

Insider: Kelly E. Carter's guide to Napa Valley

By Janelle Bitker | on October 27, 2016



Photo: Peter DaSilva, Special To The Chronicle



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Kelly E. Carter is the director of communications at Alpha Omega Winery in St. Helena.

After three years of city life — and finding any excuse to visit Napa Valley on the weekends — **Kelly E. Carter** made her favorite escape her permanent residence.

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In 2015, she moved to Rutherford, a tiny town with a population of about 164. Every morning, she wakes up to vineyards right outside her yard and enjoys a two-minute commute to work as the director of communications for Alpha Omega Winery.

"It's like a dream come true," she says.

Carter spent decades as a celebrity, sports and luxury lifestyle journalist for publications such as [USA Today](#), [People](#) and [Haute Living magazine](#) before crossing into the wine world in March. In 2010, she and [Venus Williams](#) co-authored "Come to Win: Business Leaders, Artists, Doctors, and Other Visionaries on How Sports Can Help You Top Your Profession," a [New York Times](#) best-seller.

When she's not busy touting Alpha Omega's handcrafted wines or commitment to sustainability, she takes advantage of Rutherford's peace and quiet by working on her memoir, "Bellini for One," which covers her two years as a freelance travel writer in Italy. Carter fell in love with Italy and always planned to move back, but for the first time, she no longer feels that need — a sentiment that inspired her next book: "Napa Is the New Italy."

"I call Napa the new Italy because everything revolves around food and wine," she says. "Napa is my Italy."

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A few favorites

Oat Hill Mine Trail: This 8.3-mile hiking trail is Carter's go-to for "working off the wine while enjoying sweeping views of the Napa Valley," she says. The hike starts outside downtown Calistoga and can get challenging — and rocky. Be prepared to share the path with bicyclists. *2082 Oat Hill Mine Road, Calistoga; (707) 942-4575. <http://napaoutdoors.org/parks/oat-hill-mine-trail>*

Rutherford Grill: Locals love the restaurant's consistently satisfying comfort food and lack of corkage fee. Carter says the vibe is "so convivial that it's unusual if people at the bar don't share their bottle of wine with strangers sitting next to them." *1180 Rutherford Road, Rutherford; (707) 963-1792. <http://rutherfordgrill.com>*

JCB Tasting Salon: Carter recommends sipping a glass of JCB No. 13 bubbly rosé in this luxury tasting room and retail boutique by [Jean-Charles Boisset](#). Afterward, wander next door to Atelier by JCB for an overwhelming selection of cheeses. *6505 Washington St., Yountville; (707) 934-8237. www.jbcollection.com*

Cameo Cinema: This historic theater was built in 1913, and Carter says it's a perfect date-night destination. Owner [Cathy Buck](#) "does a fantastic job" pairing films, food and wine for special events in addition to bringing interesting first-run movies to town. *1340 Main St., St. Helena; (707) 963-9779. www.cameocinema.com*



Brasswood Bar + Kitchen: Carter was sad to lose Tra Vigne last year, but much of the staff migrated to this new, farm-to-table restaurant at Cairdean Estate. "Regulars know to order the stretched mozzarella, which isn't on the menu." *3111 St. Helena Hwy. N., St. Helena; (707) 968-5434. <https://brasswood.com/brasswood-bar-kitchen>*

Napa Valley Vine Trail: Instead of driving from winery to winery, why not bike? Carter especially appreciates that she can now bike on a path shielded from buzzed or distracted drivers. Vintner [Chuck McMinn](#) paved the way to provide cyclists safe passage from South Napa to Yountville — and eventually the route will extend 47 miles, from Vallejo to Calistoga. www.vinetrail.org

Hess Art Collection: It's free to explore this contemporary art museum, which showcases works collected by wine producer [Donald M. Hess](#). "Wine may be the heart of Napa Valley, but art is the soul," Carter says. "No place combines the two better than Hess." *4411 Redwood Road, Napa; (707) 255-1144. www.hesscollection.com*

Miminashi: whenever Carter finds herself in downtown Napa, she goes to the city's lone izakaya. The trendy menu — yakitori, okonomiyaki, brood sausage fried rice — is well matched with the restaurant's unique, warm design. Plus, "Miminashi's late-night kitchen is a big bonus." 821 Coombs St., Napa; (707) 254-9464. <http://miminashi.com>

Jameson Animal Rescue Ranch: Looking to adopt a new friend? Carter is a big supporter of this no-kill rescue and sanctuary for companion and farm animals in need, founded by Monica and David Stevens. "When I can have a dog again, I know exactly where I'll go to find one," she says. 1224 Adams St., St. Helena; (707) 815-8153. www.jamesonanimalrescueranch.org

Alpha Omega Winery: Visit Carter at this dog-friendly, 10-year-old boutique winery owned by Robin and Michelle Baggett. (Robin is a former general counsel for the Golden State Warriors.) Carter was first drawn to Alpha Omega for its setting: Along with an umbrella-lined terrace overlooking dramatic fountains, the rustic-chic tasting room sits between vineyards and the Mayacamas Mountains. 1155 Mee Lane, St. Helena; (707) 963-9999. www.aowinery.com

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