Next to well-known Café Rustica and tucked just inside the LyonsHead Gallery is the lovely Twisted Roots Winery. It’s a unique place to visit, in that you can order food from Café Rustica to munch on in the winery’s courtyard, or meander around inside LyonsHead and check out all of the interesting artwork. And then there’s the wine tasting, of course. Winemaker Josh Ruiz is producing some excellent wines and he’ll be happy you’re there to try some.

Ruiz, representing fellow partners in the business Ross Schmidt and Mike Hodge, says the Twisted Roots label has been around only since 2005, but their grape-growing history dates back to 1918 when vineyards were planted in Lodi. Ruiz, a farmer by trade, realized he could make premium wine from these sustainably farmed, high-quality grapes and he set about the task with passion. Ruiz now makes Chardonnay, Petite Sirah, Old Vine Zinfandel from the plantings of 1918—appropriately named “1918”—and Cabernet Sauvignon.

I particularly enjoyed the 2011 Cabernet Sauvignon ($25 at the tasting room) with its dark, luscious fruit-laden tannins and sensuous aromas of warm brambleberry, black tea and clove. A mouthful of this well-made wine is top-flight—and you’re also drinking for a good cause, as a portion of the profits from every bottle sold are donated to the ALS Association to help fight Lou Gehrig’s disease.

Twisted Roots Vineyard, 12 Del Fino Place, Carmel Valley, 831-594-8282. Twistedrootsvineyard.com. Open noon to 5 p.m. Friday to Sunday.

PINO ALTO RESTAURANT
The Pino Alto Restaurant is the place to visit if you want to try something a bit out of the ordinary. Located in the historic Sesnon House in Aptos, it’s where students in the culinary program at Cabrillo College practice their skills—so they go the extra mile with their creative preparations. The Pino Alto is open each semester and menus vary accordingly, so you’ll now find seasonal produce such as fennel, leeks and parsnips. Don’t miss the potato gnocchi with butternut squash if it’s still available. Lunch and dinner menus can be seen online, and there’s also a terrace menu for those wishing to sit outside—usually under heaters. Reservations can be made by visiting pinaltorestaurant.org or on OpenTable.

MUSIC WITH A LATIN TWIST
Sip on fine wines from Stockwell Cellars, enjoy food from Lifestyle Culinary Arts, and try delicious chocolate from Donnelly’s—all while taking in an afternoon of music featuring cellist Stephen Harrison of the Ives Quartet, and pianist John Orlando, professor in the music department at Cabrillo College. The Music with a Latin Twist event features the works of several composers, starting at 2 p.m. on Sunday, Oct. 12, and will be held at the Aptos home of John Orlando as part of the Distinguished Artists Concert & Lecture Series. Tickets are $50. Visit distinguishedartists.org for more information.