

# San Francisco Chronicle

## FOOD & WINE

### WINE COUNTRY Modernist design at new Napa wineries

By John King

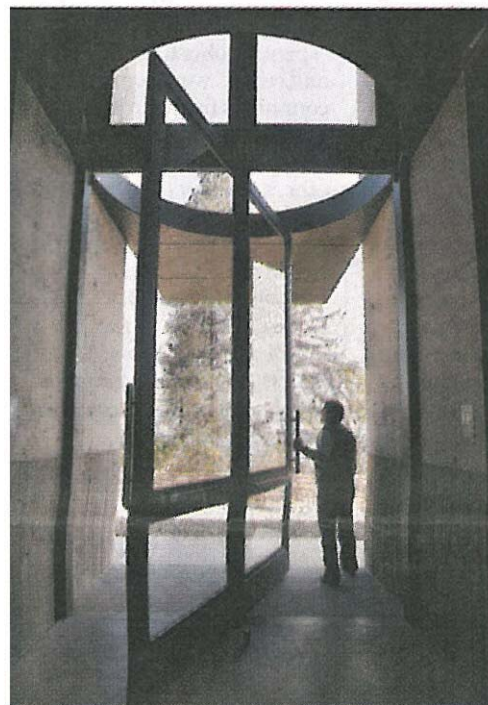
CHRONICLE URBAN DESIGN WRITER

Ever since Robert Mondavi unveiled his exquisitely ersatz Oakville mission in 1966, Napa's wineries have taken architectural theatrics to theme-park extremes.

There's a medieval Italian castle and an 18th century French chateau, a Persian temple and barns more refined than any real barns should be. That's what makes two new Napa wineries such a shock. They're dressed for the 21st century, emphasizing concrete and steel instead of limestone and wood.

Viewed cynically, you can say this monochromatic modernism is just one more theme added to the mix. But the debut this month of Cade Winery on Howell Mountain and Hour-glass near Calistoga offer refreshing proof that even within the Napa wine scene, innovative contemporary design has a place.

*Design continues on E6*



Eric Luse / The Chronicle

A swinging door marks the entrance to Cade, a winery owned by the PlumpJack Group.

# Modern wineries with a sense of place

Architecture from page E1

"My first mandate was no Italian architecture and no French architecture," says Jeff Smith, owner of Hourglass, which is completing a facility tucked into a steep ridge off the Silverado Trail. "It was a conscious decision. We're trying to push the cutting edge of winemaking, and we wanted our architecture to reflect that."

There's a similar sentiment voiced by John Conover, Cade's managing partner.

"Our goal wasn't to remind people of Tuscany or Bordeaux," Conover says. "Hillside wines tend to be masculine in style — this leads to an architecture that's tougher and strong."

The more adventurous newcomer is Hourglass because, in a conventional sense, it's not even there.

The winery burrows into a ridgeline at the edge of 41 acres that Smith and his wife, Carolyn, purchased in 2006 to enlarge their much-lauded Hourglass line beyond the original vineyard, a 4-acre plot near St. Helena that even in a bountiful year produces just 800 cases of Cabernet Sauvignon.

The new holding, dubbed Hourglass Blueline Estate, gives a winery that until now has done its crushing and blending at rented facilities a home of its own. But visitors who wend past the rows of

**Hourglass Blueline Estate** is open to visitors by prior appointment only. Call (707) 968-9332, ext. 17 or e-mail [marybeth@hourglasswine.com](mailto:marybeth@hourglasswine.com)

**Cade Winery** is at 360 Howell Mountain Road South and is open to visitors by appointment. Call (707) 965-2746 or e-mail [dj\\_nielsen@cadewinery.com](mailto:dj_nielsen@cadewinery.com)

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**For more photos, see this story at [sfgate.com/wine](http://sfgate.com/wine).**

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five red varietals will be greeted by a humble sight: two sloped retaining walls that slide up to meet at a 90-degree angle, forming a sort of broad V.

"It's the Vietnam Memorial in reverse — instead of going down we go up," says architect Olle Lundberg, best-known for restaurants such as Slanted Door and the Moss Room in San Francisco.

The one visual flourish is the canopy of fiberglass-like acrylic that stabs out 30 feet beyond a march of steel beams lining the west-facing retaining wall. It is anchored to the hillside and shades the production area, including six large fermentation tanks where grapes will be stored during harvest.

The rest of the winery operations — offices, barrel storage, tasting rooms — are within the ridge, lining caves entered via a pair of semicircular portals, each framed by a loop

of galvanized steel.

Here's where function gives way to art: Set inside the looped steel, framing silvery doors with thick bolts, is a wall made from wine bottles set on their sides and sliced in half.

It's as if the doors were poised amid murky opaque foam.

"Everything is so workmanlike outside we wanted *something* to add a bit of color," Lundberg explains.

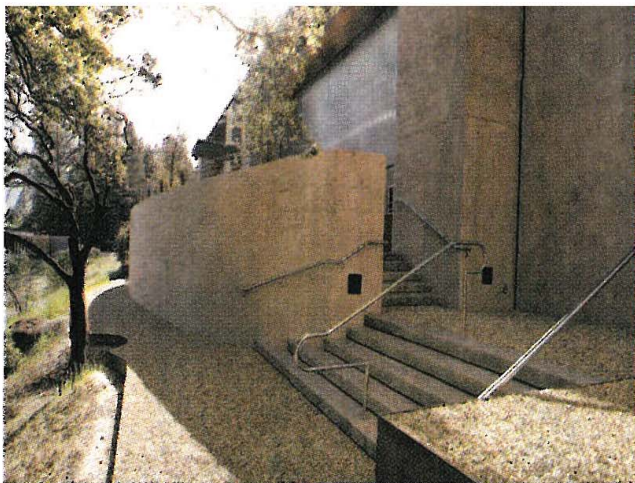
If the concrete slash against the oak-shrouded ridgeline sounds abrupt, the lack of a formal structure keeps the emphasis on what's of lasting importance: the terrain. And the experience of the caves is more vivid when you step from the great outdoors into a dark space 13 feet tall and wide.

The architectural experience at Cade Winery offers drama of a different sort.

Cade is an offshoot of PlumpJack Winery, which makes its home in Oakville in a cluster of farmhouse buildings erected between 1880 and the 1930s — the sort of setting that has been replicated in recent years by cult wineries such as Harlan Estate that seek to cast a spell of rooted make-believe.

The message at Cade? There's room in Napa for wineries that celebrate the place without trading on the past.





Photos by Eric Luse / The Chronicle

Cade Winery, left, is made of concrete and channel glass. A dramatic fiberglass canopy floats over the crush pad at Hourglass Winery.



## Napa building blocks

**1887** Inglenook Chateau opens. The design by Hamden McIntyre and William Mooser is reminiscent of a European winery; the client is Gustave Neibaum, who made his fortune in the Alaskan fur trade. Now home to Rubicon Estate, this marriage of wealth and make-believe hints at what Napa Valley will become.

**1966** Robert Mondavi Winery signals Napa Valley's revival, luring tourists to a cozy and crowd-friendly take on mission-style architecture designed by Cliff May.

**1980** Architect William Turnbull of Sea Ranch fame designs Cakeread Cellars; even after several additions, it retains a modesty rare in Napa, woody and modern at once.

**1989** Domaine Carneros opens its "classic 18th century chateau-style building ... inspired by the historic Taittinger-owned Chateau de la Marquetterie in Champagne." We'll take the winery's word for it.

**1991** Opus One, a partnership of the Mondavi and Rothschild families, arrives on the scene with creamy limestone and palatial colonnades that Marie Antoinette would adore.

**2004** Napa's resemblance to a viticultural world's fair deepens with the arrival of Darioush, a winery that takes its design cues from Persepolis, the capital of ancient Persia.

**2007** Like it or loathe it, there's probably no topping Castello di Amorosa, a 107-room faux medieval castle topped by stone battlements and built in part with 200-year-old Austrian bricks. "I love medieval architecture," says winery owner Darryl Sattui. No kidding.

— John King

The production facility is a muscular shell of thick concrete and channel glass topped by a line of black steel and set partly into a hillside. It's imposing up close — but from nearby Howell Mountain Road it's simply another form on the terrain, softened by a screen of cedar beams and the vertical stripes of translucent glass "planks."

Unlike Hourglass, Cade includes such ceremonial touches as a 12-foot-high door

of dark steel and clear glass. A lean pair of companion buildings houses offices and a visitor center with a jaw-dropping view.

But the emphasis is on production, not pomp.

Architect Juan Carlos Fernandez of Lail Design Group worked each step of the way with Cade winemaker Anthony Biagi, and the attention to detail shows.

There's a deft logic to how, for instance, the fermentation

tanks rest on shelves of concrete that scallop out from the walls. Bins can be rolled smoothly beneath the tanks to capture stems and skins on their way to being pressed, a solution that avoids the usual mess. The spacious structure is tall and wide enough to allow fire trucks to drive through if needed — a move that erased the need for an additional road on the site — while production can spill inside and out with a minimum of fuss.

Another plus is the emphasis on environmentally sensitive design, from rooftop louvers that allow natural ventilation to countertops made of paper, not stone. Cade's aim is to become the first winery in California to receive a gold rating from the United States Green Building Council, a reminder that in environmental terms, wineries need to pay attention to more than just terroir.

These two wineries won't make Napa Valley's most garish showcases vanish; theatricality is inseparable from the "romance" of wine. But Hourglass and Cade show that modern buildings can convey a tone of sophistication in this storied setting — and also tread lightly, fittingly, on the land.

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