

Defining the Napa Valley

By KATIE SOMPLE

Attempting to define Napa Valley's lifestyle is like looking into a single frame of a kaleidoscope assuming it describes its total splendor and individual possibilities. Whether you come for the wine culture, the culinary excellence, the rural beauty, or perhaps a weekend respite from the hustle bustle life of a busy city, or a place to raise your children in a family-friendly, education-focused environment- each lifestyle pursuit is as unique as a rotation of the scope.

There are, however, common lifestyle denominators local residents share. They are inter-woven threads that define the valley's culture. Those that stand out are the three "S's": Simplicity, Style and Sharing.

The concept of 'less is more' applies to most if not all aspects of décor, dress and design. Décor is expressed by fewer things of greater quality. Clutter is obsolete, but eclectic is revered in any quintessential Napa Valley style home. Interior and exterior furnishings are purchased and arranged with the goal of simplicity and style to enhance the aspect of sharing a cup of coffee, a glass of wine or a meal with friends and family. Outdoor living and entertaining is a major focus.

Simplicity is also emphasized in a typical daytime Main Street wardrobe of a wine country local. For men, it might include blue jeans or khakis, loafers, and a polo shirt or casual button down. Ankle-length slacks, a twin-set Cardigan, and flats or togs for the gals. Shin-length safari shorts, a Patagonia zip-up or pull-over, and wine-stained work boots is the classic uniform of a Napa Valley winemaker.

The second S, style, is everywhere, and in all things Napa Valley. From wine-making styles, to culinary menus, to personal styles of self expression. One common element of style relates to the unyielding respect of and dedication to the county's rural nature. Designing and building homes and wineries that complement and blend with the surrounding beauty is Napa Valley style. Cooking with simple, healthy, locally grown ingredients is Napa Valley style. Sharing an al-fresco meal with friends over an exceptional bottle of local wine is Napa Valley style.

One's personal style is expressed through community involvement, support and volunteerism. It is not uncommon for Napa Valley locals to wear several hats. For example, a dentist in St. Helena assumed the responsibility of little league commissioner, and a 5th grade spelling bee judge. The annual valley-wide Follies musical features a local CPA doing an Elvis impression, or, in the case of Napa, the city's mayor produces and coordinates an intense, year-long leadership training program, which has spawned some of the valley's best new leaders.

The final S, sharing, ties the whole Napa Valley lifestyle package in a lovely bow. The generosity of Napa Valley's average citizen is immeasurable, and not just in dollars, but also through the precious commodity of time and real caring and concern, which is followed by action. A neighbor runs for school board because it's the right thing to do. A winery owner makes it possible to build a ball field, and a Rotary luncheon spontaneously raises tens of thousands of dol-

ars for a local music program just because someone stood up and mentioned there was a need. A new fire engine is needed so funds are donated by the local citizens it would serve.

Wineries share expensive wine-making and farming equipment. They educate one another for the greater good of the product. They give generously to just about every charitable wine auction in the valley, raising unprecedented and much needed funds to support a quality of life for everyone who works to make the community function well.

Napa Valley's world class wines attract other world class assets such as health facilities, culinary excellence, the arts, education and, of course, premium real estate. It makes perfect sense that the people drawn to reside here are world class too.

In terms of real estate and the 3 'S's', style, simplicity and sharing apply as well. Style is displayed in the architecture influenced by early settlers who emigrated from Europe's old world wine regions, including French chateaus and farm houses, Spanish villas, Tuscan estates, turn-of-the-century Victorians and Craftsman bungalows. Throw in a vineyard view, or a quaint residence on a tree-lined street within walking distance to a small valley town, and you have a Napa Valley lifestyle.

The most prominent influence of real estate on the Napa Valley lifestyle is the supply and demand factor created by the finite, buildable parcels and residences that are available. Any time supply