

GRAB A PLANE



Photo courtesy VisitNapaValley.com

Out in the Vines

The Charles Napa Valley is elevating the region's thriving LGBTQ wine scene

By Shane Gallagher

The opening of The Charles Napa Valley feels, at first glance, like the arrival of another beautifully restored boutique hotel in California wine country. But step inside the 1906 mansion and it quickly becomes clear that this isn't just about design, history, or even luxury. It's about visibility. And in a region long celebrated for its wine, that visibility is now shining a brighter light on Napa Valley's quietly thriving LGBTQ scene.

For designer Charles Gruwell, who brings more than four decades of global hospitality experience to the project, the hotel represents a continuation of a vision first realized at The Charles Pacific Grove. There, a 1904 Victorian mansion was transformed into an elegant, welcoming retreat that quickly earned a devoted following—particularly among LGBTQ travelers seeking both style and a genuine sense of belonging. In Napa, that

same ethos carries forward, now intersecting with one of the world's most iconic wine destinations.

Gruwell's approach to design is rooted in layering: fabrics, wallpaper, antiques, and artwork sourced from a range of cultures come together to create interiors that feel both timeless and deeply personal. But it's the philosophy behind the aesthetic that resonates most. Alongside partner Ryan MacCarrigan, Gruwell has built The Charles brand around what MacCarrigan calls "authentic inclusivity," supported by the company's proprietary C.H.A.R.L.E.S. Method—a structured approach to hospitality training that ensures every guest, regardless of identity, feels seen and welcomed.

That intention arrives in Napa at a moment when LGBTQ travelers are increasingly seeking destinations that offer more than scenic beauty.

They want connection, community, and spaces where they can fully be themselves. Napa Valley, it turns out, has been quietly cultivating exactly that.

Just a short stroll from the hotel, downtown Napa offers a vibrant starting point. Deuce's Market buzzes with energy, serving as a gathering place for locals and visitors alike. It offers a wide range of hydration and gourmet food stuffs, all sourced locally and globally from artisan brands. It also regularly hosts LGBTQ meetups and social events.

The Q Restaurant & Bar offers a casual dining destination rooted in Southern fare, a lively bar, and genuine hospitality. Nearby, the Napa Valley Wine Train provides a nostalgic, immersive way to experience the region's vineyards—an experience that has increasingly embraced inclusivity in both its marketing and guest programming.

Beyond the town center, a growing number of wineries are helping redefine Napa's cultural landscape. Ashes & Diamonds Winery, known for its mid-century modern aesthetic and progressive ethos, has become a favorite among LGBTQ visitors for its welcoming atmosphere and thoughtfully curated tastings. Meanwhile, Clif Family Winery pairs organic wines with a strong commitment to sustainability and community—values that resonate deeply with many LGBTQ travelers.

There are also organizations like Out in the Vineyard, whose gatherings (ranging from vineyard parties to winemaker dinners) have helped transform Napa into a destination where LGBTQ culture and wine culture intersect in meaningful ways.

While Napa may not yet have the overtly queer branding of

destinations like Palm Springs or Provincetown, its appeal lies in something subtler: a sense that LGBTQ visitors are not just accommodated, but organically woven into the fabric of the experience.

The arrival of The Charles Napa Valley amplifies that momentum. By

situating an explicitly LGBTQ-friendly hotel in the heart of downtown, Gruwell and MacCarrigan are not only providing a place to stay; they're creating a hub. The hotel's daily social hour, featuring local wine and cheese, echoes the successful formula of its Pacific Grove predecessor while offering guests an easy, convivial way to connect.

It's a small detail, but one that speaks volumes. In a region where experiences often revolve around private tastings and curated itineraries, The Charles introduces a communal element that feels distinctly queer: open, social, and rooted in shared experience.

This isn't about reinventing Napa Valley, but about revealing a dimension that has long existed just beneath the surface. Yes, it remains a place of world-class vintages, Michelin-starred dining, and postcard-perfect landscapes. But increasingly, it is also a place where LGBTQ travelers can arrive not as outsiders, but as part of the story.

For more information, go to www.visitnapavalley.com and www.thecharlesnapavalley.com

