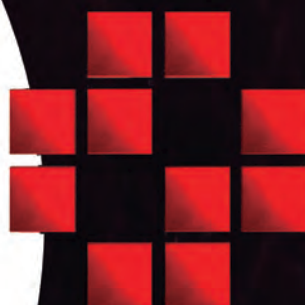


oliva tessen

BY MERCACEI

*the delicate pleasure of extra
virgin olive oil...*



guest star

*Helen Mirren and her
unconditional love for
the olive tree*

chefs

*Jorge Vallejo or the
exaltation of Mexican
gastronomy*

it food

*Vacations at sea with
haute cuisine (and
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crazy about EVOO

*Kate Moss, the fashion
icon finds her refuge in
the middle of nature*

road trip

*California, tour &
taste olive oil in the
Golden State*

trends

*Dolce&Gabbana Alta
Gioielleria, sparkles
among the olive trees*

California

Tour & Taste Olive Oil in the Golden State

By Alexandra Kicenik Devarenne
and Roberta Klugman

If you're planning a trip to California and love food as much as we do, you won't want miss the opportunity to get as up-close-and-personal as humanly possible to the state's healthiest, most sustainable and delicious crop – olive oil.

Photo Credit
Leah Kelley







The name California evokes many things: a vibrant entertainment industry, high tech innovation, sunny beaches and natural beauty. But in addition, California is an agricultural powerhouse; its farming sector is by far the largest of any state in the US, valued at \$55.9 billion in receipts for 2022. Among the many crops that thrive in the state's rich farmland and Mediterranean-type climate are olive trees.

But first some History

The roots of the olive oil industry in California go back to the late 18th century. As Spanish Franciscans established missions up the coast of California, they planted olive trees for oil production. In the second part of the 19th century, orchards of various varieties were planted from San Diego to Sonoma and in the Sierra foothills. The first commercial olive oil was pressed in 1871 in Ventura County. By 1885, oil was being produced from about 809 ha (2,000 ac) of olive trees, but the industry declined in the late 1800s because California olive oil did not compete well against seed oils and imports.

At the turn of the 20th century the California black ripe olive became popular and olive production in the state turned to table olives. Olive oil was produced on a small scale, mostly from undersized fruit that was not used for table olives. Many of the old orchards of oil cultivars were abandoned and gradually were overgrown.

The modern era began in the late 1980s as interest in Italian cuisine and healthy eating grew. Starting around 1990, some intrepid producers were clearing and rehabilitating those abandoned oil olive orchards from the past. The “California olive oil Renaissance” saw a flurry of planting -at a boutique scale- of primarily Italian oil cultivars and the '90s saw a proliferation of artisan extra virgin olive oil brands that were grown and bottled in the state.

The next stage for California's olive oil industry began in 1999 when the first super-intensive plantings of Arbequina, Arbosana and Koroneiki went in. This started a rapid expansion of acreage, primarily in the Sacramento and San Joaquin valleys. Today, the vast majority of California olive oil is produced in the super-intensive system for large brands, but a vibrant artisan industry flourishes alongside.



Road Trip!

One of the first things a visitor to the Golden State will realize is how big it is. For reference, California is about the same length as Italy, and 25% larger in area, so be careful not to underestimate distances and travel time. The train service is limited and time-consuming although the Pacific Surfliner (San Diego to Los Angeles) and Coast Starlight (Los Angeles to San Francisco and on to Seattle) both travel a beautiful coastal route. Longer legs in your itinerary can be done by air to save time, but the best option for flexibility is to drive. One travel option you can look into is renting a recreational vehicle (RV) so that you don't have to worry about motels or hotels. California is famous for the diversity of its landscape and for its national and state parks, ranking #1 in the country for both, not to mention the many tourist destinations in the metro areas. For our Olive Oil Road Trip, we are going to focus on the food and agricultural side of the state, but there is so much to see along the way.



A family coupage EVOO made from
Picudo and Carrasqueño olives

From our family to yours



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HERITAGE TREES AND A FRESH APPROACH

North of Los Angeles in the southern part of the Central Valley is Tulare County. Producing more than half of the state's table olives, it lies on the way to Sequoia National Park and the breathtaking landscapes of the southern Sierras.

Olivaia's OLA

Ave. 200, west of Road 204 in Lindsay.

Offerings:

Tours and tastings by appointment. Olive oil dinners, lunches and food pairing, all by prior arrangement.

Contact:

giulio@olivaiaolive.com / 310-291-4074

Website:

www.olivaiaolive.com

Olivaia's OLA is an 8 ha (20 ac) farm with traditional table olive cultivars, Manzanilla and Sevillano, planted 60 to 125 years ago. Owners since 2012, Giulio Zavolta and Rachelle Bross have taken this parcel of California's historical table olive production in a new direction.

Recently 300 Coratina and Itrana trees have been interplanted in the old orchard. Since there are at least nine varieties of olives that are yet to be identified –plus the four already mentioned– they call the orchard Block X. The trees are farmed to optimize the different uses of the olives: CA Ripe Olive industry, fresh olives for home curing, *Olivaia Olives* (their own table olives), and *Olivaia's OLA*, their extra virgin olive oils (winners of multiple Best of Show and Best of Class awards).

Olivaia OLA's artisanal approach, regenerative farming, and attention to detail align to create outstanding products and honor their heritage trees. The small town of Lindsay once called itself the “Olive Capital of the World” and the thriving olive-growing region is now being usurped by more lucrative crops. Olivaia aims to reshape the perception of heritage trees in the hope that their practices and the recognition of their products will convince others to see that the value of heritage trees goes beyond just the bottom line.



SAN ARDO'S OTHER OIL

Olive oil is not the only oil that has featured in the history of California; petroleum has been an important industry as well. In 1903, California was the #1 oil producing state in the country and it remains significant. Pumpjacks (aka grasshopper pumps) appear periodically along the highways as you traverse the state. Our next producer is located across the freeway from a cluster of oil wells in San Ardo, 45 km (28 miles) north of the Central Coast wine region of Paso Robles. This oil field has led the locals to call the extra virgin olive oil from 43 Ranch “San Ardo's other oil.”

43 Ranch

Highway 101 Exit 260, 4.8 km (3 mi) south of San Ardo.

Offerings:

Tasting room open Fri–Sun 12 – 5 PM or any day by appointment (traveler tip: don't miss the olive oil ice cream); tours by appointment.

Contact:

info@43ranch.com / 831-627-2455

Website:

www.43ranch.com

Accommodations:

43 Ranch is part of the Harvest Hosts network for RV travelers www.harvesthosts.com

Located right off 101 on a site previously occupied by a petrol station is the mill of 43 Ranch. In a sign of changing times, the mill parking lot is now home to twelve Tesla NACS superchargers. Greg and Cindy Traynor grow Spanish and Italian cultivars on this ranch that has been in Greg's family since 1864. They built the mill in 2017 and won a Best of Show with their first production. Since then, in addition to Best of Show every year at the Los Angeles International competition, 43 Ranch has earned the distinction of being the only domestic extra virgin olive oil ever to win the Marco Mugelli “Best of the Best” award at the Los Angeles International Competition.



A PIONEER'S PIECE OF PARADISE

San Francisco figures into almost everyone's visit to California, and our next farm is only 35 minutes north of the Golden Gate Bridge, nestled among the rolling hills west of the picturesque river town of Petaluma. This region is home to artisan cheese makers, distinctive wines and a vibrant local food culture. The ranch holds an important place in the modern history of olive oil in California thanks to its visionary founder, Nan McEvoy.

McEvoy Ranch

Petaluma, 10 minutes outside of town, 15 minutes from Hwy 101.

Offerings:

Tasting room and tours by appointment, 11 AM – 5 PM 7 days/week. Olive oil and wine tastings, lunch, charcuterie boards; private events and experiences available by arrangement.

Contact:

customerservice@mcevoyranch.com

Website:

www.McEvoyRanch.com

McEvoy Ranch was founded in 1990 by the late Nan McEvoy on a 222 ha (550 ac) former dairy farm. She imported olive tree starts from Italy, determined to make the sort of extra virgin olive oil she had fallen in love with in Tuscany. Since then, McEvoy Ranch has helped to define the Premium sector in California with its certified organic, estate grown and milled extra virgin olive oil. In addition, they produce a line of co-milled olive oils that range from the traditional citrus to the innovative ginger-turmeric. Committed to stewardship of the land, the ranch has the highest standards for sustainable production. They irrigate only with surface water that is collected in ponds and all the mill by-products and prunings are composted and returned to the orchards. The McEvoy family continues to own and operate this beautifully designed and maintained ranch with the third generation now joining the workforce.



Photo credits

Courtesy of McEvoy Ranch

AT THE HEART OF THE WINE COUNTRY

If you travel east from McEvoy Ranch you head into the most prestigious wine region in the US. World-class wines are produced in several areas of California, but none is as famous as the Napa Valley. Don't miss the great wines and history in Sonoma County on the way, including Mission San Francisco Solano (1823), the furthest north of the missions in California. Our next producer is located in the middle of the beautiful Napa Valley, surrounded by vineyards, one of only two working olive mills in the valley.

Round Pond Estate

Rutherford Road between Hwy 29 and Silverado Trail in Rutherford.

Offerings:

Tasting room offering a guided tasting of the estate's oils and vinegars paired with seasonal small bites from their estate chef. 10 AM – 4 PM, by reservation only. For groups over 10 people, private experiences available.

Contact:

concierge@roundpond.com / 707-302-2575

Website:

www.roundpond.com

Round Pond Estate has 4.9 ha (12 ac) planted with 2,200 olive trees: Leccino, Pendolino, Maurino, Frantoio, Coratina, Sevillano, Mission and Manzanilla. Their mill includes both a traditional stone and a hammer mill. This combination of time-honored and modern methods allows them to give each olive variety the handcrafting that brings out its unique expression. All of the olives are sustainably farmed, hand harvested, milled and bottled on the estate. Two extra virgin olive oils -Italian Varietal and Spanish Varietal- are joined by two citrus co-milled oils and several infused oils. Round Pond also produces red and white wine vinegars from estate-grown grapes.

1-2. Photo credits

Courtesy of Round Pond tasting
Briana Marie Photography

3. Photo credit

Kiyomi Wall



A TASTE OF SICILY IN THE SACRAMENTO VALLEY

Over the mountains that border Napa Valley on the east lies Yolo County. This flat farmland is home to row crops, fruit and nut trees, and olive orchards. The charming town of Winters and its Historic District give visitors a sense of California history, rural lifestyle, and fresh farm flavors. The Olive Center at UC Davis is 20 minutes away (visits by appointment at <https://olivecenter.ucdavis.edu>). Amidst this diverse agricultural bounty is a 4 ha (10 ac) farm making extra virgin olive oil from a mix of olive varieties found nowhere else in California.

Bondolio Olive Farm

Near Winters, off Hwy 505 about 80 minutes northeast from San Francisco.

Offerings:

Tours and tastings by appointment; can include pizza from a wood-fired oven served in their outdoor tasting room. Extended menu by arrangement.

Contact:

Orders@bondolio.com / 916-715-9007

Website:

www.bondolio.com/contact-us/

A passion for Sicily and its distinct olive oils inspired Karen and Malcolm Bond to transform their almond orchard into a traditional Sicilian olive grove of Nocellara, Biancolilla, and Cerasuola cultivars grown from cuttings the Bonds imported from Sicily. Both the grove and on-site mill used to create Bondolio's Sicilian estate blend are certified organic. Hands-on olive oil growers and millers, the Bonds live alongside their grove and the mill.

The Bondolio flavor profile, while readily found in Southern Italy and Sicily, is quite rare among California oils. A four-time Good Food Award winner, critically acclaimed Bondolio consistently earns awards, including Best in Show at the California State Fair in 2017 and 2019, and frequent gold medals from the New York and Los Angeles international olive oil competitions.



1. Photo credit
Bondolio

2. Photo credits
Bondolio
Judy Doherty Photography

3. Photo credit
Federica Gioia

OLIVE OILS WITH A SACRED CONNECTION TO THE LAND

The Capay Valley, northwest of Winters between the Napa and Sacramento Valleys, is the historic home of the Yocha Dehe Wintun Nation, where Native American people have lived for thousands of years. Reflecting the Tribe's sacred commitment to the land, the Tribe sustainably manages more than 9,700 ha (24,000 ac), cultivating over a dozen crops on 1,200 ha (3,000 ac). Dedicated stewards of the land, the Tribe has set aside areas for habitat restoration, permanent conservation, and rangeland for its growing herd of 800 cattle. Séka Hills is their line of agricultural products, named in their native Patwin language after the blue hills that overlook their lands.

Séka Hills Olive Mill and Tasting Room from Yocha Dehe Wintun Nation

On County Road 78, Brooks in the heart of the Capay Valley, off Highway 16 in Yolo County.

Offerings:

The Tasting Room, Weds-Sun 11 AM – 5 PM. Made-to-order food available. Mill and orchard tours by appointment.

Contact:

sekahills@sekahills.com / 530-796-2810

Website:

www.sekahills.com

Accommodations:

Minutes from the mill is the Cache Creek Casino Resort, a four-diamond luxury hotel owned and operated by the Tribe www.cachecreek.com

The Tribe first planted olive trees in 2008 on 33 ha (82 ac). Olive acreage is now over 200 ha (500 ac) in seven orchards. Séka Hills grows, harvests and mills monocultivar extra virgin olive oils, primarily Arbequina, Picual, Frantoio, Taggiasca, and Coratina. The Tasting Room, inside the mill facility, offers visitors guided tastings featuring the estate grown olive oils, wines and honey. The menu showcases the honey, tribal-raised beef, nuts, and other Tribal agricultural products as well as farm goods from the verdant Capay Valley and the region.



Photo credits
 Courtesy of Seka Hills
 Judy Doherty Photography

**More producer information:**

This is just a glimpse of what California and its olive oil industry has to offer. There is an online resource that lists many more visitor-friendly olive oil locations throughout the state, with a special section on harvest events.

www.ediblecommunities.com/edible-stories/olive-oil-heaven/

About the authors:

Alexandra Kicenik Devarenne is an olive oil consultant, writer, educator and international olive oil judge. She is the director of Extra Virgin Alliance, the specialty olive oil section of the North American Olive Oil Association (alexandra@calathena.com).

Roberta Klugman develops strategic plans and communications for the food and wine industries •