

Reservations Filling Up As Tasting Rooms Reopen Under Strict COVID-19 Protocols

By [Andrea Nakano](#) June 12, 2020



SONOMA (KPIX) – Sonoma and Napa Counties are raising their glasses again as wineries and breweries have the green light to open their tasting rooms. But it won't be business as usual as wineries try to navigate through the COVID-19 protocols.

It's finally time to uncork and pour as wineries and breweries have opened their tasting rooms. The requirement to serve food is gone but changes are in place to protect customers and staff.

Visitors will notice the difference as soon as they drive up to the winery. Their car is their waiting room and they'll get a text to let you know when a table is available.

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Inside the winery there are no menus. Customers get a business card with a QR code and all they have to do is scan it with a camera and it will lead them directly to the website.

At Alpha Omega, all staff members are wearing masks and gloves. Each table is wiped down in between customers and there is even an attendant at the bathroom to sanitize after each use. None of these changes has deterred customers from visiting, though.

"In fact, for this upcoming weekend we stopped taking reservations because we are fully committed at the capacity that we can safely operate at," says Chief Operating Officer Jeff Knowles.

That's an encouraging sign for the region feeling devastated by the closures. Visit Napa Valley estimates more than half of the 16,000 hospitality jobs disappeared overnight. "It's just so encouraging to be able to open the door and welcome people to come back," says CEO Linsey Gallagher.

Now, hotel occupancy is creeping up and the jobs are coming back. Alpha Omega has brought back all of their staff and it's hiring more.

Knowles adds, "Despite this our business is growing. Quite honestly the protocols to which we are operating to now, to do it right to do it safely, we need more hands."

Alpha Omega made many changes during the quarantine by offering virtual tastings and creating an Instagram live show. The company says it's work in the virtual space will continue even though their tasting rooms have opened but now it can go back to its roots to connect with its customers.

"Wine has always been about the enjoyment with good food, friends and a beautiful compelling space. It's never been about solely what's in the bottle," Knowles says.

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