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Getting a leg up, a goat at Pugs Leap Farm (left) goes nose to nose with owner Pascal Destandau; French-born Destandau and partner Eric Smith craft goat cheeses. Guests share a Cabernet moment at Ladera Vineyards (above) with owner Pat Stotesbery, in the black hat.

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OF CITY LIFE**

I head to my next stop, Ladera Vineyards. Ladera may be Spanish for “slope,” and the winery may have been started by two Frenchmen in 1877, but Ladera Vineyards embraces the Italian idea of *famiglia*. It is now owned and run by Pat Stotesbery, his wife, Anne, and two of their children. Just like a good Tuscan *vignaiolo*, Stotesbery is happy to show guests who have made an appointment the property himself.

As I cross the gravel drive, Stotesbery comes to greet me. “Welcome to Ladera!” Tall Italian cypress trees outline the property and frame a view down soft-shouldered Howell Mountain. I make out the winery’s

centerpiece, an immense three-story stone building that holds the vats. These vats are gravity-fed, just as they were in 1886 when the winery was built.

Stotesbery need not work. A storage company he owned sold for a nice price. But since the winery is in the family, he works. Hard. “Probably harder than usual,” he admits, as he shows me the barrel-filled caves, or storage areas, redolent with the smell of oak and Cabernet.

“Now I want to take you to taste our wine,” he says, motioning me to an SUV.

“This is Big Country,” he notes as we zip across Napa’s green valley floor to the 480 acres Ladera owns near Mount Veeder. We drive up a trail between ordered rows of Cabernet vines. “Nowhere else like it.” Gazing at the steeply wooded hills around us and the green valley below, I have to agree. We stop the vehicle and get out. Stotesbery pours a glass of the Cabernet.

“Hold it to your nose and smell,” he says. It smells like cherry. Then tobacco. Licorice.

“What is in your glass comes from here.” Stotesbery motions toward the surrounding fields. Now I understand why I need to be here. Sipping the wine, I am actually tasting the land.