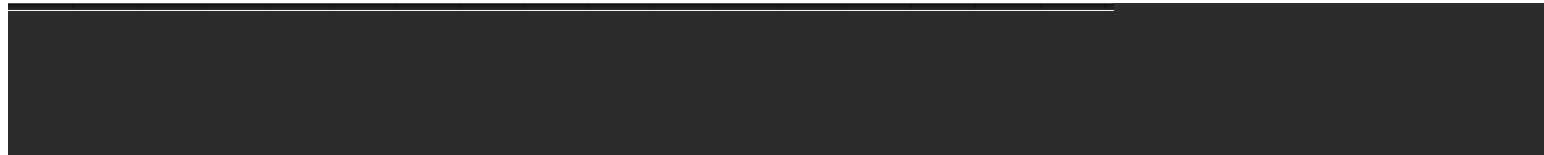


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by Patricia Calfee 11/18/09 4:11 PM



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Patricia Calfee

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Patricia Calfee

Last week, while eating dinner with a friend at Redd in Yountville, I overheard an interesting prediction.

Our waitress, a confident young woman in her twenties, announced to a table of Napa Valley visitors that five years from now no one will drive north of **Yountville**. "St. Helena won't matter anymore because everything--absolutely everything--will happen here," she proclaimed loudly.

A few nights later, a snazzy black Ferrari guarded the entrance to **Hotel Luca** during its pre-opening party, while a FoodTV chef pumped the hands of dinner guests at **Bottega**; gorgeous art mingled brazenly with wine at **Ma(i)sonry**; and champagne poured like

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water at **Bouchon**. At the Hotel Luca party a Restoration Hardware executive led me through rooms his company had furnished, and I realized that our waitress had a point: relative to other corners of Napa Valley, Yountville is a new kind of town.

Those who knew Napa Valley in the 70s and 80s remember Yountville as a sleepy town with a handful of stop signs, a Veterans home, an old-fashioned gas station, and **The Diner**. But that was before **Thomas Keller** ushered in a new era with **The French Laundry**. Although some of Yountville's rustic charm remains (the gas station still stands and Pancha's still pours for locals) other relics have not. Sadly, The Diner, the famed lunch spot that served frothy buttermilk shakes and decorated its walls with colorful teapots, did not survive. But--like a Phoenix rising from the ashes--the building remains a landmark: home to the comfortable and tasty **Ad Hoc**, another Keller creation.

A few blocks away on Highway 29 cars speed past, making their way north to St. Helena's established homes, wineries and businesses. Yountville's transformation has been nothing short of miraculous during the past two decades, and everybody has an opinion about it. "Please!" my friend had scoffed as our waitress strolled away. "Yountville usurp St. Helena as the heart of Napa Valley? Never."

Patricia Calfee is a Napa Valley local & blogger. You can read more of her work online at [So Many Wineries](#). Follow her on Twitter [@SoManyWineries](#).

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Yountville IS Heaven

Yountville has definitely grown over the years, and the quality of the restaurants and hotels rivals that of anywhere in the Valley -- or elsewhere, for that matter. As a long time visitor to the area I really miss The Diner as well as Gordon's, but a lot of great places have stepped up to fill the gap. Redd, Bouchon, Bistro Jeanty (still miss the old Pare Jeanty, though), Bottega, Ad Hoc, etc. If there is a 1/4 mile strip of finer restaurants anywhere in the US I have yet to see it. Plus, with great wine tasting locations like Maisonry, the premier retail wine store to be found anywhere (V Wine Cellars), and a world-class spa at the Villagio, what's not to love? If there really is a heaven, I'm guessing it's just a backstage lot version of Yountville.

Posted by **Sonny H** November, 18 2009 17:10:32

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