



NOVEMBER/
DECEMBER
2010

HOME & AWAY

Leaving for LAS VEGAS

**CÉLEBRITY SERIES:
NAPA VALLEY**

HONOLULU'S CHINATOWN

**GO DOWNHILL
IN THE ROCKIES**

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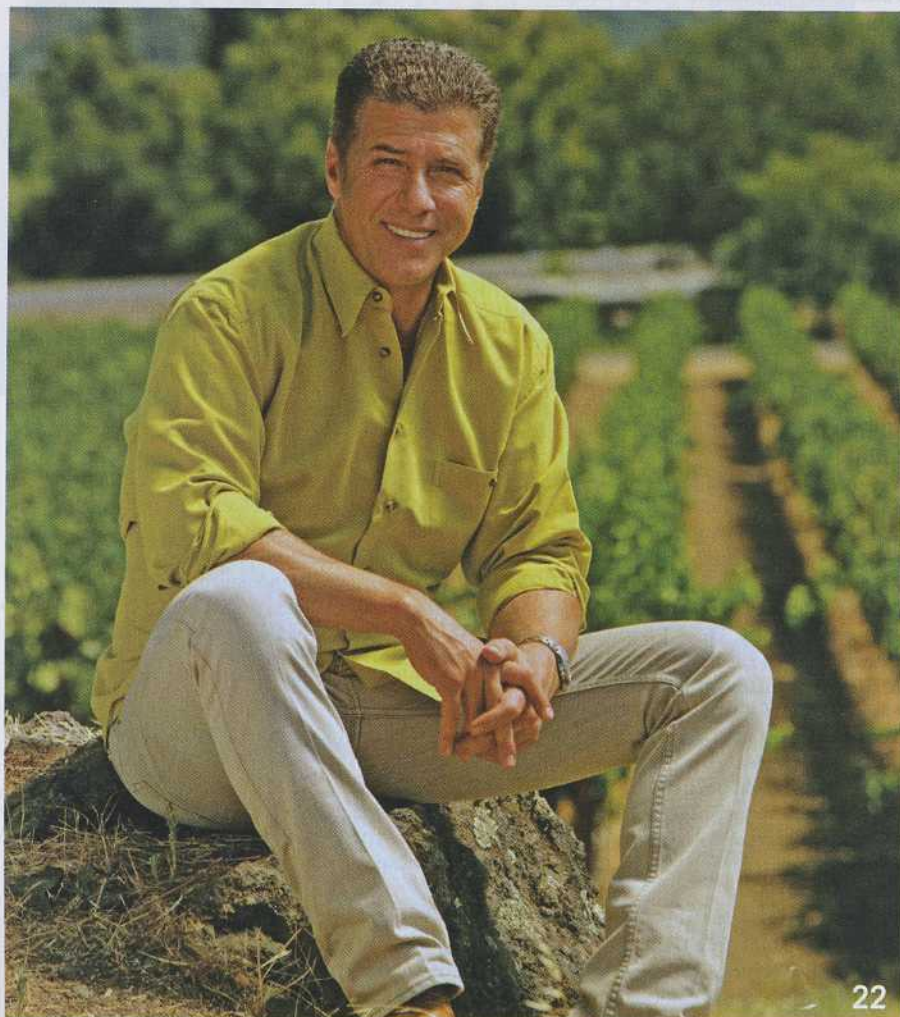
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ABOUT THE COVER

With its ever-evolving skyline of casino hotels, Las Vegas has launched a host of new attractions and properties—most notably the mixed-use development known as CityCenter—to complement its current lineup of attractions.

PHOTO BY PEPEIRA TOM/PHOTOLIBRARY

MICHAEL CHIARELLO'S Napa Valley

The steaming scents of peat and earth filled my nose as I gingerly pushed one bare leg into the sluggish vat of volcanic mud. Gurgling, it reluctantly accommodated the rest of me. It wasn't the typical tourist experience, but Napa Valley is anything but ordinary.

In this 5-by-35-mile strip of land between California's coastal mountains, visitors can wallow beneath the soil in Calistoga's restorative mud baths or soar above the fields in a rainbow-colored hot-air balloon. More than 4.5 million visitors a year come here for experiences like these, as well as for spectacular Cabernet Sauvignons, farm-to-fork organic cuisine, leisurely train rides, million-dollar tasting rooms and vineyard views that rival Tuscany.

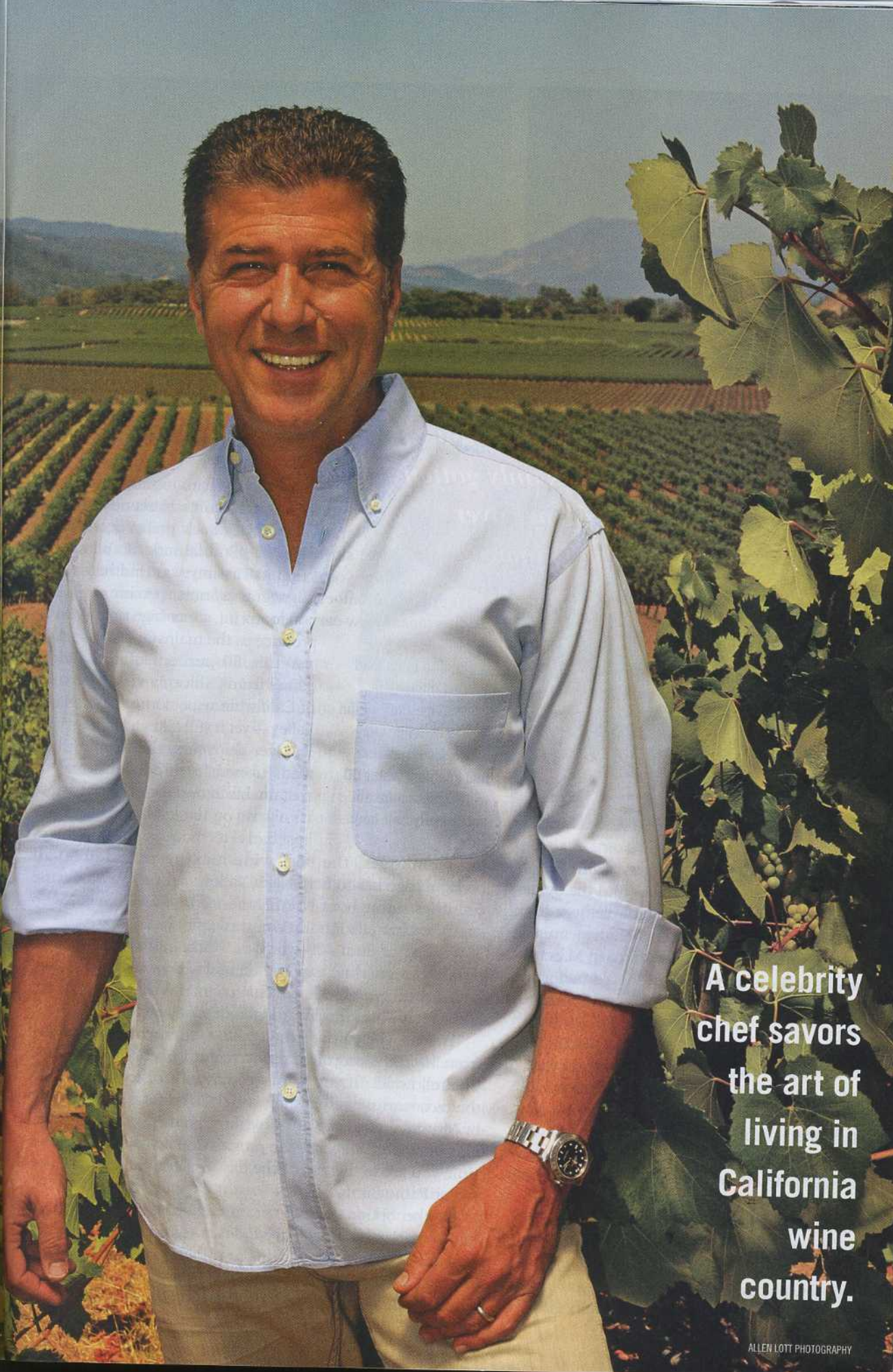
Twenty-four years ago, the beauty and bounty of the area attracted one of America's top chefs, Michael Chiarello, owner of Bottega restaurant in Yountville, author of five cookbooks, and Emmy Award-winning host of *Easy Entertaining*, *NapaStyle* and *Michael Chiarello's Napa*. Shortly after he was named Chef of the Year by Food & Wine magazine in 1985, Chiarello was searching for a place to put down roots when Napa stole his heart.

"I came into the Napa Valley on a late February day, and the mustard was up around my waist," he said. "It was just a blanket of yellow, and the farmers all around—beyond the grapes—were really growing some fantastic produce, which is the mainstay for Italian cooking, so I had this immediate crush on the Napa Valley. The love started deep and has only gotten deeper over time."

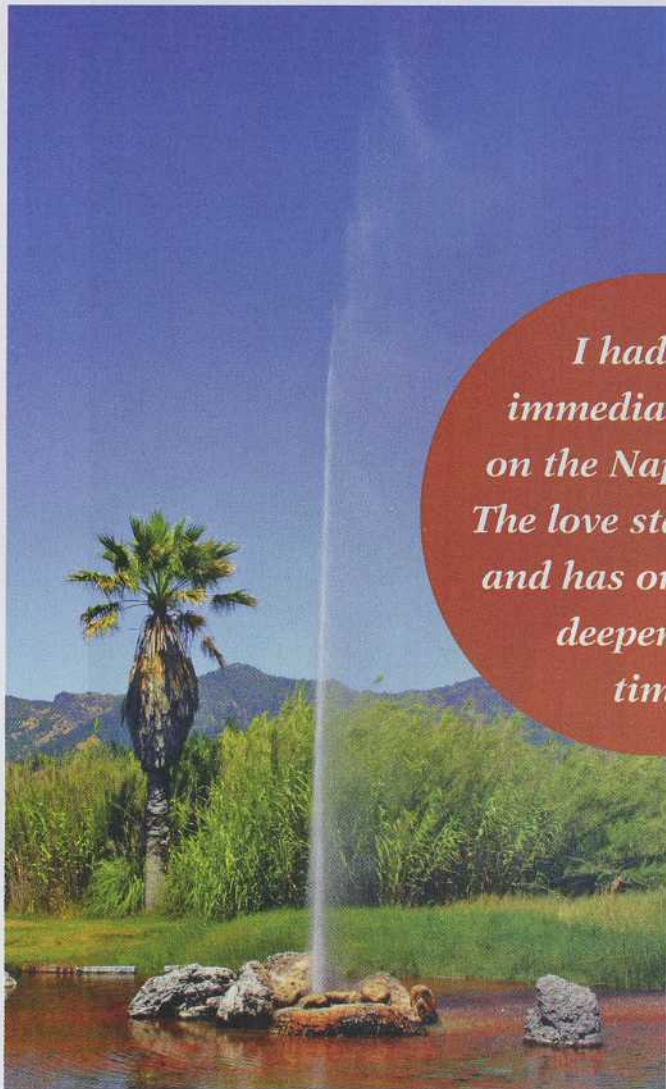
How much time should travelers plan to spend in this plain an hour north of San Francisco? Chiarello said "a day-and-a-half longer than the longest time you can afford." While the summer months attract the biggest crowds, the shoulder seasons feature a grape harvest from mid-August to November, weather depending, and a mustard festival in late winter/early spring.

BY BARBARA
WAYMAN





**A celebrity
chef savors
the art of
living in
California
wine
country.**



I had this immediate crush on the Napa Valley. The love started deep and has only gotten deeper over time.



Chiarello said. “‘Farm to table’ might be a term that was coined recently, but in Napa Valley, that’s been going on forever. We sit inside the 42nd latitude, so all of the things you’d find in Tuscany you find here: eggplant, tomatoes, figs, grapes, nuts, persimmons. It’s Mediterranean, low-carbon footprint, super-high quality with produce as the mainstay of cuisine.”

In addition to its mud baths, Calistoga is home to the Old Faithful Geyser of California, which sprays steam and scalding water 60 to 100 feet in the air about every half-hour.

While 80 percent of U.S. wine comes from California, only 4 percent of California wine comes from Napa Valley—yet it still takes a leading role.

“Over the years, the farming has transitioned from conventional to sustainable to organic to biodynamic. It’s always on the leading edge of the best barrel techniques, the best farming

“I love the beginning of March,” Chiarello said. “All the vintners are back and you’re more likely to find the owners in the tasting room. It’s a little more affordable, too. Right before Thanksgiving also is spectacular, when the leaves are changing and the entire valley looks like you’re in Maine.”

Whatever season visitors choose, they should factor in a leisurely pace, as the delights of the plate and goblet are best savored slowly.

“People come here for the sole purpose of enjoying food and wine and I love that,” Chiarello said. “Americans tend to power tour, but you want to factor in time to take a nap.”

Malbecs and More

Foodies and wine lovers alike have built the once-sleepy Napa region into a spot with more acclaimed wineries than any other region in North America. Yountville boasts more award-winning restaurants per capita than any other city in the world. Residents are called Napkins because of their strong appreciation of quality cuisine.

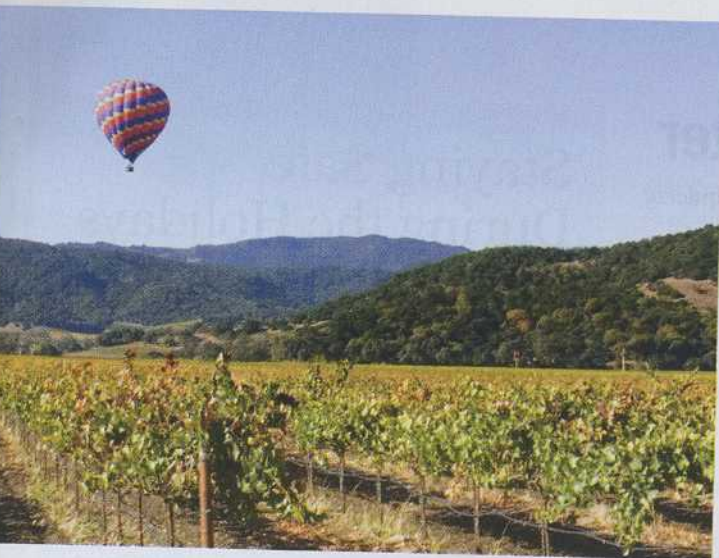
“It’s one of the few places in the world where you can live like you’re in the country and cook like you’re in the city,”

ing techniques, the best wine-making techniques, all brought together to help Napa Valley lead the way for wine countries throughout North America,” said Chiarello, who runs the Chiarello Family Vineyards.

With more than 400 wineries, Napa has a lot of opportunities for swirling, sipping and swishing. Visitors should have a game plan, both for which wineries they want to visit and which wines they’re going to drink at each.

“We eat when we’re hungry, but we tend to taste all day, from 10 in the morning to 6 at night. I like to break it up,” Chiarello said. “If you want to enjoy four or five wines over the day, start with sparkling wine. Go to Domain Chandon or Mumm and work your way through the light whites, just like you would through the progression of the meal. By the time you get to the end of the day, you could be into Cabernet or Petite Sirah.”

Another option Chiarello recommended is staying with one or two varietals. “People try to learn too much in a narrow amount of time,” he said. “If you sprinkle in all these bits and pieces, you go away having enjoyed yourself but never really digesting enough information to build on for your next visit.”



A number of hot-air balloon companies send tourists and locals alike into the skies above Napa Valley's vineyards (above). Yountville's Bouchon Bistro (right)— which has outposts in Las Vegas and Beverly Hills— is one of renowned chef Thomas Keller's eight restaurants.

What should tasters concentrate on? The wines they most enjoy drinking or those they've bought most often in the past year or two?

"A lot of wineries specialize in one or two varietals," Chiarello said. "You can go through WineSpectator.com if you're a ratings person— pick 88 and above and go prepared to taste a specific thing."

Farm to Fork

When it's time to dine, Chiarello recommends Bouchon, Ad Hoc and Étoile at Domain Chandon.

"Everyone's talking about the taste of the soil, or *terrior*, but I have this thing I call '*manier*'—the taste of the person," he said. "I find when I have a flavor for a particular person, I really enjoy their food, so Richard Reddington's Redd and Cindy Pawlcyn's Mustards Grill, Go Fish and Cindy's Backstreet Kitchen are some places I really enjoy."

Starting the evening with champagne and oysters at Bouchon and finishing the night surrounded by a group of friends around a fireplace is the perfect way to spend a night in Napa Valley. The next day, tourists can head north to Calistoga to experience the small town's hot springs and mud and mineral baths Old Hollywood style.

"All the actors and actresses would come and hang out, and I like to close my eyes and imagine Greta Garbo walking by in a one piece and Clark Gable, who used to have a ranch up in St. Helena, smoking a cigar in the corner," Chiarello said. After a swim, a massage and glass of sparkling wine make unwinding luxurious.

Michael's Picks

DINE: "With so many dining options, it's hard to pick favorites. While Yountville is known as the 'culinary capital,' Napa Valley is full of extremely talented chefs. Look on a local site like www.legendarynapavalley.com for an inclusive list of great options. I love Morimoto and Oenotri in Napa and Bouchon and Redd in Yountville."

SHOP: "Our restaurant is part of the Vintage Estates in Yountville that has a number of great shops, including our own NapaStyle. I love St. Helena as a walking town; the downtown has some great wine shops. I would take the time to go to Calistoga, too. It's funky and a little crunchy, and that's wildly attractive to me."

DO: "Eating. Wine tasting. Picnic at a vineyard. People talk about the microclimates here, and you can really

feel that on your body when you're on a bicycle. To watch the Napa Valley come to life at harvest time from a hot-air balloon is just spectacular. And since I'm Italian, I love trains. The Napa Valley Wine Train ends by our property, and I love the ritual of it. I think they do a really nice job, and it's quite romantic."



GERALD HOBERMAN/PHOTOLIBRARY

In Italian, "Chiarello" means "famous" and "light," and it translates into Chiarello's life in Napa.

"Yes, it means 'light' as in 'clear,'" he said, "and I try to keep clarity of thought about what the founders of Napa Valley brought, which is it's really not about us. It's about continuing to carry the torch forward so this experience can continue. No matter where I go, this is a place I'm thrilled to come home to."

Planning Your Trip

For TripTik routings; *TourBook* guides; and rental car, airline or hotel reservations, contact a local AAA Travel agent or visit AAA.com/travel.

Be sure to ask for the Explore Wine Country package, which includes two nights in California wine country and a Wine Country Explorer Pass providing free admission to the top Sonoma County, Calif., and Napa Valley wineries, museums and tastings. Also included are exclusive special offers on shopping and wine purchases. For accommodations in the area, inquire about the Hilton Sonoma Wine Country or the Napa Valley Marriott Hotel & Spa.

H&A

■ Barbara Wayman is a regular contributor from Dublin, Ohio.