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Article by Cary Ordway

It's fun to make discoveries when your travel — to make a real “find” when you experience accommodations and/or services that were even better than described in the brochure. Such is the case with these two accommodations in California Wine Country.

Paso Robles

Perched on a hill near Highway 101, La Bellasera Hotel and Suites might look from the freeway like it's just a nice, modern hotel at an easy exit point — a place on the way to someplace else. But get a little closer and you realize somebody has spent a lot of money creating a true luxury hotel. Using a blend of Mediterranean and Italian architecture, this hotel truly stands out.

It's one of those hotels that almost overwhelms the senses as you enter the lobby with its rich marble floors and Roman columns supporting a pseudo balcony with ornate iron railings against a backdrop of ultra high ceilings. The feeling is classic, yet contemporary with special attention given to spot lighting and the hotel's stylish but comfortable couches. Along one side of the room, wrought iron doors open to the elaborate wine Wine Cellar while nearby is the entrance to the hotel's locally acclaimed Enoteca Restaurant & Bar which, in just a short time, has become known as the place for a gourmet dining experience in the immediate area.

Our two-room suite expanded on the theme of local luxury by including in one room a three-person Jacuzzi tub that had been built into a foundation of bricks and set in a corner where colorful wall paintings added the illusion that our tub was looking out on a Mediterranean coastal village. Again, Roman pillars were used to complete the illusion. Across the room was a cabinet-style wet bar and glass-doored refrigerator and, on the wall, a full-sized high-definition plasma television. There was also a smaller flat-screen television in the bedroom, as well as two king beds, a desk and a desk-top computer.

We could go on and on about things like the signature bedding, high thread count linens, the luxury bath products, the availability of spa services either in-room or in their special treatment room — but we think you get the idea. The quiet town of Paso Robles now has a luxury option for even the most pampered of guests.

For more information on La Bellasera Hotel and Suites, please phone 866-STAY-NOW.

Napa Valley

A visit to Napa is not just a chance to see where wine is made, or to explore the upscale shops and stores that now have found their way into the tiniest of Napa Valley communities. Rather, a trip to the valley is an almost spiritual journey that presents you at once with the beauty of 63,000 acres of vineyards and the industry that has brought a European elegance to the Valley lifestyle.

With 75,000 residents, the town of Napa has become a small city in its own right and a name synonymous with California wineries. If you want to be based in Napa during your stay, there are many options for an unforgettable experience. The most recent we sampled — and a place we would consider a “find” because of its incredible restaurant — is the Westin Verasa Napa. The resort hugs the banks of the Napa River, and is within three blocks of the plentiful shopping, arts activities, music, wine bars and other attractions located in downtown Napa. The location is also prime

because of the river walk that runs along the Napa River shores and, in this case, right by our first floor suite.

We've stayed at several Westins and it's gotten to the point where we just know our stay at a Westin is going to be a high-quality experience. Our suite was like a small condo unit with a complete kitchen – with all the latest colorful stylings, by the way – as well as an open room with contemporary dining and living room furniture, and a bedroom with a king-size bed. Plasma wall-mounted TV's were in both the “great room” and the bedroom. The bathroom with its generous use of marble was small but elegant. While the river beckoned just outside our suite – and we loved sitting in our deck area, gazing at the calm waters and people-watching as runners and walkers used the trail – the highlight of our stay had to be the dinner we had at La Toque, the renowned French restaurant right on property. It's been named one of the best restaurants in America and has won numerous culinary awards, and we were certainly curious to see what all the fuss was about.

It didn't take long to figure it out. We were seated at a table that felt private, yet had a good view of the restaurant's “show kitchen” where cooks and waiters were scurrying about doing all the things you see in those cooking shows that are so popular these days. The maitre d' explained how this restaurant is a little different – you can choose two, three or four courses and they'll give you portions to match. So if you choose two, you get big portions; choose four and each one is smaller.

The menu is subdivided into four sections and many diners choose one from each – but it's not mandatory. You can choose all meat dishes if that's what you want. The choices were amazing and included such items as Seared Artisan Foie Gras with Bacon-Wrapped Medjool Dates and Toasted Brioche (the best foie gras we've ever had) or West Texas “Nilgai” Antelope with Leek and Black Trumpet Potato Terrine and Roasted Root Vegetable Red Wine Reduction, or Florida Frog Legs with Sweet Garlic Puree, Sauce Verte and Tomato Confit.

Because this is California Wine Country, there is something else to think about – what wine you will drink with these delectable entrées. This is where the experience totally transcended any we've had before – if you want something extra special, ask for wine pairings for each of your courses. With wine pairings they don't just bring you a different wine for each course – you also get an education. La Toque's wine steward knows everything about wines from all areas, not just Napa. With each pouring you get a detailed explanation of where the wine came from and why it is being paired with the entrée you have chosen.

For more information on the Westin Verasa Napa, phone (707) 257-1800.

Cary Ordway is a syndicated travel writer and president of Getaway Media Corp, which publishes websites focused on regional getaway travel. Among the sites currently offered by GMC are <http://www.californiaweekend.com>, covering California spa vacations and other Golden State destinations, and <http://www.northwesttraveladvisor.com>, covering Washington vacation ideas as well as other Pacific Northwest travel destinations.

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