

FARM STANDS

OXBOW  
PUBLIC  
MARKET

OXBOW DISTRICT

FOOD • SALADS • SANDWICHES

# OXBOW PUBLIC MARKET

a smorgasbord of culinary adventures

BY LESLIE HARLIB



**I**n design, Oxbow Public Market is a hip, gastronomical temple for tasting. In location, it's a recreational playground, with giant outdoor decks overlooking a bend in the Napa River. Whether you call it a shopping center, a food court or a farmers' market, it's 40,000 square feet of stores and restaurants devoted to all things culinary.

Food and wine are both education and entertainment, where tables fill the center of the giant complex, most vendors offer tastes of their wares, and shopping feels like a treasure hunt.

Steve Carlin, founder and CEO of Oxbow, sees it as "The evolution of the farmers' market. It's not a grocery store but it has a lot of amenities that a grocery store has. You can use credit cards. There's adequate parking. It's kind of a hybrid."

Half the fun is how the place feels. Designed by San Francisco architects Baldauf, Catton and Von Eckartsberg, who

also remodeled the Ferry Plaza building, it's all about light and space. Windows have views out to the river, sunlight streams in from a 30-foot-high ceiling, and color is everywhere, from the vintage pottery at Heritage Culinary Artifacts to the vibrant hand-woven table linens from Kitchen Library. People watching, depending on when you go, is some of the best in the Napa Valley.

It's also the perfect place to indulge the senses. There's a world's worth of scents from the spices at Whole Spice, the piquancy of grilled corn-based foods at Pica Pica Maize Kitchen, meaty notes from the bronzed, juicy chickens roasting over fire at Rotisario, and more delicate fragrances from 30 types of tea at Tillerman Tea. The aromas are so wonderful it's impossible not to want to buy something at every booth.



The exotic sights and smells offered by the Whole Spice Company



Diners enjoy the Italian-style small plates offered by Folio Enoteca and Winery.

Yet Oxbow has had its share of challenges. Built on what was once Copia land, it was meant to be a key player in Napa's bid for recognition as a world-class destination for gastronomy. But the food and wine museum Copia, plagued since its opening in 2001 by budget problems and insufficient visitors, went bankrupt and closed for good in November 2008. That seriously diminished Oxbow's initial potential for foot traffic. Then, construction on Napa's First Street Bridge turned downtown Napa into a dizzying series of detours. (The bridge is now expected to reopen on August 1.) Now, the downturn in the economy has, at least up until recently, kept people at home. Carlin, however, is optimistic. "We now have 24 tenants, all owner-operated. That's our strong suit," he said. "We think that this year, the tourist industry should be quite busy as people decide to do things closer to home and not take trips outside the area."

Tuesday night is one of the best times to go. The market is open from 5 to 8 PM and every store has a promotion. Hog Island Oyster Company sells oysters on the half shell for a buck apiece, while Taylor's Refresher has \$1 servings of French fries. Live music plays from 6 to 8 PM All this brings out locals and tourists alike.

Oxbow has become more than a testament to the saying, "If you build it, they will come." Just visit Oxbow once, and you'll become a regular.

*Oxbow Market  
610 and 644 First Street in downtown Napa.  
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[www.oxbowpublicmarket.com](http://www.oxbowpublicmarket.com).*



# A GUIDE TO OXBOW'S DELIGHTS

## RESTAURANTS AND WINE BARS

### Taylor's Automatic Refresher

Well known for fresh, natural foods served at high speeds. Famous for Ahi Tuna Burger, Fish Tacos and classic drive-in fare.

### Pica Pica Maize Kitchen

Unusual corn-based foods from Venezuela, cooked to order. Try the arepa, a grilled corn flour cake crispy on the outside, moist on the inside, stuffed with a range of fillings.

### Rotisario

A sleek little stand for fire-roasted chickens and an exceptional fire-roasted porchetta sandwich with wild arugula and caramelized onions.

### Folio Enoteca & Winery

This micro-winery actually ferments vintages on site. Many great wines by the glass or bottle. Italian-style small plates and meals inspired by the seasonal produce sold at Oxbow also available.

### Hog Island Oyster Company

This vendor emphasizes the sweet oysters grown sustainably in Tomales Bay (Marin County) on their own oyster farm, both cooked and raw, along with other seafood dishes, and one of the best grilled cheese sandwiches on the planet.

### Oxbow Wine Merchant and Oxbow Cheese Merchant

Here you'll find more than 600 different vintages by the bottle, dozens by the glass, and hundreds of cheeses. Menu emphasizes charcuterie, cheese and other small plates designed to complement wines.

## MERCHANTS AND FOOD PURVEYORS

### Anette's Chocolate Factory

Locally made chocolates, brittles and candies; truffles filled with wine-spiked ganaches.

### The Fatted Calf Charcuterie

Artisan charcuterie and butcher shop known for exceptional cured salamis, sausages, bacons, rillettes and more, from sustainably raised meats. Also sells other Bay Area artisan-made products.

### Fete

All of the essentials for home entertaining, such as napkin rings, custom letterpress invitations, tapered candles and crisp linen napkins.

### Five Dot Ranch

Five generations of Swickard family members have built a reputation for their naturally raised, hormone and antibiotic-free Angus beef. A must visit for summer BBQ needs. All cuts available.

### Heritage Culinary Artifacts

Antique and whimsical kitchen equipment sourced from around the world. A perfect place to find a gift that isn't seen in every Napa Valley shop.

### Kanaloa Seafood Market

This full-service seafood market features sustainably caught and environmentally responsible harvests. Fresh fish is brought in each day.

### Kara's Cupcakes

Open since April and one of four Kara's in the Bay Area, it sells flavorful cupcakes made with local, organic ingredients. Try the chocolate with salted caramel.

### Kitchen Library

This gallery sells limited-edition photographs, ceramics, table and kitchen linens, food and wine-related antiques, fine paper goods and adventure-oriented books.

### The Model Bakery

A local favorite known for fresh breads, huge wedges of vegetable-topped pizzas, muffins and fanciful cakes.

### Napa Valley Adventure Tours

Travel experts create tours for driving, biking, hiking and more throughout the Napa Valley, all with an edge of adventure and with access to "hidden" Napa.

### The Olive Press

Look for a wide range of olive oils, olive-related gift items and balsamic vinegars, among other things.

### Oxbow Produce and Grocery

A small market featuring locally grown and sourced products and produce.

### Ritual Coffee Roasters

Fresh-roasted beans, espresso drinks, brewed coffee and pastries from serious coffee buyers and roasters who create the perfect beans for your brewing pleasure. Free coffee tastings from those who really know their coffee.

### Three Twins Organic Ice Cream

Founded in 2004 in Terra Linda, it's devoted to hand-made ice creams based on Straus organic dairy mix and flavored with locally grown ingredients as much as possible. Try the Je Ne Sais Quoi Strawberry, tinged with balsamic vinegar.

### Tillerman Tea Company

Both rare looseleaf and bagged teas from around the world are sold here, along with teapots, tea cups and other tea paraphernalia. Tastings are encouraged. Tea talks and tea ceremonies are offered as well.

### Whole Spice Company

A husband and wife team from Novato has created their own blends, and nearly 30% of the spices are organic. Specialties include spicy, vibrant Zhug, flavored salts, mushroom powders and varietal cinnamons.

**ALSO:** On Oxbow Market's outside wall, there are stalls from 10 specialty growers who sell vegetables, flowers and more.