

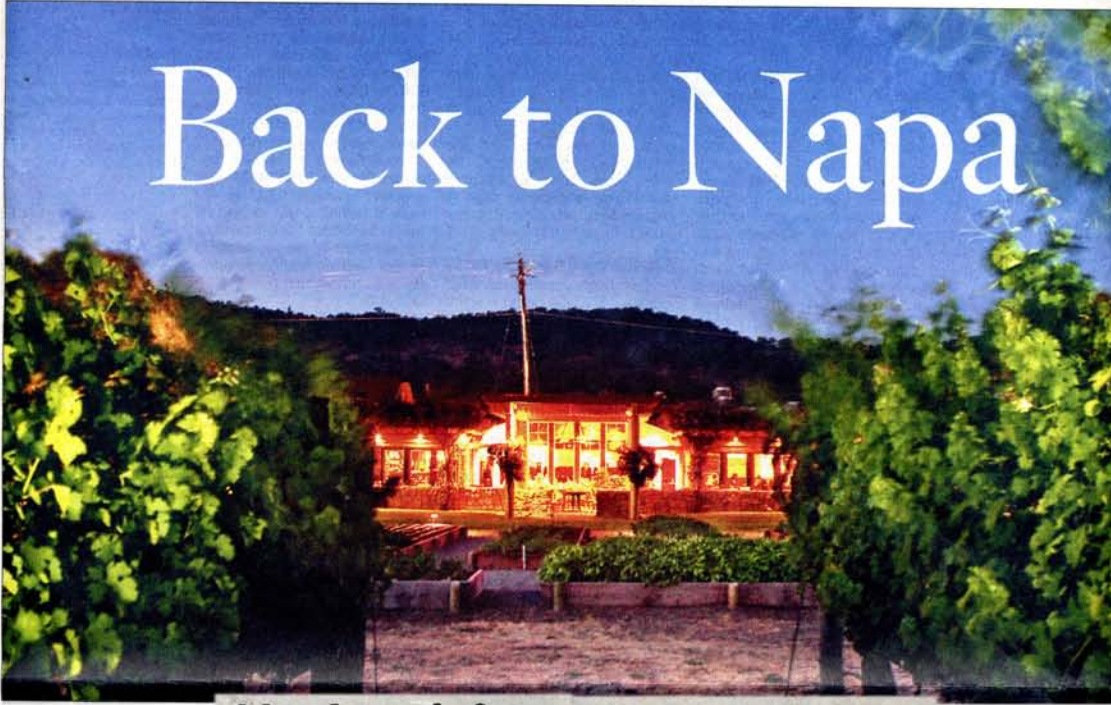
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FOOD

Back to Napa



A hands-on chef

Over the last dozen or so years, **Brix**, just north of Yountville, has been through chefs and even a name change, but luckily in January, Anne Gingrass-Paik came in as executive chef, and what a profound difference. With her then-husband David Gingrass, she was opening chef at Wolfgang Puck's Postrio in San Francisco and later opened Hawthorne Lane there. She's definitely not the hands-off type but is always in the kitchen.

Brix is hidden from the road behind a screen of glorious flowering plants and is officially described as a "restaurant, gardens and wine shop." Why anyone would want to eat inside beats me, when you can have lunch outside on a broad, shady terrace looking onto a picture-perfect garden of raised beds planted with tomatoes, lettuces, herbs, flowers and a newly planted citrus grove. Beyond are vineyards and the green hills, an oasis of gentle calm right off Highway 29. This is definitely the place I would take a first-time Napa Valley visitor to give them a sense of the lushness of the valley. Start with apple carpaccio, thinly sliced raw apple strewn with walnuts and herbs with some crushed cocoa nibs for crunch. Or try a salad of heir-

loom beans tossed with wispy frisée, and matchsticks of carrot in a vibrant dressing. There's a juicy Niman Ranch cheeseburger and a terrific farm egg salad sandwich on fluffy toasted brioche. She also just reinstated a Sunday brunch buffet, which includes an al fresco seafood bar, egg dishes and sourdough pancakes, flatbreads and pizza from the wood oven, and fish and meats on the charcoal grill. Because Brix includes a wine shop, wine list prices are remarkably fair.