



The suites at the Hermannhof Haus Wineries are furnished with period reproductions and antiques made by German cabinetmakers.

(Tom Uhlenbrock/P-D)

Great weekend getaways

By **Tom Uhlenbrock**

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HERMANN, Mo. — The Champagne Suite in the Hermann Haus, one of six vintage stone "wine houses" relocated to a hill overlooking this river town's historic district, is the cream of the crop of weekend getaways.

A decade of roaming the boonies, searching for unusual places to stay within a few hours' drive of St. Louis, has resulted in a select list of cozy cabins, roomy lodges, country guest houses, waterfront boatels, even a treehouse or two, that make for the perfect spot for a quiet retreat. They're all different, no chain motels here, but they also have a lot in common.

There are no golf courses, no shopping malls, no fancy spas. Many don't even have TVs or telephones. Most do have fireplaces, hot tubs for two and porches for sitting. There's nothing to do but hike, read, cook, drink, nap, star gaze and commune with your bunkmate.

By happenstance, rather than design, most are within sight of a river. The Hermannhof Haus Wineries, with the Missouri flowing a block away, fit right in.

The wine houses, which have 20 suites for nightly rental, opened last year as part of Jim Dierberg's vision to make Hermann a year-round tourist destination. He is the banking side of the family that also owns the grocery chain in the St. Louis area and is using his appreciable wealth to create a legacy to the Germans who arrived in the 1830s and made Hermann the heart of Missouri's wine country.

"Missouri was the largest wine producer of the states, and Hermann was the middle of it until 1873," said Dierberg, who opened Hermannhof Winery in 1976. "These rock buildings were all mom 'n pop wineries — they made the wine downstairs and lived upstairs. We took them down stone by stone and numbered the stones for the masons to put them back up."

The Champagne Suite, on the top floor of the two-story Hermann Haus, has a gas fireplace in the bedroom and another in a luxurious bathroom. From the covered porch, you can look down on Hermann's east side and see other Dierberg projects — the Tin Mill Brewing Co., the German market around a brick plaza, the stable that will be part of the living history farm, the Festhalle, where the top two floors have been converted into eight elegant rental suites, called the Inn at Hermannhof.

The wine houses and Festhalle suites are furnished with quality period reproductions and hand-picked pieces from Dierberg's collection of walnut furniture made by six German cabinetmakers who were among the first arrivals in the river valley.

"They came in 1837 and started making furniture right off the bat — there's a long tradition," Dierberg said. "Our furniture is as good as what they made in Pennsylvania. But in Hermann, we haven't done a good job of presenting the story.

"People who have pieces in their family are getting older, like I am, and they're parting with them. I want to get them before they're spread out. It's like the stone wine houses, which are really disappearing. It's a shame; I thought they should be saved."

Rates for the wine houses and Festhalle suites vary by day of the week and month and are listed at www.hermannhof.com. On a Sunday in winter, the top-of-the-line Champagne Suite was \$186 a night. On a Saturday in October, when fall foliage is blazing, it's \$364.

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