



# THE great escape

Right now your focus is likely on family—kids, parents, grandparents, cousins, siblings, great-aunts—all of whom you love. But when's the last time you snuck in a little time for yourself? You know, enjoyed good wine and conversation with a friend? Here's your chance: Take a five-minute break from the holiday haze and **book a girls' getaway**. We suggest a road trip along California's Central Coast, abundant with **fantastic restaurants, cozy inns and stunning vineyards**. And because this trip is all about the ladies, we've spotlighted wineries owned by supercool women. We'll drink to that!

BY KARA WILLIAMS

ILLUSTRATIONS BY KRISTINE LOMBARDI



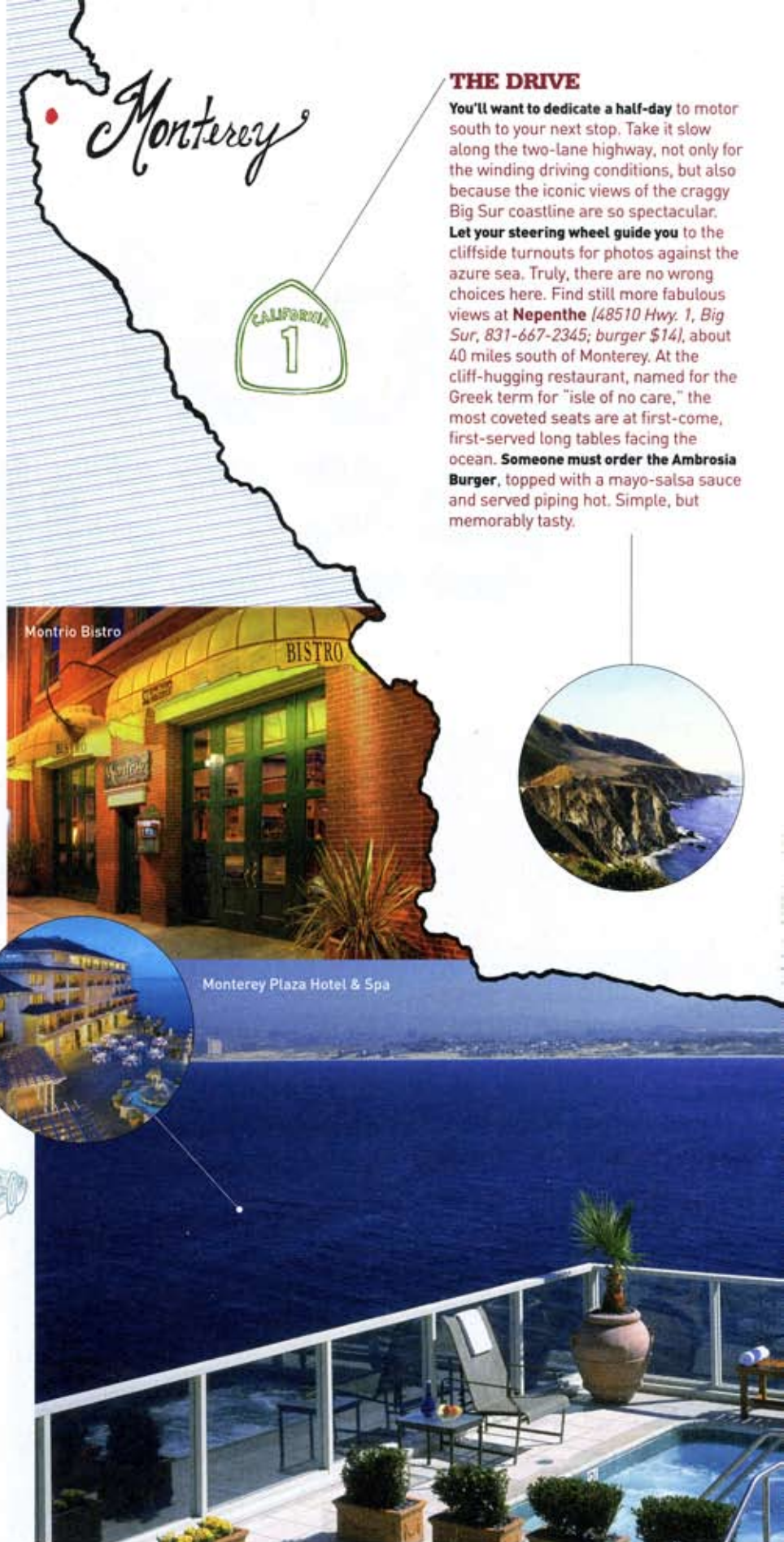
## stop 1 Monterey

**YOUR ADVENTURE BEGINS** a couple hours south of San Francisco, in Monterey County, where the sunny climate, ocean breezes and rich soil provide perfect grape-growing conditions. Sample some of the area's finest at elegant **Château Julien Wine Estate** (8940 Carmel Valley Road, Carmel, 831-624-2600, [chateaujulien.com](http://chateaujulien.com)). New Jersey natives Bob and Patty Brower founded the winery nearly 30 years ago, modeling the main building after a French chateau. While Bob focuses on wholesale operations, Patty works the property, overseeing events, tastings and tours. The hands-on owner may lead your free tour of the 16-acre grounds, pouring samples of wine along the way.

**TAKE IN THE VIEW** at the **Monterey Plaza Hotel & Spa** (400 Cannery Row, Monterey, 831-646-1700, [montereyplazahotel.com](http://montereyplazahotel.com); doubles from \$230), watching the resident otters crack shells on their chests and dolphins frolic in the mellow waves. Rent a kayak and tool around the bay, then head up to the spa for a decadent **Sea Mineral Massage & Body Polish** (\$135). If that sounds a mite *too* decadent, go back to your room, open the window and take an ocean-breeze nap.

**COME SUNDOWN**, walk over to **Cannery Row Brewing Company** (95 Prescott Ave., Monterey, 831-643-2722; beers from \$5), housed in a massive brick building that was once a sardine factory. Gather around the outdoor fire pits, hopping with locals and tourists enjoying some of the 70-plus brews on tap. Try Madame Flora's Red Light Special paired with smoked buffalo wings.

**THE BEST RESTAURANTS** in Monterey are always packed, so book a dinner reservation at **Montrio Bistro** (414 Calle Principal, Monterey, 831-648-8880; small plates from \$4.50), housed in a converted 1910 firehouse. Over a bottle of wine (or two, especially on half-price Sundays), share seafood-heavy small plates—dungeness crab fritters, lobster mac 'n' cheese and pancetta-wrapped prawns.



### THE DRIVE

You'll want to dedicate a half-day to motor south to your next stop. Take it slow along the two-lane highway, not only for the winding driving conditions, but also because the iconic views of the craggy Big Sur coastline are so spectacular. Let your steering wheel guide you to the cliffside turnouts for photos against the azure sea. Truly, there are no wrong choices here. Find still more fabulous views at **Nepenthe** (48510 Hwy. 1, Big Sur, 831-667-2345; burger \$14), about 40 miles south of Monterey. At the cliff-hugging restaurant, named for the Greek term for "isle of no care," the most coveted seats are at first-come, first-served long tables facing the ocean. **Someone must order the Ambrosia Burger**, topped with a mayo-salsa sauce and served piping hot. Simple, but memorably tasty.



Château Julien Wine Estate



Cannery Row Brewing Company



OPEN SIGN AND WINE GLASS, SARA REMINGTON; VINEYARD, DIANE COOK AND LEN JENSEL



### Drink It

You don't need to leave home to sample the good stuff.

While doing research for her book *Women of the Vine* (\$17, amazon.com), Deborah Brenner fell in love with the vintner way of life. So she launched her own label, Women of the Vine Cellars, using grapes harvested by female winemakers all over California. The result: delicious wines, including a rich Santa Barbara chardonnay (\$22) by Signe Zoller, and a mellow Central Coast merlot (\$15) by Alison Crowe. Visit [womenofthevine.com](http://womenofthevine.com) to find a store near you.

### Spike It

These vintners—featured in *Women of the Vine*—always have a bottle handy in the kitchen.



—AMELIA CEJA  
Ceja Vineyards

“I baste turkey with a mixture of olive oil, lime juice, cilantro, garlic, chopped roasted peppers and **sauvignon blanc**. The dry wine and aromatic cilantro add a fresh flavor to the turkey.”



—MERRY EDWARDS  
Merry Edwards Winery

“One of the best sauces for pork tenderloin or beef filet is a reduction made of **pinot noir** and roasted beef bones, onion and carrots.”



—KRISTIN BELAIR  
Honig Vineyard & Winery

“**Cabernet** makes a great base for braised lamb shanks.”



## stop 2 Paso Robles

**AFTER CHECKING IN TO** the **Paso Robles Inn** (1103 Spring St., Paso Robles, 805-238-2660, [pasoRoblesinn.com/RR](http://pasoRoblesinn.com/RR); deluxe spa room from \$169), get into your swimsuit and jump in the hot tub—it's on your balcony and fed by mineral springs. Bunk together in a deluxe spa room with two queen beds—all the better for late-night girl talk. **Every Day with Rachael Ray readers get a special deal: Book three nights, get the fourth free.**

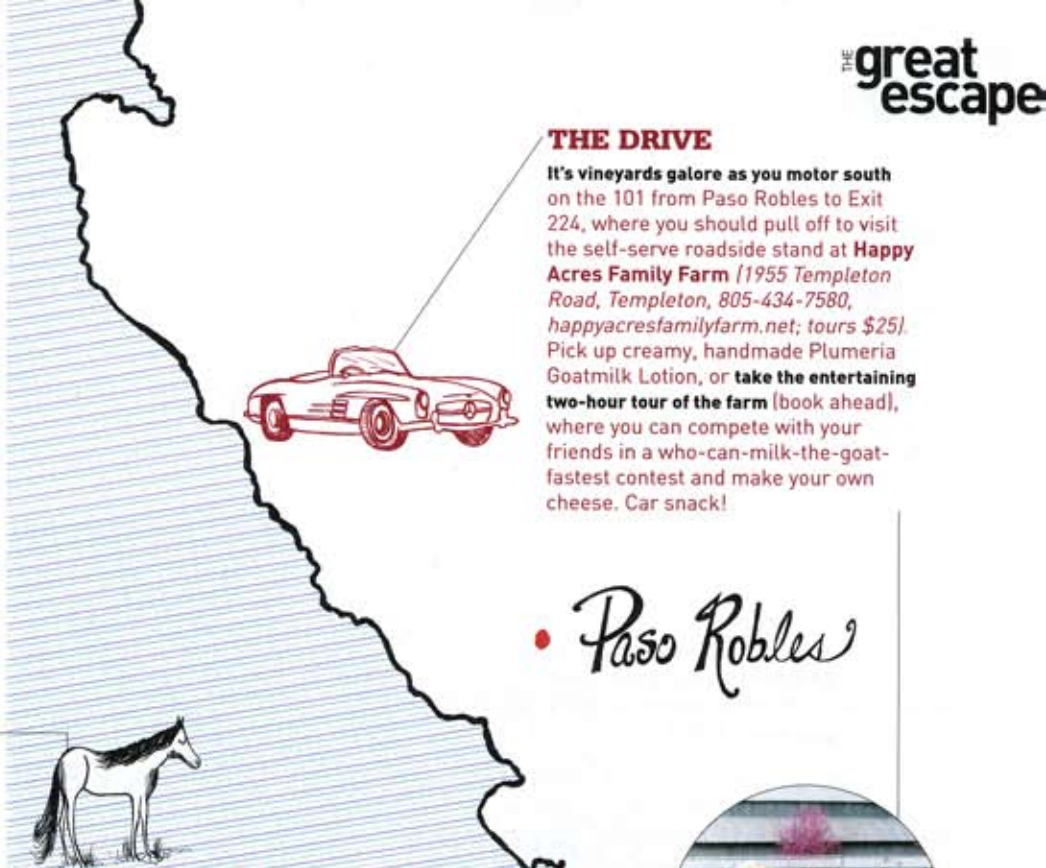
**WHEN IT COMES TIME** to taste wine, you could stay in town—17 tasting rooms are a short walk from the hotel—or hop in the car and head to the coast, past open meadows and grazing horses to the down-home **Kynsi Winery** (2212 Corbett Canyon Road, Arroyo Grande, 805-544-8461, [kynsi.com](http://kynsi.com); tastings from \$5), housed in a renovated dairy barn. It's all hands on deck for the women of the Othman family: Mom Gwen and daughters Kala and Anna participate in every aspect of winemaking. You might find one or more Othmans pouring a Kalanna syrah or the pink Barn Owl Blush, a portion of whose proceeds goes to breast cancer research and awareness.

**WIND DOWN** with a sophisticated, Spanish-inspired meal and a glass of house-made wine at **Villa Creek** (1144 Pine St., Paso Robles, 805-238-3000; entrées from \$21, tacos \$2.50 each on Tuesdays). If you happen to be in town on Taco Tuesday, forgo the refined dining room and fight for space at the bar, where the margaritas come straight up (in martini glasses), the guacamole's made fresh, and the carnitas tacos are so good, you won't want to share.

### THE DRIVE

It's vineyards galore as you motor south on the 101 from Paso Robles to Exit 224, where you should pull off to visit the self-serve roadside stand at **Happy Acres Family Farm** (1955 Templeton Road, Templeton, 805-434-7580, [happyacresfamilyfarm.net](http://happyacresfamilyfarm.net); tours \$25). Pick up creamy, handmade Plumeria Goatmilk Lotion, or **take the entertaining two-hour tour of the farm** (book ahead), where you can compete with your friends in a who-can-milk-the-goat-fastest contest and make your own cheese. Car snack!

## • Paso Robles



VINEYARD, GETTY IMAGES; WINE BARRELS AND OCEAN, DIANE COOK AND LEN JENSHEL



## stop 3 Solvang



Solvang

REVEL IN THE VINEYARD-DOTTED landscape of the Santa Ynez Valley, made famous in the indie film *Sideways*. Stay in Solvang, a community settled by Danish immigrants in the early 20th century and filled with brightly painted windmills and half-timbered houses. The recently refurbished **Hotel Corque** (400 Alisal Road, Solvang, 800-624-5572, [hotelcorque.com](http://hotelcorque.com); book using code MKT\_RRAY) defies the kitschy local architecture: The vibe is sleek-meets-rustic, with curvy glass sculptures and wooden coffee-table cubes dotting the rooms. **Every Day with Rachael Ray readers get a special rate: \$139 for weekends and \$99 for weekdays (down from \$179).**

CHILL OUT BESIDE the hotel's outdoor pool before getting gussied up for drinks at the on-site **Root 246** (805-686-8681; *gimlets* \$7). Gather in the Alice Lounge (the oversize high-backed chairs look pulled from the Mad Hatter's tea party) and order a round of herb gimlets—made with locally farmed fresh basil and organic vodka—and platters of cheese and Morro Bay oysters.

COME MORNING, spend a couple of hours in charming Los Olivos, where you can stroll art galleries, antique shops and more than two dozen tasting rooms—all in the two-block downtown radius. Eat lunch amid wisteria-covered trellises at **Los Olivos Café** (2879 Grand Ave., Los Olivos, 805-688-7265; *entrées* from \$14). Nibble on niçoise salad topped with seared fish—whatever's fresh—and save room for the flourless chocolate cake with homemade vanilla ice cream smothered in caramel sauce.

END YOUR TRIP at the beautiful **Rideau Vineyard** (1562 Alamo Pintado Road, Solvang, 805-688-0717, [rideauvineyard.com](http://rideauvineyard.com); *tastings* from \$10), where the decor is decidedly feminine, with antique furniture, fleur-de-lis symbols and evocative paintings of jazz musicians—a nod to owner Iris Rideau's New Orleans heritage. Be sure to sample Iris' favorite vintage (currently grenache blanc) and toast to good wine and fun-loving ladies.

## Day Trip

It's harvest time! Visit your nearest woman-owned winery and watch the action.

### Olympic Cellars Winery

Port Angeles, Washington

Home to the Working Girl series of wines, including Go Girl Red and Rosé the Riveter, this winery is owned by three female entrepreneurs, known as the Olympic Women in Wine. They work out of a 19th-century barn on the North Olympic Peninsula. [olympiccellars.com](http://olympiccellars.com)

### Cinder Wines

Boise, Idaho

Founded by winemaker Melanie Krause and her husband, Joe Schnerr, in 2006, Cinder Wines is named for the layers of volcanic remnants found under the vineyards in Idaho. Visit the tasting room near downtown Boise to sample their refreshing vlognier and silky syrah. [cinderwines.com](http://cinderwines.com)

### Jowler Creek Vineyard & Winery

Platte City, Missouri

Colleen and Jason Gerke produce affordable wines that pair with their favorite foods—Kansas City BBQ, bratwurst and grilled steaks. Try the Jowler Creek norton, the Missouri state grape that's been dubbed the "syrah of the Ozarks." [jowlercreek.com](http://jowlercreek.com)

### The Salt Lick Cellars

Driftwood, Texas

For more than 40 years, The Salt Lick has dished up some of Texas' best barbecue. The founder's granddaughter Maile Roberts just opened a tasting room adjacent to the restaurant, set amid 35 acres of vineyards. A house red and white, crafted from neighbors' grapes, are designed to pair perfectly with The Salt Lick's mouthwatering meats. To come: a full estate winery. [saltlickbbq.com](http://saltlickbbq.com)

### Red Tail Ridge Winery

Seneca Lake, New York

Scooter and Shazzam (a yellow lab and a German shepherd) will greet you at Red Tail Ridge's modern, eco-friendly facility and tasting room in the Finger Lakes region of New York. Winemaker-owner Nancy Ireland cultivates grapes on 34 acres of land she and husband Mike Schnelle cleared and planted themselves. [redtailridgewinery.com](http://redtailridgewinery.com)