



## Oxbow - Napa gets a farmers' market

publication date: Jan 7, 2008

author/source: Linda Murphy

### Napa's new look

If you haven't been to Napa in the past year, you wouldn't recognize the place. No, the route along Highway 29 hasn't changed much, except for an Italian medieval castle (with moat and drawbridge) here and a new spa over there.

It's Napa city that's changing, going from frog to prince with new hotels, a bustling restaurant scene and, this week, the full-fledged opening of the 40,000-square-foot Oxbow Public Market, a European-style market that features restaurants, gourmet food purveyors, wine and cheese merchants, a bakery, 10 farmstand stalls and Michael Mondavi's Folio Enoteca and Winery, a micro-winery, wine shop and café.

Oxbow Public Market is adjacent to [Copia](#) on First Street, in an area called the Oxbow District that hugs the Napa River and is just a quick bridge-cross away from the revitalized downtown area. The district is far from the big-box stores, fast-food restaurants, chain motels and factory outlets that visitors see when they drive through Napa on Highway 29. A detour from this main drag to the east side of town now rewards with great food, wine, shopping and accommodations; the only thing missing is vineyards, though those can be found north of town and all the way to Calistoga.

Now that the Napa River has been fortified against floods, the east side of Napa town is booming, drawing locals and visitors alike to [Copia](#), the (originally) Mondavi-backed shrine to wine and food that got off to a very slow start but is picking up steam; the refurbished Napa Valley Opera House; the upscale Napa River Inn; and new eateries, wine bars and tasting rooms. A sure sign of Napa's growing sophistication is the fabulously successful [Ubuntu](#) vegetarian restaurant, where one must look hard at the menu to find a mention of tofu; it really is all about the vegetables.

And Napa is not even close to being done. The Westin Verasa hotel/condominium complex will open this summer, northwest of the Oxbow Public Market, and a Ritz-Carlton is planned for the northeast side of [Copia](#), to open in 2009. A landscaped "river walk" will eventually connect the hotels, Oxbow Public Market and downtown, bringing everyone together in one big, happy, visitor-friendly family.

Oxbow Public Market is the cornerstone of this renaissance. Founder/CEO Steve Carlin, the man behind San Francisco's Ferry Building Marketplace and the Oakville Grocery chain, sees the market first as a hangout for locals, and second as a tourist attractant. He tells me it's a place for the community to gather, for neighbours to gab, for folks to shop for fresh meats and produce on a daily basis, rather than hitting the supermarket once or twice a week and letting their greens get old in the refrigerator.

Vendors renting the Oxbow farm stalls will sell produce from 100 miles away or less. Some will be there year-round, others will rent space for their seasonal specialties. The market is open seven days a week, improving upon the California norm of farmers' markets being open only one or two days a week.

It works in Italy, it works in France, so why not Napa? That's Carlin's thinking. He and his investors are pitching the Oxbow concept to other US cities, and Carlin says he's talking with officials in Santa Rosa (Sonoma County), San Jose and other cities to develop similar projects.

Now open at Oxbow Public Market are Pica Pica Maize Kitchen (Venezuelan cuisine); Five Dot Ranch beef; Fete tabletop essentials; Anette's Chocolate Factory; Heritage Culinary Artifacts antiques; Three Twins Organic Ice Cream; the Olive Press; Kitchen Library collectibles; Tillerman Tea; and the Whole Spice Co.

Opening later in January are the Oxbow Wine Merchant and Wine Bar (from the folks who run the Ferry Plaza Wine Merchant); Oxbow Cheese Merchant (with Kate Arding, formerly of Neal's Yard Dairy in London and Cowgirl Creamery in California's Marin County); Rotisario grilled meats and poultry; Taylor's Automatic Refresher hamburger emporium; the Fatted Calf charcuterie/butcher; and the Model Bakery.

In April, Kanaloa Seafood opens. Still to be announced is a restaurant tenant -- reported to be a well-known Bay Area chef -- and a coffee vendor.

Yountville, St. Helena and Calistoga likely won't be hurt financially by the city of Napa's resurgence, as Napa Valley has had to turn away potential visitors due to lack of rooms. Napa is creating those rooms. My only concern is that traffic, already frustratingly slow through Napa Valley during peak hours, will get worse now that Napa is such a draw. The flip side is that some tourists will stop at Napa city, not venturing farther north, thus leaving more road and rooms for the rest of us.