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# the first sip

a blog by [vinovisit](#)



By [Louise Veron](#)

## Blending Wine and Art



Photo credits: Chick Harity

Your GPS has just guided you to a quiet neighborhood at the northern end of Napa Valley in St. Helena. Without a winery in sight, you get the sinking feeling you must have made a wrong turn somewhere. Then, out of the corner of your eye, you see a couple of well-used wine barrels in front of an old house. This is the only marker signaling that you've arrived at [Charter Oak Winery & Vineyards](#).

### [Charter Oak - VinoVisit \(14\) sm](#)

Upon entering the quaint cottage situated at the end of Charter Oak Ave (hence the winery's name), you'll receive an enthusiastic greeting from renowned artist and winery owner, Layla Fanucci, as you step into her living room-slash-gallery-slash-tasting room. This dynamic painter, dressed in a white blouse covered in paint, has probably just put down her brush to welcome you to her vintage home. The turn of the century gem has surprisingly remained untouched since its original construction in 1900, and it now doubles as the tasting room for husband Robert Fanucci's boutique winery (1,000 cases annually) and vineyard.

Your first stop on the tour of this historic property is the underground cellar. Beneath the house, the thick earthen walls offer a consistently cool temperature year-round, making it the perfect spot to store wine. Old bottles, wine barrels marked with chalk, and vintage pictures of the family are stashed everywhere, as they have been for decades. Robert, who also happens to be the winemaker, descended from a long line of Italian winemakers, so it's no surprise he makes his wine the exact same way his grandfather Guido Raghianti did- everything by hand, from grape to bottle.

### [Charter Oak - VinoVisit \(8\) sm](#)

After visiting the cellar, you'll explore their back garden – a beautiful outdoor space brimming with fruits and vegetables and garden art scattered throughout. This urban hideaway hosts private events, large group tastings in the modern barn and on occasion, a Food Network show. And tucked away amongst the flowers is the 120-year-old basket press used for pressing the wine grapes during harvest. Robert's winemaking philosophy is simple: Quality over quantity, and do things with passion. You see, Robert is also an artist – a wine artist – who feels his goal is to produce what he says are the “forgotten wines”- those that are naturally luxurious, silky and elegant. Charter Oak wines are crafted without any chemicals or additives, and the only thing he does add is plenty of heart and soul!

### [Charter Oak - VinoVisit Blog \(5\) montage](#)

Photo credits: Chick Harity

Back at the house, you'll pass through Layla's painting-filled studio and into her kitchen where several wines are already lined up and waiting to be explored. Tip: Don't ask Layla about how she got into art until *after* the tasting. She believes wine and art are two strong mediums which shouldn't be mixed. So her amazing story (featured in Marlo Thomas' book “It Ain't Over Till It's Over”) will just have to wait until you've tasted their small, but mighty, collection of exceptional reds. There are no white wines produced at Charter Oak Winery, so Chardonnay lovers will just have to get their fix [elsewhere!](#)

Here's what we tasted with Layla:

- 2014 Guido Raghianti Old World Field Blend: a well-balanced red blend with an exotic, dark and seductive side.
- 2013 Zinfandel, Monte Rosso Old Vine Hillside Zinfandel Sonoma County: a structured wine with a long, smoky finish.
- 2014 Zinfandel Mind TZM: a bold, spicy and sexy wine with scents of cracked black pepper. Laced with hints of blackberry and exotic Bing cherry.

### [Charter Oak - VinoVisit \(1\) sm](#)

Now, back to the art. Layla has become famous for her abstract cityscapes, which reflect her many travels across the globe. But *how* she paints is what makes her work so unique. She paints over her own paintings, time and time again, creating new works made up of several layers. For example, a canvas featuring the streets of Paris may also have a layer of New York City underneath it, and a layer of San Francisco underneath that – creating a three-dimensional composition of colors and shapes. Her work is truly incredible, with large pieces taking between 8 and 24 months to complete.

### [Charter Oak - VinoVisit Blog \(13\)](#)

Photo credits: Chick Harity

Layla's art has been featured in the Huffington Post, Kron 4, the Today Show and more. Her works are admired in galleries and museums worldwide and will soon be exhibited in The Louvre. In fact, the Charter Oak Winery & Vineyards story is so remarkable; it's been featured on CNN! [Check out the video here.](#)

Layla and Robert are two complementary artists. Robert once said, “*Her art inspires me to make great wine, and my wine inspires her to make great art*”. We couldn't agree more!

### [Charter Oak - VinoVisit \(7\) sm](#)

**Charter Oak Winery tour, tasting and art exhibit – St Helena, CA – \$50 per person**

## **Book Now**

Have a memorable experience!

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Originally from Bordeaux (France), I moved to the Napa Valley to work for VinoVisit.com in 2015. I just finished my trilingual Master's degree in Wine Tourism and International Marketing and graduated with honors. As a real food and wine lover, I'm enjoying exploring the area and relating my discoveries from a very French point of view.

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