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THE PLACE TO BE

Gotta Be Gott's A late-spring lunch at an iconic wine country roadside burger stand

By Hunter Lewis



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FROM LEFT: **ANNIE FAVIA-ERICKSON**, FAVIA, Falafel Salad // **CHRIS PHELPS**, AD VIVUM, Ahi Burger // **CHRIS HALL**, LONG MEADOW RANCH, Double Cheeseburger // **CHRISTOPHER KOSTOW**, THE RESTAURANT AT MEADOWOOD, Green Chile Cheeseburger // **KERRIN LAZ**, K. LAZ WINE COLLECTION, Wisconsin Burger // **CHRIS COSENTINO**, ACACIA HOUSE AND COCKSCOMB, California Burger // **JENNIFER WILLIAMS**, ZIATA AND OTHERS, Vietnamese Chicken Salad // **JOSH PHELPS**, GROUNDED WINE CO., Texas Avocado Burger // **ARTIE JOHNSON**, STAGLIN FAMILY VINEYARD, Green Chile Cheeseburger // **MICHAEL POLENSKE**, BLACKBIRD



THE UNOFFICIAL INSTAGRAM rulebook states that you haven't truly arrived on a California vacation until you've posted a shot of a Double-Double Animal Style from In-N-Out Burger.

Hey, I've posted that photo, too. But for my money, the real burger to travel for is at Gott's Roadside in St. Helena.

And after that Niman Ranch burger dripping with secret sauce on a squishy egg bun? I'm going back again with friends for Crab Louie if it's in season. Or maybe Vietnamese chicken salad. Or a seared ahi tuna burger. That's the thing about Gott's: Everything on the menu is craveable. Everything is fresh. And everyone who works there is really nice.

Those are but a few of the reasons why you'll find local Napa Valley winemakers waiting in line with tourists. Owner Joel Gott told me the story of John Shafer, the late vintner, eating a cheeseburger next to a visitor enjoying a half bottle of Shafer's world-class Cabernet Sauvignon, while a guy from the power company was drinking a Budweiser at the next table. "It's like people are coming to Disneyland and don't realize they're sitting next to Mr. Disney," he said. "The locals are the famous people of the valley, and you're sitting next to them."

In that spirit, we invited some of those locals—chefs, winemakers, and other wine industry folks—to Gott's for lunch. Several choice bottles were consumed, and more than a few ice cream cones, too.

In 1999, Gott and his brother Duncan bought Taylor's Refresher, a "goofy little hamburger stand" in their hometown, eventually renaming it. In those early days, Joel Gott flipped burgers alongside employees from his grocery in Calistoga and interns from The French Laundry looking to make a few extra bucks. Naivete made the burger joint's high-low mix work, he says: "We didn't know a damn thing about running a restaurant, and that was the brilliance behind it."

That former side hustle to Gott's hugely successful wine company is now a 380-employee business with seven restaurants operating at Shake Shack-level efficiency. A new Gott's will open at Chase Center in San Francisco this year, and the company has its sights on the East Bay soon and maybe eventually Sacramento, Gott says.

The Gott's team also recently opened a coffee kiosk in an old gas station in St. Helena that may expand faster than the burger concept. Of course it's photogenic. Forget to snap that burger for Instagram before vacation ended? There's a Gott's at the San Francisco International Airport, too.

VINEYARDS, Chicken Schnitzel Sandwich // **SHANNON STAGLIN**, STAGLIN FAMILY VINEYARD, Mahi Mahi Tacos // **CHARLIE SMITH**, SMITH-MADRONE VINEYARDS & WINERY, Cheeseburger // **SAM SMITH**, SMITH-MADRONE, Texas Avocado Burger // **CARLTON MCCOY JR.**, HEITZ CELLAR, California Chicken Sandwich // **AMANDA MCCROSSIN**, PRESS, Ahi Poke Crispy Tacos // **DAVID GUILLOTY**, THE CHARTER OAK, Wisconsin Burger // **MARTINA KOSTOW**, THE RESTAURANT AT MEADOWOOD, Ahi Poke Crispy Tacos // **DLYNN PROCTOR**, FANTESCA ESTATE & WINERY, Kale Salad and California Burger

“Listen, you can go to a lot of restaurants and have a great meal,” says Joel Gott. “The number one thing here is to provide a good time.”



TOP LEFT: Owner Joel Gott (go-to order: Chicken Schnitzel Sandwich) serves ice cream to Carissa Mondavi of Continuum Estate (Veggie Burger with cheese and a Black-and-White Milkshake). TOP RIGHT: Napa Valley chefs and wine industry folks raise glasses of their wines for a late-spring toast in the backyard of Gott's Roadside. BOTTOM: Chris Hall, Kerrin Laz, and Chris Cosentino at the order window with Gott's employee Deborah Reyes. OPPOSITE: Gott's menu staples like burgers, fries, and tuna tacos with seasonal offerings like corn, watermelon, and an ever-changing rotation of salads

