

VIEW OF 2011: BEST NEW BUSINESSES, SOME THAT CLOSED

2010 brought new faces to Sonoma; we said goodbye to treasured institutions.

By [Alexis Fitts](#) | January 1, 2011



Earlier this month [we asked you to weigh in](#) on the stories, events, and people that piqued your interest in 2010. Last year was a year of upheaval, as several prominent businesses closed their doors for good. But hope springs eternal, there's lots of new faces in town that have already started to make their mark. Here's the short list:

Best New Businesses

- **El Molino Central:** The organically crafted Mexican restaurant opened their counter space on Highway 12, just a stones throw from the popular Taqueria La Hacienda. No worries, El Molino's tortillas, created daily from freshly ground masa, are enough of a draw for those searching for a cup of Blue Bottle coffee to go with their enchilada.
- **Hopmonk:** A beer parlor in wine country? After only a few months of business Hopmonk has been applauded by the city council, and become a destination point for locals and tourists in search of a brew and a magical burger.
- **Salon NOVO:** A good beacon for progress: the county's first eco-friendly salon opened in Sonoma city limits. Hawking green beauty products along with an allergen-free hair dye process, Salon NOVO proves that beauty can sometimes be skin deep.
- **Bank of Marin:** Not quite open yet, but out of the ashes of the Bank of Sonoma, [we'll see a new local branch](#) of the Bank of Marin.

Businesses That Closed

- **Gramma's Cal Italia Pizzeria:** After almost 20 years of business, Jim and Angie Cahoon packed up their California-fusion restaurant and moved to the Philippines.
- **The Laughing Queen:** Always a hodgepodge of thrifty finds and quirky decor, The Laughing Queen was a regular site on East Napa Street.

- **Sonoma Valley Bank:** The Sonoma Valley raised news headlines when it was [closed by the California Department of Financial Institutions](#), and just as quickly, was scooped up by WestAmerica Bank. Months later, its still making headlines, as concerned citizens fight to save branches in Glen Ellen and the Springs from speculated closure.
- **Robin's Nest:** You could always rely on the kitchen supply store to offer up whatever your souffle's were lacking. No doubt their bargain basement going-out-of-business sale outfitted many kitchens.