"WHERE IN THE WORLD IS CORI BRETT?"

January 2011

SONOMA COUNTY GOLF AND WINE

The Links at Bodega Harbour

I love fall in the wine country. Imagine yourself in the midst of a vineyard at harvest time – ripe, juicy grapes are plucked from the vines, and the fall crush begins. It's an incredibly busy time for wine-makers, especially with the many wine festivals and events that mark the season. Fall also happens to be a great time of year for a golf getaway. My favorite wine/golf spot is northern California's Sonoma County, a quiet, more laid-back alternative to Napa Valley, and home to some wonderful courses.

Sonoma can be pricey - worldwide fame does that to a destination. Fortunately, I was able to use the AWGA Choice Hotels Savings Card and found a Quality Inn in Santa Rosa that was really nice, affordable and conveniently located. It served as "home base" for our golf and wine tasting adventure. For info on what's available, visit www.sonomacounty.com.

Hole No. 14 on Foxtail South Course

Foxtail Golf Club, located in nearby Rohnert Park, offers two fun courses that are easily walkable. The North Course's higher green fee delivers better conditioning and a more challenging layout. South features a shorter tee option (4,818 yards) and the best deal of all: $5 green fee after 5 pm.

Fall weather usually chases away the coastal fog, so we had a spectacular day at The Links at Bodega Harbour. The hilly front nine commands wide ocean views, while the back nine sweeps all the way down to the surf and finishes among fresh water marshland on holes 16 through 18. It's worth the drive out to the coast to play the course, or stay at Bodega Bay Lodge and make a weekend of it. I confess to keeping an eye out for marauding black birds. Alfred Hitchcock's thriller "The Birds" was filmed nearby.

Sonoma County sprawls from coastal towns to lush inland valleys and north to the Russian River's majestic redwood groves. At the nine-hole Northwood Golf Club in Monte Rio, towering redwoods line the fairways and lend a sense of deep solitude to the course. It's beautifully conditioned and a treat to play. Northwood

was designed by Alister MacKenzie in 1928, famed architect of Augusta National and Cypress Point. It was originally created for the exclusive Bohemian Club.

Wine country and gourmet dining go together, so there's no shortage of wonderful restaurants in Sonoma County. I just have to tell you about Willie Bird's in Santa Rosa."Turkey always and turkey all ways!" is their motto. Locally grown, free range, Willie Bird turkeys have graced holiday tables for more than 40 years. Willie Bird's Restaurant serves breakfast, lunch and dinner every day. It's a full menu, but turkey rules.

I always make time to visit a few wineries. Some require an appointment for tasting or for winery tours. I like Benziger Family Winery, in Glen Ellen, for their wonderful wines and for the care they take to produce wines that are certified sustainable, organic or biodynamic. Lambert Bridge Winery is located down a narrow country lane in Healdsburg, with a rustic ambiance and a comfortable "hands-on" appeal.

If my scorecard warrants a celebration, I'll head to Korbel Champagne Cellars. Korbel has been making champagne in the Russian River Valley since 1882, using the traditional "methode champenoise" technique. I just love the way those tiny bubbles tickle my nose. Cheers!

"Escape with Cori" on assignment to fun and exotic golf destinations. First-hand impressions from an experienced golf travel writer and AWGA member. www.coribrett.com
Copyright Cori Brett 2010-do not copy or cite in whole or in part without permission.