

# Vintners Inn

By Alexandra Russell

Asked what makes Vintners Inn in Santa Rosa a perennial BEST Of winner, General Manager Percy Brandon reflects, "Over the years, we've made some really incredible relationships within the community. So when it comes time to name a favorite place, we come up on top. They support us, because we support them."

With more than one dozen wins in multiple categories over the years (making it among the all-time top honorees), it's clear the VI team is doing something right. Then again, what's not to love?

The intimate, 44-room Vintners Inn is nestled on 92 acres of mostly vineyard and open space, so even though it's easily accessible from Highway 101, it feels worlds away. "Only 10 of our 92 acres are zoned for multiple businesses," says Brandon, "so we have the hotel, restaurant [John Ash & Co.; see page 84] and event center. We've also recently expanded our entertaining areas by installing bocce courts and multiple gardens."

Upon check-in, guests will find a split (half-bottle) of Ferarri-Carano Vintners Inn Fumé (Don and Rhonda Carano own both businesses)—just the right welcome for weary travelers. All rooms feature king-size feather beds with turn-down service (including fresh-baked cookies), bell service, room service, a soaking tub, Italian amenities and either a balcony or patio. There are also a few junior suites and one 900-square-foot family suite. Vintners Inn is certified at the Environmental level in the California Green Lodging Program, and all concierges and front desk staff are Certified Tourism Ambassadors (CTA).

Guests can enjoy Wine Country from the moment they arrive. A 1.1-mile walking/jogging trail (with a .5-mile loop so the trek can be extended if desired) winds through the surrounding vineyards and neighboring farmlands. "It's just beautiful," says Brandon. "We're part of Santa Rosa, yet we're not a 'city' hotel. We're surrounded by country, so it's a different feeling."

Vintners Inn offers corporate programs, so many local companies use the hotel for their business travelers. And with 10,000 square feet of meeting space onsite, it can be an ideal location for corporate gatherings. "Mostly what we do are board retreats and things like that, because we only have 44 rooms, so we can't accommodate larger groups overnight," says Brandon. "For large



Vintner's Inn is an intimate, 44-room getaway nestled on 92 acres of mostly vineyard and open space in Santa Rosa.

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—Percy Brandon

gatherings, we usually work with local companies."

The event center has also become a popular place for local nonprofits to host their fund-raising galas and auctions, and the Inn's two wedding pavilions are in high demand year-round. "They're both right next to the vineyards, so the views are stunning," says Brandon, adding that, "When someone wants to have a destination wedding, we have everything here."

"It can be difficult, because weddings are big parties, and people want to let loose a little," he continues. "Sometimes they drink a little more than they should. That's why it's great to have a place like ours, where everything is right here."

Big news for locals is that Vintners Inn has expanded its catering program to include offsite events for up to 300 guests: "From our garden and kitchens to your table," enthuses Brandon of the already growing addition.

"We 'Celebrate Everything' here—that's our trademarked tag—and now we're taking the celebration to you." ■

[www.vintnersinn.com](http://www.vintnersinn.com)



## John Ash & Co.

By Alexandra Russell

It can sometimes be a challenge for a restaurant that's located on the grounds of a hotel to establish itself as separate. But John Ash & Co., located at Vintners Inn in Santa Rosa (see page 77), conquered that challenge long ago. "Of course we cater to our [hotel] guests," says Vintners Inn General Manager Percy Brandon, "but we're also here for locals. A lot of Sonoma County residents come here for special occasions."

Helmed for the past six years by Chef Tom Schmidt, John Ash & Co. has two distinct dining options. The first, the Front Room Bar & Lounge, is a casual, welcoming space as perfect for winding down after a day of sightseeing as it is for celebrating a successful workday. "The Front Room is an amazing bar," agrees Brandon. "Something is always happening."

"It's packed most days. It's really a fun space to come over and have happy hour. We have a lot of business people, especially many businesswomen, come to the happy hour specifically because it's a comfortable, respectful place. They finish their day's business in the lounge."

Monday through Friday, Front Room hosts a business happy hour from 4 p.m. to 6 p.m., featuring small plates, specially priced cocktails and selected wines for \$4 per glass. Wednesdays is "Crush



Dining at John Ash & Co. is always memorable, whether you're sitting indoors or out.

his innovative recipes are designed to complement the restaurant's extensive, award-winning wine list. "There are so many wines, we need to be able to tell the stories so our guests can choose," says Brandon. "We're always trying to enhance the dining experience."

The restaurant partners with local wineries to host six to eight

*"We're always trying to enhance the dining experience." —Percy Brandon*

the Rush" day, with discounted cocktails and food from 5:30 to 6:30 p.m. Saturdays is Pinot & Pizza happy hour; every month, a different local winery is paired with wood-fired pizzas. And on Sundays, the focus is burgers and beer. "That's \$10 for a burger and fries and two-for-one beers," says Brandon. "A lot of families are coming to that."

It's also worth noting that the hotel's breakfast room is now open to the public from 7:30 to 10:30 a.m. daily. Says Brandon: "What better place is there to conduct your morning meeting?"

Looking for a more elegant option? Step into the restaurant proper, where Chef Schmidt and his team (including sous chef Devin Kellogg and pastry chef Casey Stone) create Wine Country cuisine that changes seasonally to take advantage of the abundance of locally grown foods, working with more than 30 Sonoma County farmers and food producers to secure the best and freshest ingredients.

Schmidt also oversees (with culinary gardener Annya Maskey) the restaurant's own onsite fruit, vegetable and herb gardens, and

winemaker dinners each year, and Schmidt creates a specially paired menu for each one. And Ferrari-Carano Winery (owned by Don and Rhonda Carano, who also own Vintners Inn and John Ash & Co.) does a weekend getaway four times per year for its wine club members. "They get experiences at the winery and here at the hotel," says Brandon, "as well as a winemaker dinner here."

So bottom line: What makes John Ash & Co. Best?

"I think when people are voting, they realize this is such a comfortable place to come and do business—in both environments," Brandon concludes.

"Where's a better place to land a deal than here?" ■

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