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The Wines, Celebs & Chefs of Festival Napa Valley 2016

By Jackie Bryant Jul. 28th, 2016



Photo Credit: Bob McClenahan

For two weekends every July, the place to see and be seen in California's Napa Valley is undoubtedly [Festival Napa Valley](#). Held

at wineries and estates around the county, this two-week celebration, formerly known as Festival del Sole, includes concerts, dinners, tastings, lectures, fashion shows, galas and more.



Photo Credit: Bob McClenahan

The first Friday night kicked off with a concert from Emmy and Tony Award-winning actress Kristin Chenoweth, which was held at the Tuscan-inspired Castello di Amorosa. The petite actress with a larger-than-life voice wowed the crowd with a medley of show tunes from her career and beyond. Following the recital, people continued on to either the festival-sponsored after party or the first Patron Dinner of the evening, which was held at Reserve Napa Valley and catered by Estate Events at Meadowood. Chenoweth herself made

an appearance, greeting the patrons and thanking them for their support over the years.

Guests were treated to in-season grilled peaches with burrata alongside duck confit and Darioush wines. Simultaneously, the after party at Solage Calistoga was an opportunity for festival-goers to mix and mingle in the backdrop of the Palisades mountain range. Irish singer Eoin Harrington performed, while drinks and light bites were passed around (word has it that the build-your-own nachos was a favorite).



Photo Credit: Bob McClenahan

Saturday morning began with a five and 10-kilometer Sun Run, which helped attendees balance the other excesses of the festival.

By 11 a.m., the Taste of Napa Valley at Cairdean Estate was in full-swing. All of the region's best vintners and restaurants were showcased at individual booths while attendees had an exclusive reserve tasting room set aside. Participating wineries included Darioush, Quintessa, Cardinale and many other revered Napa County names. Guitarist Morris LeGrande provided the backdrop while celebrity chef Ryan Scott of *The Rachael Ray Show* and *Cooking With Ryan Scott* broadcasted live from the event. As guests were busy tasting, Blue Apron Wine Director Chef Thad Morrow hosted a seminar about how to expertly pair wine with food. While the sun was shining, the temperature was mild for the time of year, and guests reveled in the good food, wine and sunshine.



Photo Credit: Paul E. Richardson

In the early evening, Maestro Joel Revzen and the Festival Orchestra NAPA performed *Rhapsody in Blue* at the Lincoln Theater. The orchestra was an ensemble of the New York Metropolitan Orchestra, the San Francisco Symphony, the Los Angeles Philharmonic and other top international orchestras. Two special guests were also in attendance, Cuban pianist Aldo Lopez-Gavilan, who appeared in the United States for the first time, and American soprano Kathleen Battle.

Saturday night saw yet another after affair held at Yao Family wines along with a dinner, which was hosted by Hall Wines. Yao Family Wines was started by basketball hall of famer Yao Ming and features varietals from six Napa vineyards. Over at the patron dinner, which was again catered by Events by Meadowood and served alongside Hall and Walt wines, guests dined al fresco while overlooking the Mayacamas mountains and relaxing to the bluegrass sounds of Ed Neff's Blue and Lonesome band.



Photo Credit: Bob McClenahan

The weekend rounded out with two bombshell events: Neiman Marcus' lunch at Solage Calistoga and the Imaginarium Festival Gala. The lunch doubled as a fashion show, with Italian design house Brunello Cucinelli presenting its elegant Fall 2016 collection. Guests were able to purchase looks from the so-called "King of Cashmere," whether piecemeal or head-to-toe. Aldo Lopez Gavilan returned to lull guests into serenity while the Michelin-starred culinary team of Solage served seasonal hors d'oeuvres alongside Eleven Eleven and Nino Franco's wines.



Photo Credit: Bob McClenahan

Hosted by Wayne Brady and featuring a performance from Cirque du Soleil, the Festival gala was the place to be in Northern California that Sunday night. Held at the lauded Meadowood resort, where guests dined on a multi-course meal prepared by the resort's celebrated chef Alejandro Ayala. Bounty Hunter, Darioush, Gallo Signature Series, Domaine Carneros and Twomey provided the wine pairings. Festival Napa Valley's mission is to make the arts available to all, and using funds raised from the Gala, the foundation provides funding to Napa County public schools for various art programs. They've raised \$4 million to date, a number which is undoubtedly higher after this year's gala.

The festival continued on into its second week, during which more concerts, auctions, luncheons, dinners and tastings were held. Highlights included the *Town & Country* cook-off at the Culinary Institute of America, the Opera Gala at Lincoln Theater and the closing dinner at Robert Mondavi Winery. Festival Napa Valley is already planning its lineup for 2017 and ticket sales begin soon. If you go, high-end accommodations are readily available and best found at the sister properties of Villagio Inn and Spa and the newly renovated Vintage Inn in downtown Yountville. For those who want an unparalleled luxury experience, you can do no better than Meadowood. Passes sell out quickly every year, so it's advised to plan ahead and ensure you won't miss the wine and food-lover's event of every summer.