Hidden

NAPA VALLEY

PHOTOGRAPHS BY WES WALKER

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INTRODUCTION BY LINDA REIFF

welcome BOOKS

NEW YORK
Each season in the Napa Valley stands alone in its extravagance and meets the eye with a brilliant abundance. Fields of wild poppies and mustard burst forth in early spring, followed by acres of vineyards breaking bud. Summer’s longer, hotter days turn vineyards, heavy with fruit, a lush green against hills of drying grasses. After harvest, as the days cool and shorten, the eye is met with vibrant golds and vermillion against clear blue skies. Then, an elegant return to the bare architecture of life in winter—gnarled vines, organic earth, rain-filled skies. Yet, the hidden beauty I care about most comes from a deeper source, which sees the valley’s rarity as a place in which people and nature flourish. Thanks to the sheer tenacity and foresight of those who preceded us—who were devoted to grape growing, the crafting of fine wines and the preservation of its history—the Napa Valley’s beauty is a living testament to the value of keeping landscapes open against urban sprawl. It is my hope that the images I’ve captured here will not only document but inspire each of us to conserve and protect such beauty for ourselves, and for all who follow. Enjoy!

Wes Walker, Napa, California

Cabernet Sauvignon grapes, just before harvest, at Walker Vineyard. (page 1)

Shafer Vineyards at Stags Leap looking west toward Yountville and the Mayacamas Mountains on the western side of the valley. (preceding spread)

Red poppies frame the Rudd Vineyards in Oakville. The vines seen here are Petite Verdot, used for blending with Cabernet Sauvignon. (opposite)
There is a moment in late fall when it feels like I have Napa Valley all to myself. The time is not set, it is always a surprise, and when it arrives I welcome and relish it. Harvest is over and the result of the frenzied activity in the vineyards now rests in the wineries. It is quiet. It is still. The colors have muted. I take a mental snapshot and hold on to it.

I first visited the Valley in the early 1970s, in the back of a station wagon, in tow as my parents studied many vineyards before they planted their own. I remember how breathtaking it was. I thought the old stone winery buildings were perfect settings for the tales I would surely write. I returned to the valley a number of times in different seasons as an adult and with a much better appreciation for a place that offered so much beauty, where agriculture had not just been preserved but flourished, and where the people were more welcoming and gracious than any I’d ever known.

One cannot help being swept away by Napa Valley and I succumbed in the summer of 1995, moving here to accept a job that has allowed me to delve into, deeply respect, and fall in love with all that it has to offer aesthetically and substantively.

While Napa has earned its title as America’s legendary wine region, people are often surprised to learn, in fact, how geographically small it is. Napa Valley vineyards produce only 4% of all California wine, and its total vineyard acreage is just one-eighth the size of Bordeaux. But within this slice of heaven lie many joys. The diverse terrain

*Cabernet Sauvignon grapes shortly before harvest on Spring Mountain.*
provides for a wide variety of world class and memorable wines. Those wines are now matched in character and quality by our restaurants, food purveyors, gardens, inns, spas, educational programs and entertainment.

Much has been written about the splendor and bounty of the valley. But nothing can capture it as well as your own eye, or the eye of a vibrant and brilliant photographer who loved the place as much as anyone could. Wes Walker lived here for twenty-eight years. He tilled the soil as a dedicated grape grower and he participated in the valley’s life as a respected community leader. He photographed the valley for years celebrating the landscape, the light, the vineyards, grapes and harvests. Then, he opened his eyes to the architecture, the art, the produce, the caves, the restaurants and the culture that had grown up around the wineries. His pictures chronicle the grace of the valley, its evolution and its astonishing aesthetic in seemingly all matters. This passion for the valley seems to burst through these pages. Thank you, Wes, for creating something that we can all hold onto.

**Linda Reiff, Executive Director, Napa Valley Vintners**

*Entrance to the wine caves at Antica Napa Valley. The winery’s name is a portmanteau of the family name of the owners, Antinori, and California.*
Spring
A glorious time! Vines are being reborn. Sap begins to flow upward. Days are warming. Buds swell, popcorn fuzz peeks out, and tiny iridescent green leaves and stems stretch forth. These fragile shoots are vulnerable and need protection. They are tender and tasty to rabbits, deer, and insects, perfect for mildew, and can be blackened by frost. Wine growers are guardians and guides during these critical times.

Randle Johnson, viticulturist

Napa County Iris Gardens. Located in Steele Canyon, near Lake Berryessa. (preceding spread)

The pond and vineyards at Artesa Winery with spring mustard in bloom.