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Napa's Truchard: Caves, goats, winning chardonnay

By Tom Riley

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Truchard Vineyards in Napa's Carneros region has been growing wine since 1973. (Tom Riley)

A stop at Truchard in southern Napa's Carneros region is less like visiting a famous winery, and more like pulling up to the home of a new friend, one who just happens to own some of the best vineyard land in California.

One of the top growers in Napa since 1973, with a line of its own impressive wines since 1989, Truchard comprises 400 acres, 280 of those planted with 12 different varieties. It's no wonder the Truchard Vineyards name can be seen on so many California wine labels.

Truchard remains a true family affair and the day I visited, members of the grounds crew -- eight miniature goats -- were mowing the lawn and trimming cover crops, a sign of the family's commitment to sustainable growing practices.

Once you've been greeted by a tasting room staffer or member of the Truchard family, you begin the estate tour, a glass of crisp chardonnay in hand. A stroll through the vineyards brings you to the caves that tunnel deep beneath the vines. The caves have central hallways with several short, side tunnels, lined with barrels, stacked two and three high, and filled with aging wine.

You can taste in the caves, but good weather may draw you outdoors for a sit-down in the large gazebo that sits behind Tony and Jo Ann Truchard's home. It's a nice way to finish a visit with your new friends.

The details: 3234 Old Sonoma Road, Napa; www.truchardvineyards.com. Tours and tastings (\$30) by appointment only.

The sips: The 2012 Truchard Chardonnay (\$30) has aromas of pineapple, green apple and honeysuckle that jump out of the glass, and its citrus and stone-fruit flavors are held together with bright acidity. The 2011 Truchard Syrah (\$30) has a nose rich with berry, plum and earth notes. On the palate this wine is taut and lean, with concentrated black cherry and black pepper.

Nearby: Artesa, Domaine Carneros.

-- T. Riley, correspondent