

# WINES & VINES

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## Lake County's Eno-Tourism Expands

Lacking high-end lodging, vintners respond with ambitious plans

by [Paul Franson](#)

*Lake County, Calif.* -- Responding to its remote location, far-flung wineries and limited visitor accommodations, Lake County wineries are adopting a popular European model - wine tourism.

At present, Lake County is short on high-end visitor facilities. The only real qualifiers are the Tallman Hotel and adjacent Blue Wing Saloon and Café in Upper Lake, far from most wineries. As a result, many wineries are developing lodging, food and entertainment facilities to host visitors, in some cases primarily members of the wine trade, but often with plans for the wine-loving public.

This is in stark contrast to the situation in adjoining Napa County, which aggressively prohibits public lodging, restaurants and ancillary diversions at wineries in unincorporated land.

The latest Lake County winery to initiate such plans is Kaj Ahlmann's Six Sigma Ranch between Hidden Valley, which has a golf course, and Lower Lake.

Excavation starts this week on a hospitality building that will include eight guest suites, a commercial kitchen and dining room, in addition to hospitality and tasting rooms and offices plus basement barrel storage.

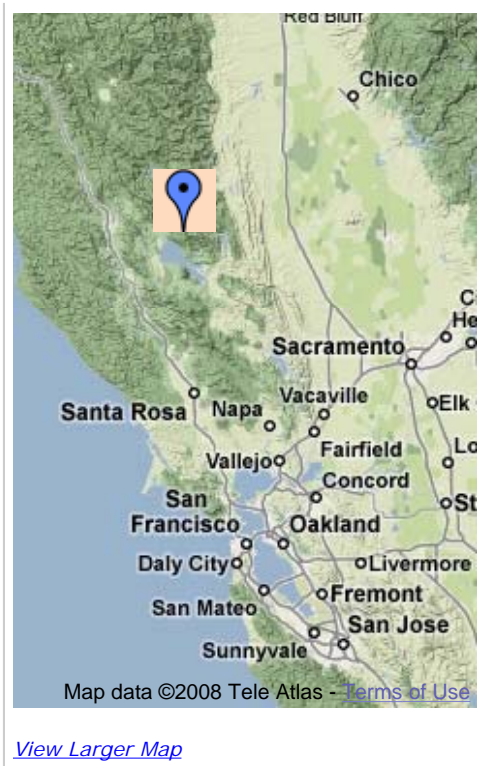
The building includes a classroom, which Danish-born Ahlmann, the former CEO of General Electric's Employers Reinsurance Corporation, also uses for environmental educational programs for children.

The facility is licensed as a bed and breakfast, though Ahlmann says the main emphasis will be on hosting the trade.

The facility lies on a 4,300-acre property with about 40 acres of grapevines planted at altitudes of 1,400 to 2,800 ft. It is in the center of the property, 1.5 miles from the boundary.



Ahlmann has a permit to plant 130 acres, and about 4,000 acres of the property lie in a conservation easement. The winemaking operation now consists of an outside slab for equipment, and a cave. Ahlmann plans additional buildings that will form a courtyard with the



hospitality building. He says that the county has been extremely supportive, and that its supervisors have visited the site.

Six Sigma's winemakers are May-Britt and Denis Malbec. Denis grew up in France, where his father and grandfather worked at Château Latour, and May-Britt was a sommelier in her native Scandinavia.

Other wine tourism plans in Lake County include:

Shannon Ridge Vineyards & Winery plans an Old World-style community to include a rustic tasting room, picnic facilities and dining patios, private guest cottages, a stone chapel, recreational grounds and hiking trails at the Rolling Knolls vineyard in the town of Lower Lake. The property now includes 240 acres of vineyards, two small cottages and an old walnut-dehydrator structure, which will be converted into a tasting room, wine shop and gourmet deli.

Tuscan Village and Terrill Cellars, with a 5,000-case winery, a four-unit bed and breakfast in Lower Lake.

Jim Fetzter's proposed \$150-million Ceago del Lago resort between Lucerne and Nice has received initial approval for a restaurant, an expanded marina and 70 condominiums.

Fetzter plans a 50-room lakeside hotel and spa, along with 50 nearby cottages for extended stays to be completed within three to five years. Fetzter says he will build a visitor-friendly demonstration winery and a development of 63 condominiums along the edge of a recently planted vineyard across Highway 20.

Langtry Estates in Guenoc Valley in Southeastern Lake County is building a golf course for members of the trade, and plans lodging as well. It already has guest lodging in the historic

Langtry House and Gephardt Hunting Lodge. Future plans could include public lodging and vineyard estates.

And Brassfield Estates in High Valley hopes to add vacation cottages in the future. It now has a lodge used for trade visitors.

In addition, High Valley Estate Vineyards is converting a garage in Clearlake Oaks into a small winery producing less than 15,000 cases per year, with a tasting room. It is near the old school on highway 20 that Shannon Ridge converted to a tasting room a year ago.



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