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Brooke & David ESCAPE TO NAPA

by Brooke Burke and David Charvet



Sometimes, no matter how strong the relationship, how passionate the affair, how happy the marriage, you just yearn to fall in love again. To go back and linger in that special place where you're simply a couple – no kids, no stress, no schedules, meetings or obligations.

When a rare chance to make a quick romantic escape came up, we immediately thought of the Napa Valley, scene of our first (and until now, only) weekend away since having our youngest two. We were way overdue for another road trip à deux.

One of the things we share is a love for Old World style – with its subdued, elegant sensuality. From the sun-dappled vineyards to the spray of wildflowers on the breakfast table, everything in Northern California's wine country seems to be done with a passion that's deep and abiding. Just the inspiration we needed to rekindle the romance.

First, though, we had to get out of the driveway. Our intentions were clear enough when we closed the Louis Vuitton bags without the usual matchbox cars parked in David's shaving kit or Disney princess pull-ups tucked in with Brooke's favorite La Perla lingerie. Any last-minute plots the kids had of turning this into a family affair were foiled when we tossed the bags into the two-seat Maserati convertible Brooke calls her "big-girl car." Ignoring four pairs of quivering lips and pleading brown puppy-dog eyes wasn't easy, but we managed to leave Malibu with a minimum of tears (Brooke's included). We turned up the volume on the playlist Brooke had downloaded the night before (Joss Stone "L.O.V.E.," Kem's "I'm In Love," Jason Castro "Let's Just Fall In Love Again") and headed up the coast.

Six hours later, pulling into the Auberge du Soleil hotel, we were in paradise, with time to spare. Christening our Napa experience, we enjoyed our first glass of wine while watching the sunset from the amazing infinity Jacuzzi perched on a cliff overlooking the vineyards.

We were starving after the long drive, and hungry is definitely how you want to arrive in Napa. Every sense is teased awake in this romantic hideaway, and for foodies like us, part of the enjoyment is stopping in our tracks while strolling across the grounds to appreciate the tantalizing aroma wafting from the hotel's Michelin-rated restaurant.

It seems an injustice to summarize a meal at Auberge du Soleil – like trying to explain a symphony by merely naming the notes. What Executive Chef, Robert Curry, creates is a value of how much devotion to detail it takes to make anything sublime. David still marvels at the flavor of a single heirloom tomato, grown locally, coaxed and nurtured to utter perfection. Brooke knows that every bite in Napa is like making love to your tummy!

We were struck again and again by the passion behind the scenes in this serene and sumptuous place. Even the mud in our couple's mudbath seemed to have been custom-blended to envelop us in an earthy, warm embrace. Brooke, usually a cup-of-coffee-and-dash carpool mom, was charmed by our simple breakfast on the terrace, and vowed to recapture the mood back home by setting up a table in the rose garden where the two of us might sneak away for coffee and croissants by ourselves once in awhile. Just being able to sit and have an adult conversation and really check in with each other is a luxury when you're trying to manage a blended family of six. With two tweens and two toddlers – plus two puppies, two kittens and a bearded dragon – the decibel level at Chez Charvet can usually rival a Black Eyed Peas concert at Universal.

Wine collecting is one of the pastimes both of us enjoy with equal passion (but points

to David for pretending that shoe-shopping is fun, and double credit to Brooke for opting out of the beach volleyball death-match before body boards and ambulances were required). Wine tasting can be overwhelming, but also a rewarding educational experience. Everyone in Napa is happy to share and educate. The many bottles we experienced will always be reminders of our Napa memories. We only wish we could save them long enough to enjoy for years to come. Fortunately, each trip to Napa is followed by many deliveries and memberships that keep on giving.

You usually think of bad weather as a spoiler when you're stealing time for yourselves, but in Napa, even the rain enhances the mood; drumming lightly on the tile rooftops and turning the spectacular view of the valley into a muted masterpiece of watercolor greens and golds.

Anxious as we were to see the kids again, it was hard to pull out of this driveway too. What we took with us, though, was the lesson on love a vintner unwittingly gave us as he recounted the factors at play to produce spectacular wine, "It takes patience, and a fierce devotion that can weather all the unpredictable elements and still have the courage to keep trying even when the occasional harvest is meager or disappointing. It takes endless nurturing, and attention to the tiniest details. And, of course, it takes tremendous faith."

We drank it all in, greedy to savor it all. We are committed to romantic rendezvous, and refuse to give up romance in the midst of raising our blended family. Heaven is where you find it. That weekend, for us, it was mercy 500 miles north on PCH. ☘



Maison suite at the Auberge du Soleil



photo by Richard Hume

Brooke Burke and David Charvet steal a moment in a Napa vineyard

