced us to her small herd of goats and brood of chickens, and pointed to her apiary of beehives above the farmstead's orchard. Once inside her warm, cozy farmhouse, appointed with family heirlooms—including her grandmother's cooking utensils, pots and pans—we tasted some of Buller's homemade goat cheese. "This was made with Marshmallow's milk," Buller told us, Marshmallow being a rather charming goat we'd met outside just moments earlier. After viewing one of Buller's beehives up close, we also tasted her Small Table Farm honey.

Then Buller lead our small group into her basement, which she transformed into a richly atmospheric speakeasy, complete with an old-timey, well-stocked private bar, curious objets d'art lying about and vases of freshly cut flowers. Paintings by Buller's sister, an accomplished artist, lined the walls. Feeling as though I'd somehow passed through some kind of time-travel portal, we followed Buller to the antique bar while she talked about her family history. Guests then enjoyed a little repast of wine and cheese while listening to Ella Fitzgerald's impossibly warm voice being piped into the tiny, dreamlike space.

That evening, I headed down to Napa's [Kitchen Collective](#), an elite event space, where chefs Dan Smith and Steve McDonagh—perhaps best known for their *Food Network* program, "[Party Line with the Hearty Boys](#)"—and a personal favorite of mine, Chicago-based chef [Gale Gand](#), greeted guests for what turned out to be a spectacularly intimate and well-executed dinner party. The evening began in the Collective's courtyard, where guests huddled around a fire pit, enjoying cocktails prepared by the Hearty Boys.



While chef Gand's sublime pavlova was served to guests as the evening wound down, Southern California-based singer-songwriter, Keaton Simons, and percussionist Mona Tavakoli performed a down-to-earth, deeply moving set of songs. At turns playful and vulnerable, both artists brought the best out in the audience. By the end of the set, hardly any of us seemed capable of keeping our legs and shoulders still. A few of us hummed along to songs we'd maybe not even heard yet, but that were so immediately likeable they became woven into the fabric of the evening in that rare way that makes something new seem suddenly comforting and familiar.



Tavakoli, who has toured with Jason Mraz, is an irresistible presence; the kind of percussionist that might prick Buddy Rich's ears, while transfixing casual music lovers with a disarming, yet staggering talent. Simons, who helped to support Chris Cornell on his most recent tour, is a seasoned yet humble professional musician and singer-songwriter with enough confidence to hypnotize and captivate an audience with his suggestive swagger, while keeping them feeling safe under the sway of a natural, genteel aura.

During this active, yet relaxing weekend, I'd occasionally check in to the NOYO Pavilion in Yountville—which served as a kind of nexus for the weekend's events—or at other satellite locations pre-designated for ticket holders only, to listen to performances by musicians like JOHNNYSWIM, Joseph, Mayer Hawthorne, Zach Heckendorf, the Silverado Pickups, Emerson Hart and Brendan James while nearby, great and in some instances quite rare wines were being poured for guests.

Event organizers Parr and Jacobs seem to have a gift for this kind of holistic, nearly spiritual curated event. If you find Coachella and other music festivals too large and somewhat tedious, then Yountville Live may be right up your alley. Parr and Jacobs and their creative team deliver a seamless experience for the wine, food and music lover who seeks—above all else to relax, discover and ruminate over the course of a few, effortless days.

Tickets for Yountville Live 2018 are [now available for pre-sale](#).

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