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GREAT ESCAPE: Saratoga's Cinnabar Winery

Head for the hills to enjoy good wine and good music on Friday nights.

By [Kathryn McKenzie](#) | [Email the author](#) | 8:39am

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Now that fall is bringing us warm evenings, where better to enjoy them than at Cinnabar Winery's tasting room in Saratoga? Sit and sip some great vintages at the tasting room's wine bar, open Friday and Saturday evening from 5-8 p.m., and also on Fridays through the end of September, enjoy live music by great local bands.

What to do here: The pleasant tasting room on Big Basin Way, less than five miles from Cinnabar's wine estate in the Saratoga hills, is a low-stress way to learn about wines and to shop for wine-related items and other gifts, including picnic items like gourmet cheeses, salami, olives, nuts, toasts, and chocolates. If you have small children with you, no problem — there's a play area with coloring books and crayons to keep them occupied.

At the tasting room, you can sample some of the current releases, including reds like cabernet sauvignon, petite sirah, and malbec; there are also several chardonnays from different wine regions, as well as red and white blends under the name Mercury Rising.

But what makes this establishment truly unique is the Mudd Room, the after-hours wine bar that revs up on Fridays and Saturdays.

Amazingly, there's no cover charge to hear live music on Friday evenings, although there is a one-drink minimum — and wines are available either by the glass or by the bottle. This Friday and on Sept. 23, you'll hear the country blues stylings of the Terry Hiatt Band; on Sept. 16, the schedule calls for folk rockers emith, and on Sept. 30, the acoustic rock of 7th Wave.

The Mudd Room is fondly named after vineyard and winery founder Tom Mudd (1942-2007); visitors can gather either indoors or out on the patio.

And even more to like: If all that wasn't enough, there's more. Cinnabar is one busy place. The winery hosts its fourth annual Harvest Barbecue at its vineyard estate in Saratoga on Saturday, Sept. 17, beginning with noontime "Wine Welcome" where guests will sample Cinnabar wines and nibble on freshly baked pizza appetizers made in a wood-fired outdoor brick oven.

A barbecued tri-tip lunch follows, all with more wine, of course. The event also includes a dessert competition; to buy tickets and get more details about the contest, visit the Cinnabar [website](#). Cost is \$50 per person.

The winery also hosts several tasting events during September, including a blind pinot noir tasting and a wine aromas and flavor component class with Cinnabar's winemaker George Troquato on Sept. 18. Cost for either class is \$15.

About Cinnabar Winery: The winery was founded in 1981 by Tom Mudd, a Stanford Research Institute engineer who became a passionate winemaker. He called his wine "Cinnabar" after the ancient name for mercury, used by alchemists to transform ordinary metal into gold. With the passing of Mudd in 2007, the winery still belongs to the Mudd family and is managed by president Suzanne Frontz and winemaker George Troquato.

Cinnabar produces its wines from a variety of regions, including the Santa Cruz Mountains, California's Central Coast, Sonoma County, the Red Hills of Lake County, the Clements Hills above Lodi, and Santa Clara Valley.

Directions and phone: From Highway 85 north, take Saratoga Avenue west; after a few miles you'll enter the town of Saratoga, and the road will turn into Big Basin Way. Continue on to the winery tasting room at 14612 Big Basin Way, Saratoga. The tasting room is open from 11 a.m.-5 p.m. daily and the Mudd Room from 5-8 p.m. Fridays and Saturdays. Information: www.cinnabarwine.com or (408) 867-1012.

What's your favorite local wine? [Tell us in the comments.](#)

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