

# via



# Beautiful bird spots <sup>30</sup>

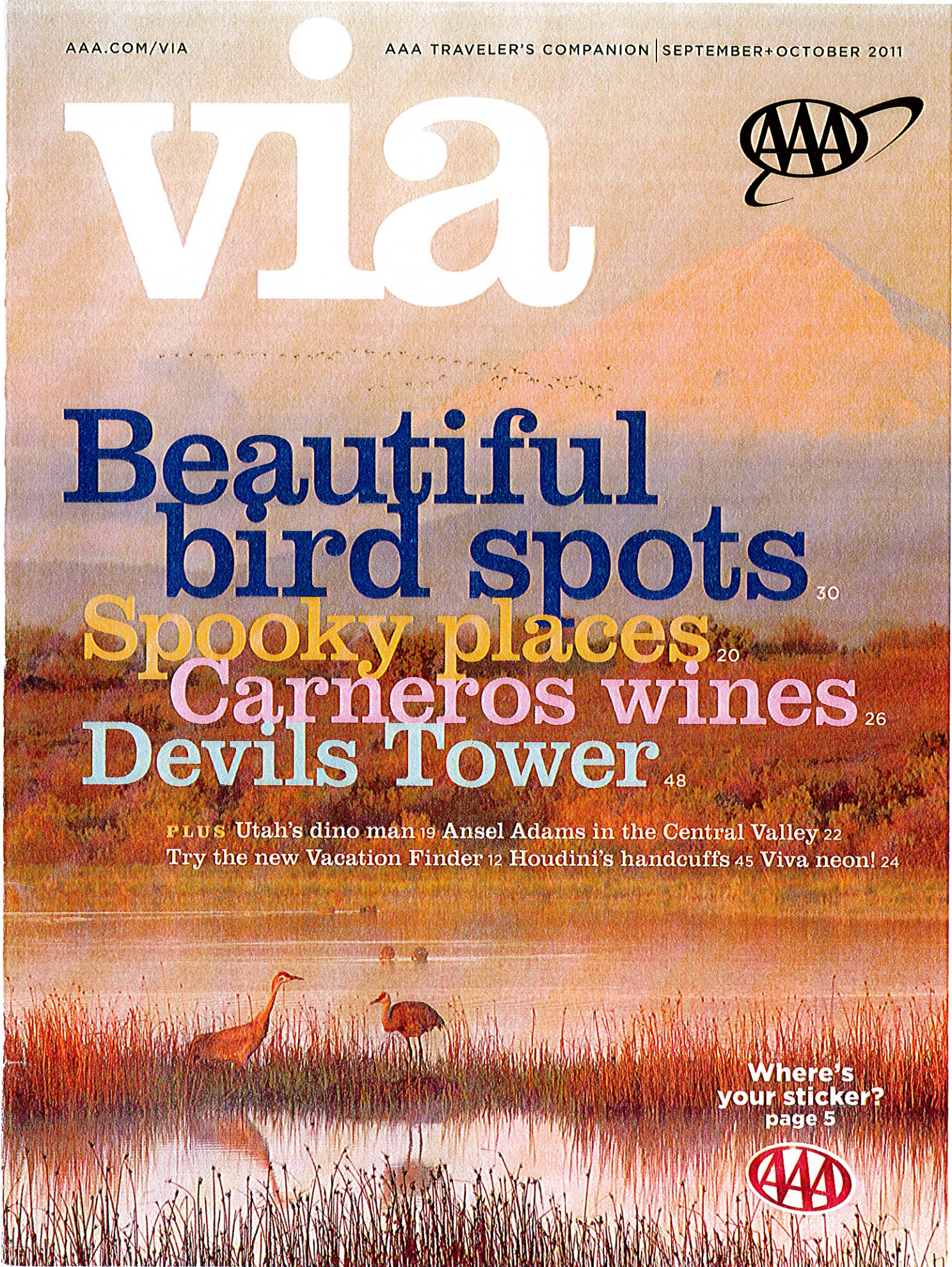
# Spooky places <sup>20</sup>

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# Toasting CARNEROS





OPPOSITE, tastes come with grand vineyard views at Cuvaison Estate Wines. LEFT, at Fremont Diner, patron Casey Larey faces a welcome challenge—the fried chicken sandwich. BELOW, Reynaldo Robledo Sr. welcomes wine lovers to his Robledo Family Winery.

## Sipping delicious reds, whites, and bubblics in California's North Bay, you'll wonder why you never stopped in before.

DECADES AGO, when Reynaldo Robledo Sr. scraped together enough cash to buy a patch of southern Napa County, the bayside hills were pasture, part of an early California rancho named Rincón de los Carneros (Haven of the Rams). “Nobody thought the land was worth that much,” recalls Robledo, who at age 16 moved here from the city of Zamora in Michoacán, Mexico. He planted his 13 acres with pinot noir vines. 🍷 Today the area has 8,000 acres of vineyards, and Robledo Family Winery, with 350 of those, regularly wows tasters with its sumptuous Los Carneros pinots and other bottlings. The official viticultural area, or appellation, centered on Highway 121 near the city of Sonoma, has since 1983 claimed slices of both Napa and Sonoma counties, yet many wine country travelers roar right past it. And that’s their loss. Along 20 miles of vine-draped roads are wineries—roughly 25 in all—where you can taste at least a dozen varieties while enjoying grand architecture, fine art, rustic barns, or all three. 🍷 “We used to call the Carneros the Appalachia of appellations because it’s so rural,” says Steven Rogstad, winemaker at Cuvaison, whose tasting room is a new glass-and-steel box set among vineyards that climb toward hills capped with oaks. “We’re right on San Pablo Bay, so we get morning fog and afternoon breezes.



BY PETER JARET PHOTOGRAPHY BY DAVID COLLIER

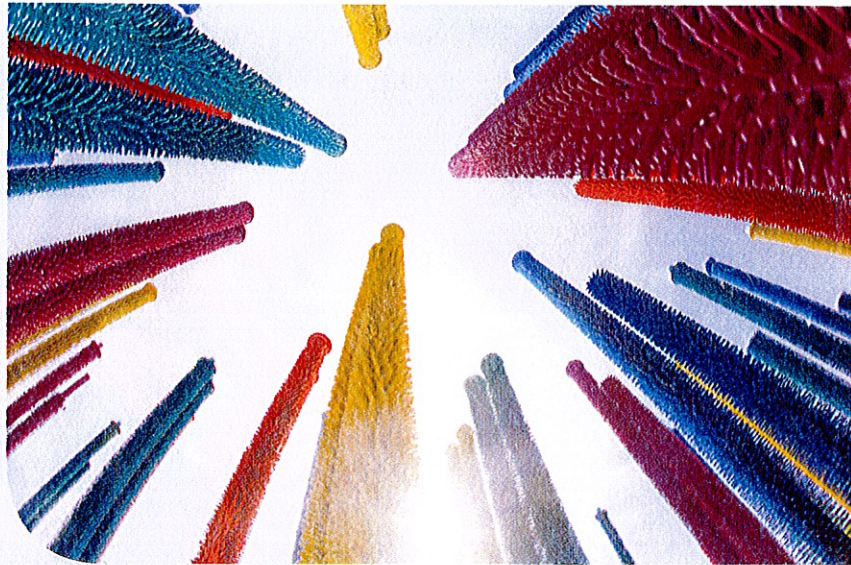
It's perfect for such early-ripening varieties as chardonnay, pinot noir, and syrah."

An ideal Carneros outing might actually begin nearby, in the region's heart, at di Rosa, where spacious art galleries and opulent gardens display works from a 2,000-piece collection of modern and contemporary paintings, sculptures, and photography. Assembled by the late Rene di Rosa—an irreverent grape grower with a soft spot for emerging artists—the preserve includes pieces by Robert Arneson, Joan Brown, Deborah Butterfield, Roy De Forest, Mark di Suvero, and William T. Wiley, all now recognized masters.

On a knoll across the road stands what looks to be a French château—the luxurious tasting room of Domaine Carneros. Here, nose-tickling sips of the winery's signature bubbly, Le Rêve Blanc de Blancs, are served in slim flutes alongside bites such as cured salmon and goat cheese. A five-minute detour up a nearby hillside brings you to Artesa, a futuristic concrete lair furnished with fountains, sculptures, and art glass. A generous menu of wines includes the Spanish varieties *albariño* and *tempranillo*; step out onto a deck for a view that takes in Mounts Diablo and Tamalpais and the San Francisco skyline.

You could choose to end your day at elegant Artesa, but you would miss the region's smaller wineries, some announced only by hand-lettered signs. Dave Homewood started making wine in his garage in 1983; today, his folksy Homewood Winery offers a pleasing chardonnay among a dozen other wines. At Adastra, a 20-acre family winery where tastes are poured in a redwood barn, you can sample cherry-scented pinot noirs, then whack croquet balls through wire hoops on a lawn above the vines.

It's just an 18-minute drive from Adastra in the area's eastern reaches to the west side's Larson Family Winery, where



Gordon Huether's *Cactus Garden* graces the sculpture meadow at di Rosa.

cheerful Labrador retrievers—mascots of a citrusy chardonnay dubbed Three Lab Chard—bound over to greet arriving guests. After tasting, you're welcome to stroll an old road into a wildlife area visited by ospreys and egrets. Back in the car, it's a quick hop to Cline Cellars, home of a museum housing replicas of California's 21 Spanish missions. Nearby you'll find the renowned Gloria Ferrer, maker of the aged sparkler Carneros Cuvée, and the by-appointment-only Robledo Family Winery.

Everardo Robledo, one of Reynaldo's sons, swirls a glass of a peppery red blend called Los Braceros and reflects on his own transition as the area grew into a wine destination. "My brothers and I had to work the vineyards," he says. "We did everything—planting, pruning, harvesting. We weren't always so happy about it then, but now we realize how lucky we were." ●

PETER JARET has written for *National Geographic* magazine.

## IF YOU'RE GOING . . .

Many wineries may be visited by appointment only; always call ahead. Request the *Northern California & Nevada TourBook* and the *San Francisco Bay Region* map at [AAA.com](http://AAA.com) or any AAA branch. To find a place to stay, visit [AAA.com/hotels](http://AAA.com/hotels). For information, contact the **Sonoma Valley Visitors Bureau:** 453 First St. E., (707) 996-1090, [sonomavalley.com](http://sonomavalley.com). Area code is 707.

**To do and see** **Adastra** 2545 Las Amigas Rd., 255-4818, [adastrawines.com](http://adastrawines.com). **Artesa Vineyards & Winery** 1345 Henry Rd., 254-

2140, [artesa winery.com](http://artesa winery.com). **Cline Cellars** 24737 Hwy. 121, 940-4030, [clinecellars.com](http://clinecellars.com). **Cuvaison Estate Wines** 1221 Duhig Rd., 942-2455, [cuvaison.com](http://cuvaison.com). **di Rosa** 5200 Hwy. 121, 226-5991, [dirosaart.org](http://dirosaart.org). **Domaine Carneros** 1240 Duhig Rd., 257-0101, [domainecarneros.com](http://domainecarneros.com). **Gloria Ferrer Caves & Vineyards** 23555 Hwy. 121, 933-1917, [gloriaferrer.com](http://gloriaferrer.com). **Homewood Winery** 23120 Burndale Rd., 996-6353, [homewoodwinery.com](http://homewoodwinery.com). **Larson Family Winery** 23355 Millerick Rd., 938-3031, [larsonfamilywinery.com](http://larsonfamilywinery.com). **Napa-Sonoma Marshes Wildlife**

**Area Limited access.** 226-3641, [dfg.ca.gov/lands/wa/region3](http://dfg.ca.gov/lands/wa/region3). **Robledo Family Winery** 21901 Bonness Rd., 939-6903, [robledofamilywinery.com](http://robledofamilywinery.com).

**Eats** **Boon Fly Café** Breakfast, lunch, and dinner; try the flatbread pizzas, crab cakes with herb aioli, and local-greens salads. 4048 Hwy. 121, 299-4870, [theboonflycafe.com](http://theboonflycafe.com). **Fremont Diner** A casual indoor-outdoor place famed for grass-fed beef burgers, fried chicken sandwiches, and ribollita, an Italian bread soup. 2698 Fremont Dr., 938-7370, [thefremontdiner.com/home](http://thefremontdiner.com/home).