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WINE

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A famous California winery unveiled a stunning remodel. Is it a turning point for the region?



Ernest Miranda leads a wine tasting for a bachelorette party at the Roederer Estate in Anderson Valley, which just unveiled a major transformation.

Santiago Mejia/S.F. Chronicle

By **Jess Lander**, Wine reporter

April 13, 2025



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For decades, visits to Roederer Estate, the California sparkling wine house owned by the famed Maison Louis Roederer Champagne family, were underwhelming. Guests were greeted by a dark barn with a plain, dated interior. Outside, the stunning view from the small patio was almost entirely obstructed by landscaping and a large tent.

While the bubbles lived up to the hype, the experience typically fell short of expectations. But this spring, Roederer, a pioneer of the burgeoning Anderson Valley wine region in Mendocino County, unveiled a major transformation of its tasting room, the first remodel since it was built in 1992. The chic and modern renovation embodies an Anderson Valley groundswell that could finally turn the rustic region into a popular destination — not just a stopover on the way to the Mendocino coast — when the local wine industry needs it most.

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Famous for producing some of California's most sought-after Pinot Noir and Chardonnay, Anderson Valley has always struggled with tourism due to its remote location (roughly 2.5 hours from San Francisco) and lack of lodging

options. [Wine tasting here](#) is no-frills and affordable, much like Napa 30 years ago, but the area is missing some of the signature elements of more popular wine regions, such as Michelin-starred restaurants and resorts.



The Homestead at the Knotty Oak, above, seen through an art piece salvaged from San Francisco's Hardly Strictly Bluegrass Festival. Roederer Estate's 2019 L'Ermitage Brut, below, is poured on the winery's new patio.

Photos by Santiago Mejia/S.F. Chronicle



The refreshed, terracotta terrace at Roederer Estate.
Santiago Mejia/S.F. Chronicle

“It’s the unsung hero of the wine valleys. It’s the most down home — you’ll often find the winemaker in the tasting room — and also the most affordable wine valley to visit,” said Mary Zeeble, owner of the eclectic Knotty Oak, one of the area’s newest lodging options. “This is one of the most beautiful places in the world, but it’s still quite undiscovered.”

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The global wine industry is in crisis, and many Anderson Valley wineries are treading water. As in many other regions, visitor traffic has declined significantly since the COVID-19 pandemic. Several tasting rooms, including Twomey, Phillips Hill and Maggy Hawk, have recently shuttered. Doug Stewart, who owns Lichen Estate and Breggo Cellars, said visitation in 2024 was down about 40% from 2021, and this past December, there were weeks where Breggo saw no one. At Roederer, winemaker Arnaud Weyrich estimated that visitation (before the renovation reveal) was down 25% from the pandemic rush.

But a flurry of recent developments could turn things around. Reimagined tasting rooms, exciting new eateries and other additions are finally delivering a touch of refinement to Anderson Valley without the pretense or sky-high prices of Napa and Healdsburg.



After a wine tasting, Felix Jaramillo, right, buys a bottle of wine before leaving the refreshed Roederer Estate, which has a much lighter interior than before.

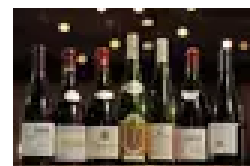
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Today, visitors to Roederer can relax on a sun-drenched, terracotta terrace — the awe-inspiring, mountain view finally on full display — and sip a flight

of [premium sparkling wines](#) for only \$30. They can add on a snack, like a fun play on meat and potatoes: crispy chips blanketed in slices of prosciutto. Guests seeking something fancier can book a \$125 tasting of magnum wines (1.5-liter bottles that enhance the sparkling wine aging process) or book a Cristal Champagne and caviar experience (\$575 for groups of 2-4) in a private salon.

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The Roederer family's Julia Rouzaud, whose mother designed the original tasting room over 30 years ago, took on the remodel. She maintained the redwood structure, but it's now much lighter inside and filled with custom decor made from natural materials. The centerpiece is the bar, its base constructed from layers of reclaimed bricks that a French artist reshaped with water pressure jets, and then assembled into a hypnotic, wave-like pattern. There are also green terracotta tiles from Italy in the foyer; tabletops made from Mt. Etna lava; and a striking, red-hued ceiling that's an homage to the Golden Gate Bridge.

"It's a space for everyone to feel welcome," said Sara Rathbun, Roederer's senior director of marketing. "We wanted to bring in nods to our

international presence, but keep the natural ruggedness and spirit of Anderson Valley. It wouldn't make sense to make it a French chateau."



Scharffenberger Cellars, Roederer's sister sparkling wine house, also recently debuted a modern refresh.
Santiago Mejia/S.F. Chronicle

The debut follows a handful of other Anderson Valley winery revamps, including Roederer's sister sparkling wine house Scharffenberger Cellars, and Breggo Cellars, which moved into Phillips Hill's historic apple drying barn. Since Scharffenberger reopened last May with a posh new look, "visitation popped up dramatically," said Rathbun. She hopes to see the same happen at Roederer.

Boonville's Foursight Wines planted a 2.5-acre lavender farm behind its tasting room. Second-generation owner Kristy Charles credits the new,

family-friendly attraction for “a few percent growth” in visitation last year. “I wouldn’t have expected it,” she said. “It’s nothing to write home about, but we feel lucky given the current climate.” Foursight offers weekend farm tours (\$15, \$30 with wine tasting) June through August and sells lavender products like soaps, candles and sachets.

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In March, Anderson Valley Brewing Co., which claims to be California’s 20th craft brewery, was sold to a former Mendocino winery owner. He has big plans for the brewery's events program and hopes to add sake, sparkling wine and food to the taproom.





Smashburgers, above, are the main draw at Jumbo's Win Win in Philo. Jumbo's owner Scott Baird, below, picks up 5-year-old Rosemary Koetzner so she can pull down the lever for soft-serve ice cream.

Photos by Santiago Mejia/S.F. Chronicle



Yet the most palpable changes have occurred within the region's culinary scene. The Knotty Oak's Zeeble tracks Anderson Valley's food renaissance back to 2020, when the Bay Area's [A16 restaurant](#) ran a six-week popup. "It sold out every night," she said. "I think that was proof in the pudding that people will drive in from outside the valley to do things like that."

Bay Area cocktail maven Scott Baird (formerly of Trick Dog) is leading the revolution with [Jumbo's Win Win](#), a playful burger shack that opened in Philo in 2024. Catering to locals, Jumbo's is now one of the only Anderson Valley restaurants open seven days a week. There's often a line out the door for its messy smashburgers, hand-cut fries and soft serve with a crunchy churro topping.

"It's kind of the public house," said Baird. "It's right in the middle of everything, halfway between (Highway) 128 and Mendocino. If you're in the valley and going wine tasting, you'll pass us."



Chef-owner Christina Jones shows a dish from her Sobo Sake Bar, which opened at the end of last year.

Santiago Mejia/S.F. Chronicle

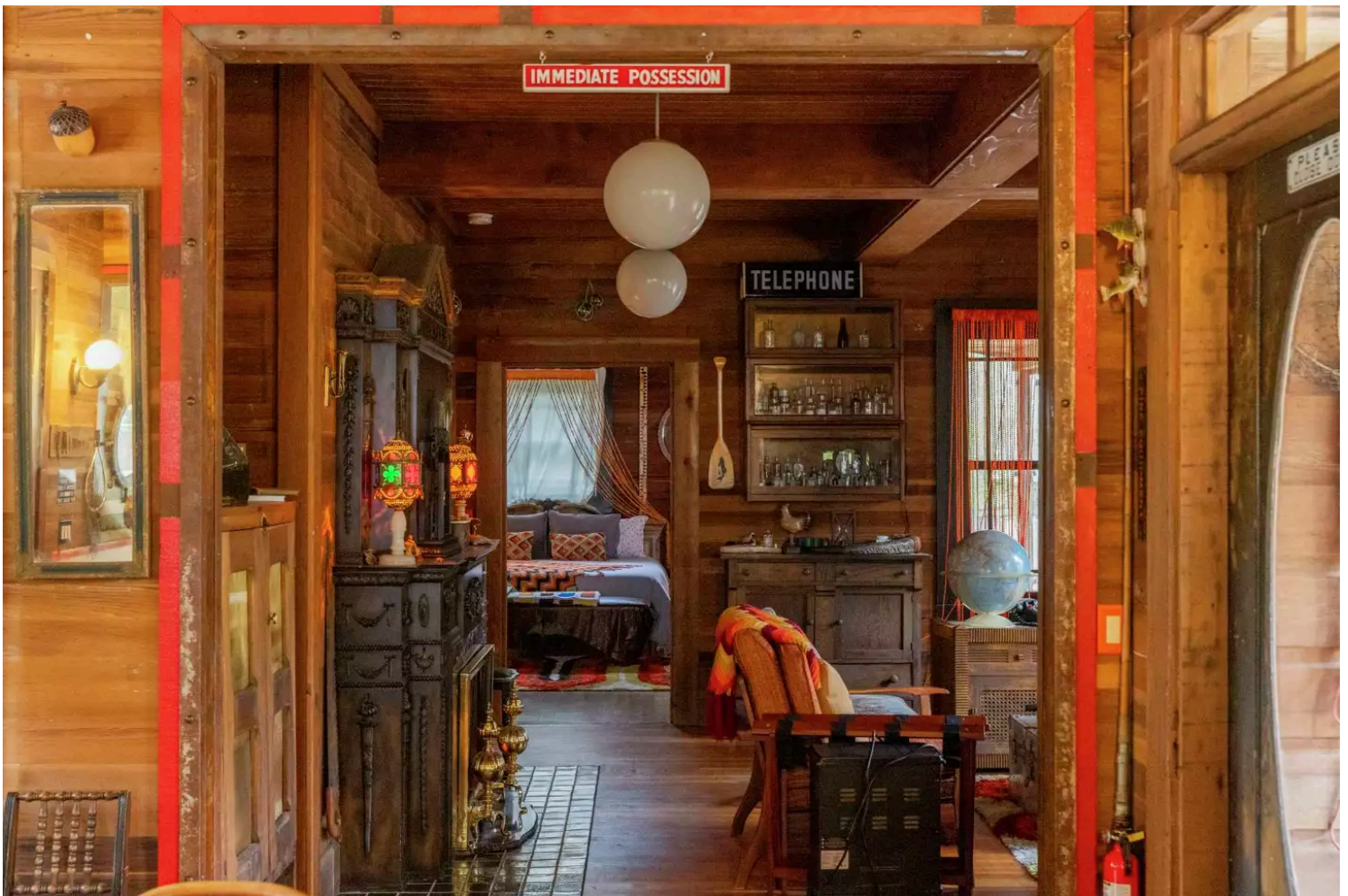
Baird said people warned him about Anderson Valley's seasonality, that things would slow significantly in the winter months. But business was "sustainable" through the winter and it's become a destination in and of

itself; Jumbo's has regulars who make the two-hour round trip weekly from Fort Bragg — and “nobody leaves Fort Bragg,” joked Baird.

Stewart said he recently hosted Bay Area daytrippers whose itinerary included just two stops: his winery and Jumbo's. “It's by far the busiest place in the valley,” he said. “It's wild.”

The Boonville Hotel, home to Anderson Valley's lone tasting menu spot, opened Offspring, a casual, gourmet pizza spot, across the street. Two blocks down, the new Sobo Sake Bar is the first Asian restaurant in town. Open on weekends, the tiny space has one cook, owner Christina Jones, behind the counter whipping up wasabi deviled eggs, sushi rolls and miso butterfish.

“There's never been anything like this,” said Jones, an Anderson Valley native, Tsar Nicoulai caviar ambassador and the founding chef of Roederer's food program. “We had to drive 45 minutes to an hour just to get sushi.”



The Homestead at the Knotty Oak, a eclectic “compound” that features 12 rooms and glamping.
Santiago Mejia/S.F. Chronicle

Despite these developments, lodging remains Anderson Valley’s primary impediment. But over the past five years, Zeeble’s Knotty Oak “compound” has added 12 rooms across three buildings, plus glamping tents. The quirky escape consists of a main house — the oldest building in Philo, built in 1888 out of a single redwood tree — a log cabin, a former school house and a creekside amphitheater set within the forest.

Much like Roederer, the Knotty Oak is a whimsical infusion of old and new: It’s modern and luxurious, featuring heated bathroom floors and plush linens, but nearly every inch is covered in vintage items and antiques that Zeeble salvaged. There’s a Pepsi vending machine; a phone booth; the guts

of an organ; and a wall of 1915 newspaper clippings she discovered under sheetrock during her renovations. “We’re talking 100 runs back and forth to the city with a packed minivan,” said Zeeble.

She’s located across the street from Jumbo’s, where the constant flow of patrons signals hope for the whole region.

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Jess Lander

WINE REPORTER



Jess Lander joined the food and wine team at the San Francisco Chronicle as wine reporter in 2022. Her writing encompasses the California wine industry — from Santa Barbara to Mendocino — with a focus on Napa Valley and Sonoma County. Jess reports on winery and vineyard acquisitions; controversial Napa land use debates; wildfires; a growing farmworker rights movement; and Wine Country’s most exciting restaurant and tasting room openings. Occasionally, Jess also writes about her favorite food: cheese.

Originally from Boston, Jess moved to Napa Valley in 2010 and has extensively covered California wine country for numerous national and international publications. In 2021, Jess published “The Essential Napa Valley Cookbook,” a project that raised more than \$100,000 for Napa Valley restaurant workers impacted by the pandemic.

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