

JANUARY 2019
Cover photo by Briana Marie

ST. HELENA

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**Fine Art and
Luscious Wine**

A CONVERSATION WITH
LAYLA AND ROB FANUCCI



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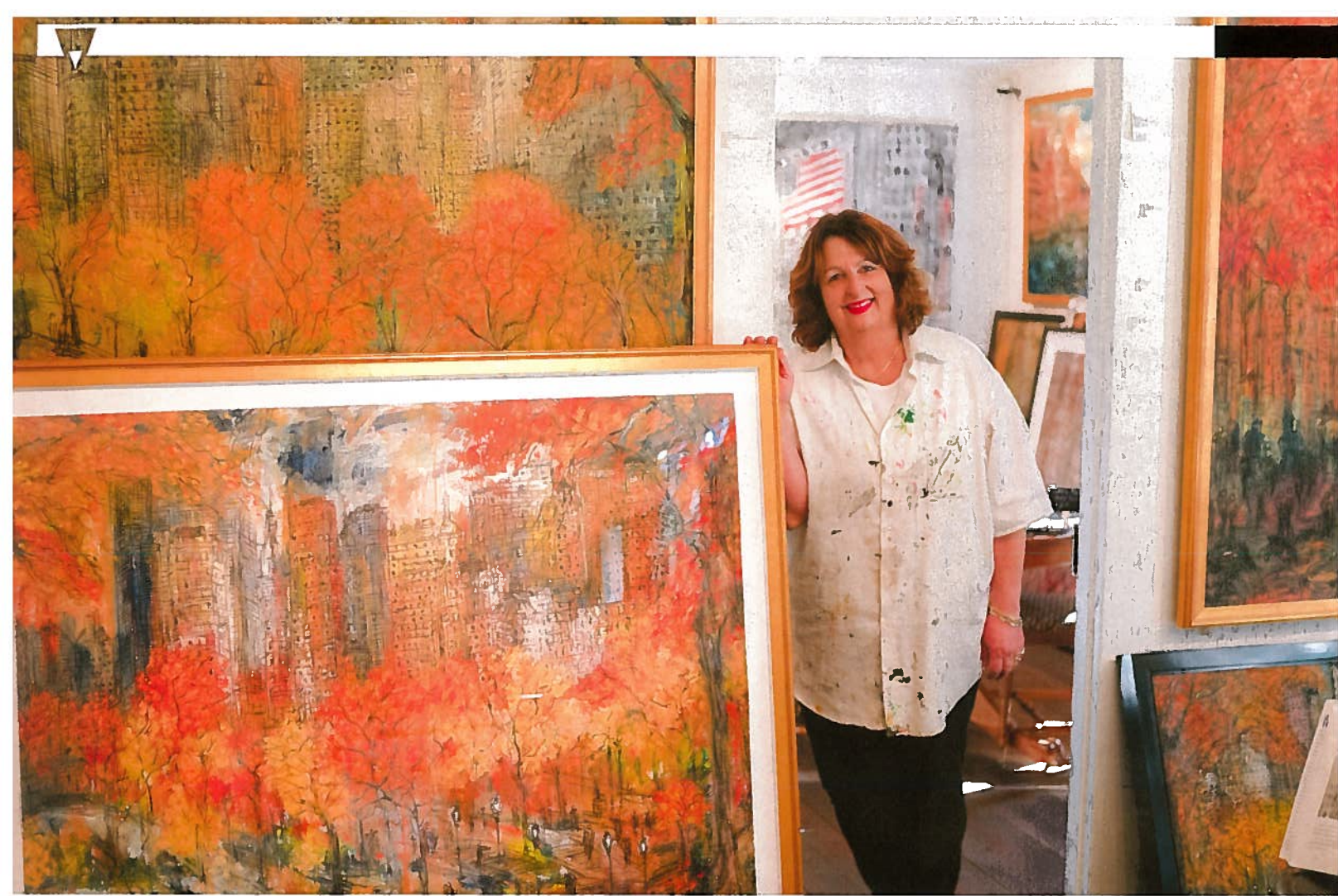
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Fine Art and Luscious Wine

A CONVERSATION WITH LAYLA AND ROB FANUCCI

BY JENN SLOAN

Artistic expression, be it for wine or painting is in great abundance in this 1900's Charter Oak Street home. Meet Layla and Rob Fanucci; ready to celebrate their fortieth wedding anniversary, who have made a practice of creating fine art and luscious wine a family affair.

This chapter begins with a living room wall that used to house a Monet poster. At the time Layla was a music teacher and director of the children's choir at the St. Helena Catholic School with three school age children and she had taken the poster down. "It was nice," she says, "just like

some music is nice. But to me, there's a difference between hearing a good CD and hearing a live band that moves you and takes your breath away." Spoken like a true music teacher, perhaps yours?

She went on a quest to find a piece of art that she loved to fill the blank wall by visiting galleries in Napa Valley, and the prices were much more than she was prepared to pay. So, she decided to paint something herself. For the first time, ever. She bought a large canvas, paints and brushes and painted a big bold abstract with color and symbolism. When she took it to Alan's back when it was still there to have it framed, Alan asked, "Do you mind if I let it dry before I frame it"? At that time, she had no idea that this single act would launch her into a new creative career.

Over the next year friends would stop by and several asked Layla to create a piece of art for their homes as well. Layla was inspired and continued to paint, loving the entire process. You might say that she became addicted. At that time Layla had been teaching music for twenty-five years and decided to quit teaching full time and fully explore if she could be an artist, not as a hobby but as a job and make money at it. She did this even though the advice she received was to teach part-time and see if the art goes anywhere. Layla knew that if she really wanted to pursue her art, she had to commit and give it everything she had.

The next two years Layla built up a body of work, and brought it to an art consultant in New York and asked the question "here's my work, can I make my art a business"? She studied it

*An investment in
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RECIPE CALL OUT!

BY JENN SLOAN

There are many great cooks in St. Helena. Some of them are even professional chefs! If you have a favorite family recipe that you would like to share with your neighbors in St. Helena Living, please send it to JSloan@BestVersionMedia.com. Be certain to include your name, the recipe's origins and any bit of family lore that you might want to share.

Please keep the seasons in mind and if you have variations that make the recipe work for different dietary needs, list those as well. We will select recipes to publish and share with the community based upon tastiness and available space. Who knows what we'll cook up next... perhaps not a wolf.

BY JULIA ORR

JUST TOO ADOPTABLE

Meet Mary Poppins!



AKA "Poppy," Mary Poppins is, in addition to being all the things cats always are (which is to say, beautiful, elegant, mysterious), a party girl. She loves hanging with humans, especially loves heat butts and scratches, and will lick any exposed part of a human foot to get attention. She'll even stand up on two legs to reach for those

scratching hands. And, in the bargain, she gets along well with other cats! Not fond of being held, but always willing to be by your side. If you would like more info about Karl or Mary Poppins please email JARR Adoption Manager, Mike Weins at mike@jamesonrescueranch.org



and said that you have to create a style no one paints in the world to be marketable.

During that time Layla and the consultant worked together, the consultant critiquing each new batch of work and Layla going back into her studio to experiment. Through the process, she developed that unique Layla Fanucci style of cityscapes: painting layer upon layer of color to capture the mood of a city—New York, Paris, Venice. For inspiration Layla looks to photographs, postcards, her travels and memories. When the paint dries, she adds architectural details like buildings and bridges, and then gives the painting life with motion and energy before covering it with more color. She paints several cities on top of the first one, creating depth and texture, so if you look closely you can almost see the other cities and architectural details bleeding through. They capture the essence of the urban environment, often adding a feeling of the musical movement beneath the cityscapes.

"The goal was to try and find something that no one had done before. I was in my mid-forties so that transfer was really great. "I actually said when I went to have my art evaluated that I have three children, almost all in college. They're all good, but expensive so I have to make this a business. If not, I'll go back to teaching. That took her back. She speculated that perhaps as I had the teaching background the business side was already there and the artistic background as well from growing up with music. "My husband said, 'I feel like we're on the Titanic and you just jumped.'" We, her viewers and patrons are grateful she did.

Layla proved herself as an original to the art consultant, who introduced her to a prominent gallery in New York City, offering

her a solo show of her paintings. If they didn't sell, the consultant warned, Layla's art career was done. Nine sold in one month.

"It is the goal for any artist to have people connect with your work on a deeper level," Fanucci says. "When the number of collectors reflects that, as it did for me in 2013, it's a humbling feeling." Point in fact, in 2013 Layla sold 32 paintings and made more money that year than had she been teaching for 33 years.

What moment did it shift, from an aspiration to the next career? "It was pretty quick. Once I had developed my style, the cities on top of cities that no one paints, I started selling paintings and making money right away." Layla was featured in Marlo Thomas's book "It Ain't Over.... Till It's Over: Reinventing Your Life and Realizing Your Dreams Anytime at Any Age, published in 2014. "Today I have sold 450 original paintings, not Giclées." The work sells, it was slow, but it was always continual, and the prices went up as time passed.

Our children are proud of me. They grew up with me being their music teacher and saw my music talent and like a lot of people think she just transferred mediums from music to art and kind of used her artistic voice in a different way. They're proud of me, particularly when I sell!"

There are a number of versions about how they met. "Layla was a soloist in a holiday concert." Rob says, "I saw this gorgeous woman walking by, we had a mutual friend, and went out to eat at a restaurant called Loves in Menlo Park." They went on to San Francisco State University together both graduating with a Bachelor of Arts degree, and Rob went to earn his Juris Doctor at Golden Gate University and then his graduate law degree in taxation at New York University. Today if you look at Layla's New York cityscapes you can almost feel the indel-

ible impression captured on linen canvas of their life in New York, years before she ever took a brush to her imagination.

Rob was born in San Francisco, and all four grandparents were born in Italy. His grandfather Guido Ragghianti, who brought his winemaking heritage to Charter Oak in the 1920's first exposed Rob to wine.

The original home and cellar was built and structurally untouched since 1900. "The Italians used this as a meeting place. My grandfather bartered cheese, wine, olive oil, and people would come up here from San Francisco and get water from the well, help pick the grapes and make wine, they would get involved."

"I got mesmerized," says Rob, who as a kid helped his grandfather Guido pick and crush grapes. We are sitting in the spotless kitchen where Guido lived and made wine until his death at 98 in 1986. Growing up there was a lot of wine and food at the table, lots of food, not just big meals on special occasions, but lots of food at all meals. We drank wine, a lot of wine at this table. One of my first memories of wine was my grandfather Guido giving me a bottle of sweet wine, with a string around it. There was probably a bit of fermentation going on but not a lot, so I'd get a sip of that, and then here at this table, eating brandied prunes and brandied raisins ever since I was six or seven years old. We also drank wine with water, *acqua con vino*.

We would come up here for the weekends, harvest time, go out and pick grapes, late 1960's and through the 1970's until he passed away in 1986." Rob, then working for Dean Witter, opted to stay in California rather than move back to New York. At the time, he and Layla had two young daughters, Michelle, who would become an Emmy-winning TV producer, and Nicole, now a therapist "Every family

business needs a licensed therapist," Layla says with a laugh. Their third child, David came a few years later. All went to school in St. Helena, and Layla taught their music classes. They moved in with Guido, later buying their own home nearby. Before he died, the patriarch taught his grandson how to make wine as his family had done it for generations. Rob, who'd grown up drinking vino, was hooked.

"Guido died that year in December. He taught me his old-world art of winemaking. I was very fortunate, because I don't learn very well from books, especially a craft or skill, artistic expression, I learn better by the doing of it. The chemistry came later, but the art, the passion for wine started in 1986 and I've become addicted to it -- its part of my blood," Rob says.

At Charter Oak it is still a small family business, a small boutique winery, following Guido's old world Italian winemaking methods. There are no chemicals or artificial colors or grape concentrate to sweeten the wine, all fermenting is on natural yeast, using hand punch downs with old redwood bats made by Guido in the 1920s to extract everything out of the skins and pulp, and the fruit is pressed in the 120-year-old basket press. "The hand press gives a gentle extraction, with a little less yield so instead of 165 gallons you may get 145 but the wine comes out silky, soft, approachable and drinkable early." Rob adds. Rob also does a lot of custom blending.

Their son, Dave Fanucci, a third-generation winemaker, who in addition to learning from his father, also studied wine in college in Walla Walla, Washington. Dave was named the "Top Young Winemaker" during the Next Gen Wine Competition for Millennial Wine Buyers. Additionally, his Charter Oak Winery Sonoma Valley Monte Rosso Vineyard 2007

Zinfandel took "Best of Show" at the competition, besting nearly 750 other wines.

"Charter Oak's production is miniscule at around 1,000 cases, this year a little higher. We are 100% direct to consumer through the wine club. When we first started, retail sales were unbelievable and then the great recession hit, and many brokers and distributors scaled back or went out of business. For a little winery it's hard to get the attention of a big distributor, they are not looking after small brands. The upside of that downside is that we went out of wholesale and shifted to direct to consumer and never looked back. It was a blessing in disguise, and it took time, almost five years to shift."

In addition to the wine business, Rob, is an attorney shareholder at Gagen, McCoy, McMahon, Koss, Markowitz and Fanucci in St. Helena. He represents a number of local wineries and vineyard owners with real estate, business, estate planning, tax law and succession planning. "For me, balancing between tax law and winemaking, I keep my sanity by making wine," Rob says with a laugh.

"I find that our lives are a wonderful merger between art and wine. It really gives us a lot of joy and satisfaction to produce an artistic expression. With Layla, it's art and for me it's wine that is well received and people

really enjoy it. That motivates me, and I'm motivated in my law career as I have a number of great clients, and there is a symbiotic relationship between my clients in the wine industry and me owning a winery."

Layla adds "one of my favorite sayings is its a joy to create but it's an honor to share. I love to create and then I love the full circle of it, the people that buy my art, the people that come back for more and talk about how it lights up their room, their space. It is the creation yes, but I also value the sharing part."

Rob too in an earlier life had another form of artistic expression; he designed and made jewelry that he also sold. He even made their wedding rings, almost forty years ago. However, when they relocated to the east coast early in their careers, he left all his jewelry making tools behind and hasn't looked back, yet. If you ask Marlo Thomas, there's still time though.

On Layla's side of the family, her father was born and raised in Istanbul, and her mother was born and raised in France. When they were twenty, they both came to Berkeley and met. "I had a Turkish father and French mother, an Italian husband and three very American children. My father and grandfather were architects in Istanbul, so while we're just a typical family there were a lot of cultures under one roof"

"When I made that transition from teaching, I loved to teach, but I was ready for a change. Teaching is bringing out the talent in your students, and it should be that way and I spent all the time doing that, I loved doing that. What's so fun about art is that I get to bring out my talent. It's so fun for me because there's no restrictions, its free, I was ready for it, and I have never said I don't want to paint today. I can't wait to get started every day.

I've learned that often the downfall of many artists, they want to just do the art, and not the business. I do definitely at least 50% business every day, and 50% painting. I don't necessarily like all of the business effort, but you can't get where you need to go if you don't focus on business also. For me, meeting people, the letters, the calls lead to success as an artist"

"I paint every day if I'm not exhibiting. What I like to emphasize with my art is all the cities underneath and that the style is very different. I try to get in five or six hours a day. If I can get in more time, I'm really happy and those are great days -- I call them my best days! For me, because I have to focus, I try to have people help me on other things, so I can focus.

Some people enjoy the wine; some people the art. Most often it's both. I'll share and answer questions on both." Yet another

intersection between the art and wine here is that Layla's images are etched and painted on Monte Rosso Old Vine Hillside Zinfandel, as well as Uncle George Cabernet Sauvignon, after Layla's Uncle George, who owns a vineyard in France.

Over the years, the Fanucci's have been fixtures in the community in varying roles. Rob served on the planning commission for eight years, which can always be controversial, from 1993 - 2001. "I always say I've insulted everybody at least once in this town because when you take a position half the people don't like the position and half do, and then on another position, the half that liked your previous position don't. Politics can be very divisive in this town you can see the old world and new world in town"

Rob also served on the Napa Valley Family Homes Board, which built Hunts Grove and the Stonebridge projects in St. Helena as well as other affordable housing projects in the Napa Valley. He's also served a stint on the board of directors for the St. Helena Boys and Girls Club. Layla used to have children come once a year from the St. Helena Catholic School where she was the music director, and she would give them a tour, show them her paintings and talk about Rob's family winemaking history, both art

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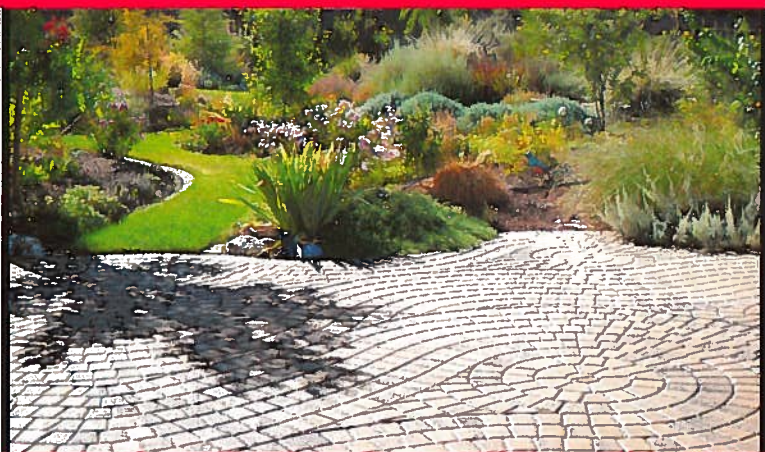


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forms and then give them each a canvas, paints and brushes and they would make their own art piece. "I did that for many years and I loved it and I was sorry that the St. Helena Catholic School closed. This will be the first year that we don't have that program. It was a wonderful experience for me, and I hope for them," Layla adds.

"I am also a supporter of San Francisco University, as we both graduated from that University and I try to give back, they gave

us so much and I'm honored to have a painting there in the J.P. Leonard Library's permanent collection. That was my donation and we try to do what we can in the ways that we can.

When asked what do you want to share with newcomers and your neighbors? "Follow your passion. To be here, it is such a beautiful place to live and work. If you can find a passion whether that's cooking, creating, doing things for non-profits, get involved. Get to know

your neighbors, our community, join a board or volunteer. This is a wonderful community, and the people here are good people, almost like a big extended family. Here at the Fannucci home and businesses, this is a family affair, art and fine wine merged together, all under one roof in a warm and welcoming turn of the century home on Charter Oak Avenue.



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JANUARY 12 - 20 | MON - THURS 6:00 PM - 9:00 PM FRI - SUN TIL 10:00 PM

► **Napa Lighted Art Festival**@ Downtown Napa

Experience an illuminating art walk during the season of lights. This festival creates stunning artwork as light displays are projected onto a variety of buildings throughout Downtown Napa and the Oxbow District. Fourteen original artworks will light up the night sky for 9 days in this unique display. Do the Napa lights and join us this holiday season for the Napa Lighted Art Festival! Symposium Series with daytime and evening discussions, Art After Dark with Rails Art District and Music Downtown.

Price: Free +
www.donapa.com/lights/ | 707-257-9529

JANUARY 15 | N/A

► **Nimbash tickets go on sale for Nimbash Saturday May 18th event**@ Nimbus Arts

649 Main Street, St. Helena

It's never too late to reserve your spot for the most creative and visually stimulating arty party that the Napa Valley has to offer.

www.nimbusarts.org | 707-963-5278

JANUARY 17 | 6:30 PM - 9:30 PM

► **Beyond the Valley, A Water to Wine Festival**@ CIA at Copia

500 1st Street, Napa

In 2018, international water organization W|W, sent a film crew to capture the impact of water in the lives of people around the world. W|W has worked in over 30 countries to provide clean water to people who most need it. In the 20-minute documentary, you will witness the stories of three amazing people, and how their service through water and their generous spirit has transformed thousands of lives in their communities.

Price: Free (RSVP Required/limited space)
www.ciaatcopia.com | 707-967-2500

JANUARY 18 - 21

► **Napa Truffle Festival**@ Westin Verasa Napa, and event locations throughout Napa Valley

The ninth annual truffle festival, hosted by the American Truffle Company Brings together two complimentary aspects of European truffles: the best chefs in the world known for their truffle cuisine, and truffle experts/scientists recognized for their truffle cultivation expertise. Gourmands and aspiring truffle growers alike will find a bounty of activities through the weekend to satisfy their appetite and curiosity. Events range from a free marketplace at Oxbow, wild mushroom forays, orchard tour with dog training demo, cooking demos, tastings and dinners.

www.napatrufflefestival.com | 888-753-9378
Price: Free - \$495 depending on the event

FRIDAY JANUARY 18 | 6:00 PM GAMES START AT 7:00 PM

► **Bingo Night Hosted by Soroptimist St. Helena Sunrise**@ Native Sons Hall

1313 Spring Street, St. Helena

Chase the January Blues away!

Hot Dogs, Chili and Beverages available for purchase. Proceeds will benefit Rianda House & Soroptimist Awards. St. Helena Fire Chief, John Sorensen will be our Bingo Caller.

Price: \$25 for 9 games

JANUARY 19 | 5:00 PM - 6:00 PM

► **Earth From Beyond Napa Lighted Art Symposium**@ CIA at Copia

Only by reaching far beyond the Earth, and looking back, do we see that Earth is but a blue marble suspended in a sunbeam. We also occupy a precious place in time in which humans can thrive. What does the future hold? Scientists and artists come together to bridge data and society, and launch new missions to space to look back with new eyes into the now and future of our planet.

Price: Free
www.ciaatcopia.com | 707-967-2500

SATURDAY JANUARY 19 | 7:00 PM

► **14th Annual A Cappella Extravaganza**@ Napa Valley Performing ArtsCenter Lincoln Theater

100 California Drive, Yountville

Headlining this year's concert are winners of the Moscow International A Cappella Championship, Six Appeal. Six Appeal is a world-class vocal ensemble infused with sharp comedic timing, and the energy and vitality of a rock band. This popular high-energy concert boasts a lineup of high school and collegiate professional groups.

www.lincolntheater.com | 707-944-9900
Price: \$30

SUNDAY JANUARY 20 - SUNDAY JANUARY 27TH |

► **Napa Valley Restaurant Week is here!**

Through multi-course prix-fixe menus for lunch (\$20) and dinner (\$36 or \$46), guests can try out the latest culinary hot spots or revisit old favorites all week long. Our farm-to-table practices and Michelin-Star rated restaurants make the Napa Valley an epicurean's destination, and there's no better time to enjoy it all than during Restaurant Week.

www.visitnapavalley.com

SUNDAY JANUARY 20 | NOON - 3:00 PM

► **Winery Truffle Lunch**@ Hall Winery

401 St. Helena Hwy South, St. Helena

Your adventure here begins with a private tour, cooking demo and lunch presented by

Michelin Star Chef Jarad Gallagher emceed by the Foodie Chap in the winery's state-of-the-art culinary center. Post demonstration, enjoy a dazzling multi-course truffle lunch, prepared by the superstar chef and perfectly paired with HALL's superb signature wines.

www.hallwines.com | 707-967-2626

Price: \$295

SUNDAY JANUARY 20 | 3:00 PM

► **Render Unto Caesar: Music from the Court of Leopold I, Holy Roman Emperor**@ Napa Valley Performing ArtsCenter Lincoln Theater

100 California Drive, Yountville

Violet Grgich and Les Violettes presents a concert of music written under the patronage of Leopold by Antonio Bertali, Giovanni Felice Sances, Giovanni Bonocini, and Johann Heinrich Schmelzer.

www.lincolntheater.com | 707-944-9900
Price: \$85

MONDAY JANUARY 21 | 7:45 PM

► **The Catcher Was A Spy / Science on Screen**@ Cameo Cinema

1340 Main Street, St. Helena

This gripping, stranger-than-fiction espionage thriller brings to life the incredible true story of Moe Berg, the professional baseball player who became a World War II spy. The guest speaker is Valerie Plame Wilson. Serving as a covert operations officer for the CIA, Valerie Plame kept her occupation and identity a secret. All that changed in 2002 when a conservative columnist, leaked her true identity. It ended her covert career and set off a scandal that rocked the Bush/Cheney White House.

www.cameocinema.org | 707-963-9779
Price: \$8

WEDNESDAY - SUNDAY | THROUGH MARCH 31, 2019 | 11:00 AM - 4:00 PM

► **Walt Disney's Trains**@ Napa Valley Museum

55 Presidents Circle, Yountville

This family-friendly exhibition, organized with San Francisco's Walt Disney Family Museum, explores the influence that railroad trains had on Walt Disney's life and work. It also tells the story of how his railroading legacy lives on to this day

www.napavalleymuseum.org | 707-944-0550
Price: Free for members, \$20 non-members, \$15 seniors (over 65), \$10 Youths under 17

SUNDAY JANUARY 20 | 3:00 PM

► **Slade Patrick Darrin, pianist**@ The White Barn

2727 Sulphur Springs Avenue, St. Helena

With her virtuosic style and versatility, Darrin entertains audiences with a repertoire that spans classical and pop offerings, from Mozart and Mendelssohn to Joplin and Jolson. His performing persona recalls a young Victor Borge. Don't miss this up and coming talent in his White barn debut.

www.whitebarn.com | 707-987-8225
Price: \$20