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THE LOCAL FLAVOR

The bounty of Sonoma County plays into everything Kyle and Katina Connaughton do, from the dishes they create at their Michelin-starred restaurant, SingleThread, to the way they play outside the kitchen. Turn to page 87 for their guide to Northern California wine country.

PHOTOGRAPH BY [ALANNA HALE](#)

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SONOMA'S TRUE COLORS

The chef and farmer behind the Michelin-starred **SingleThread** live a life as rooted in wine country as their uber-seasonal restaurant.

by Josh Sens

AS KYLE AND KATINA Connaughton see it, there are two versions of wine country: There's the postcard-pretty place that outsiders envision, a tourist-ready set piece of vineyards and tasting rooms. And then there's the postcard-pretty place where people work and live, a region with distinctive local flavors and more dimensions than a guidebook can reveal.

The latter is the wine country the Connaughtons found in the northern Sonoma County town of Healdsburg, where they run **SingleThread**, the two-Michelin-star restaurant and inn that is something of a fantasy turned real. "We've lived and worked around the

world, but we always had in mind having a place in Healdsburg," Kyle says. "We couldn't have imagined doing this anywhere else."

At **SingleThread**, Kyle is the chef while Katina farms a nearby parcel that supplies the kitchen with the bulk of its produce. The operation is a pairing of their complementary passions. It's also a reflection of their bountiful surroundings. In the year-round growing season, on a five-acre plot at the north edge of town, Katina harvests more than 70 kinds of fruits, vegetables, and herbs, all destined for the journey from dirt to dining room. Many are hard-to-come-by Japanese varieties—such as Kyoto red carrots and bell-shaped kamo nasu eggplants—that ornament Kyle's ever-shifting 11-course *haishiki*-style menu. What Katina doesn't cultivate, the Connaughtons acquire

Kyle and Katina Connaughton spent two years prepping their land, which they farm by Japanese microseasons, before opening their inn and restaurant in 2016.

from the region's purveyors and producers. They've gone so far as to contract with a farmer to breed a duck to the restaurant's just-so specifications.

Their non-working hours are locally focused, too. The couple's home is eight miles from the farm. On Mondays, the one day a week **SingleThread** is dark, Kyle and Katina can often be found strolling the town plaza or walking their dog, a Black Mouth Cur named Murray, along the Russian River, which runs close to town.

"We love the beauty of the scenery and the outdoor lifestyle here, but also this town center that's so vibrant without feeling crowded," Katina says. "We still enjoy traveling, but nothing makes us quite as happy as coming home."

SingleThread, like old-growth vines, did not develop overnight. The seed was planted in 1998, when Kyle and Katina, newly wed and in their early 20s, motored north from their hometown of Los Angeles on a wine country road trip. Stumbling onto Healdsburg, they delighted in a main square that attracted travelers with tasting rooms, bakeries, cheese shops, and trattorias but which also brimmed with locals—folks with ties to one another and connections to the land. The couple knew they wanted to put down roots in Sonoma, but first, they wanted to live abroad; they eventually relocated to Japan, then England, for eight years total, with Kyle working in esteemed kitchens and Katina exercising her green thumb. All along, they held onto the dream of Healdsburg, paying visits every chance they got. In 2011, they made the move permanent and got cracking on their ambitious plan.

Like the restaurant, Healdsburg has evolved. In the 20 years since the Connaughtons first set foot here, new shops, hotels, and restaurants have layered the town with greater levels of refinement.

"It's more of a destination now," Katina says, "but it still possesses that alluring, small-town charm that we initially fell in love with. I can't see that ever changing."

Here are some of the spots in the area that she and Kyle like showing off when friends and family come to visit.



Kistler Vineyards



Kistler Vineyards

Kistler Vineyards Trenton Roadhouse

"We're big fans of the tasting experience here," Kyle says. "It's not the typical one where you stand and quickly drink through pours. You can relax at tables overlooking their vineyards and winemaking facilities." *By appointment only.* kistlervineyards.com

Noble Folk Ice Cream and Pie Bar

"The owners of this ice cream and pie shop are two darling men who create sweets as sweet as they are," Katina says. "Their peanut butter pie—peanut butter mousse in a chocolate pie shell—is a spiritual experience." thenoblefolk.com

Armstrong Redwoods State Natural Reserve

"One of our favorite hikes is through the old-growth redwood trees on the Armstrong Nature Trail," Kyle says. "The 310-foot-tall trees make you feel you've entered an ancient world. The oldest is thought to be 1,400 years old." www.parks.ca.gov

Russian River Brewing Company

Best known for producing Pliny the Younger, a craft beer that helped put Sonoma brews on the map, this hangout is also a first-rate brewpub. "They serve pub food done with care, like wings and thin-crust pizza," Kyle says. russiandrinking.com



Russian River Brewing



Armstrong Redwoods



Noble Folk

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SingleThread

The Connaughtons designed their restaurant to feel like you are going to a dinner party in their home, and their five-room hotel takes inspiration from the English country inns and Japanese ryokans they visited on their travels. Rooms from \$600. singlethreadfarms.com

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Idlewild Wines

Idlewild Wines

This salumi and wine bar just off Healdsburg's main square is an antidote to the "churn-and-burn" winetasting experience, Kyle says. "They'll slice you a little cured ham, some local cheese, and you can hang out without feeling that you're being sold anything." idlewildwines.com



Shed

Shed

"A culinary emporium with cookware, wines, great coffee, an incredible cheese collection, a terrific restaurant, you name it," Kyle says. "It's where you'll likely find me if I'm meeting someone for coffee or getting together with a friend for a casual meal." healdsburgshed.com

Campo Fina

The ingredients are locally sourced at this popular Italian spot. "We're particularly fond of the *sugo calabrese*," Katina says. "It's the best pasta in town, hands down." Adds Kyle: "There's also a back patio with a bocce court that gives it a family-friendly feel." campofina.com

Williams Selyem Winery

To do a tasting, you'll need to join a members' list, for which there's a six-month wait, "but it's worth the effort," Kyle says. "The winery has been around for a few decades but still feels like an up-and-coming producer, making dynamic pinot noir." *By appointment only.* williamsselyem.com



Williams Selyem Winery



Campo Fina



Campo Fina