

Napa Valley *Register*

OnWine



Jeff Smith surveys the view from the crush pad of his recently completed winery, designed by Olle Lundberg. *David Stoneberg photos.*

Caves and crush pad make up working winery for Hourglass

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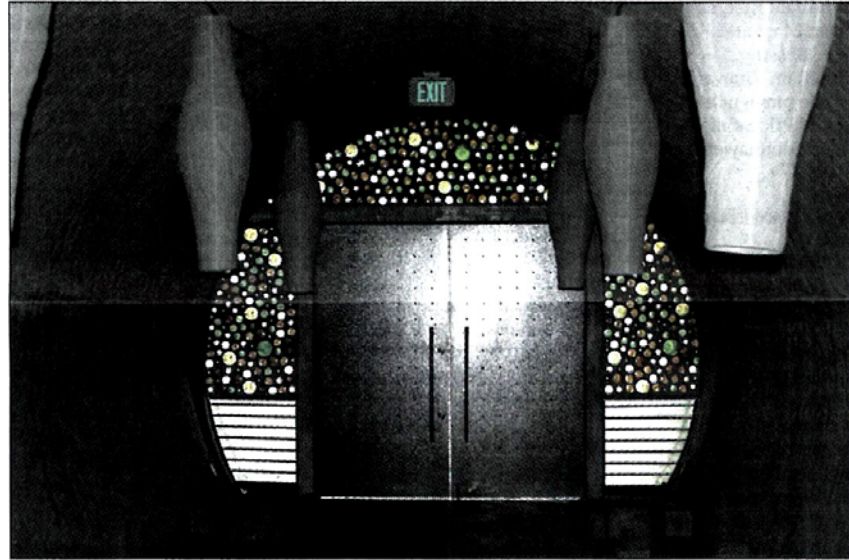
By DAVID STONEBERG
For the Register

Jeff Smith is a winemaker, not a geologist. But he's studied the Napa Valley and talks knowingly about the forces that created his Hourglass and Blueline Vineyard estates.

Those forces were the Pacific and North American tectonic plates smashing together millions of years ago. The Hourglass Vineyard is a six-acre parcel on Lodi Lane originally bought by Smith's father, Ned Smith, in 1976. Jeff named it Hourglass because the hillside site is located at the narrowest part of the hourglass-shaped Napa Valley, between the Mayacamas and Vaca mountain ranges.

The Hourglass Blueline Vineyard, near Dutch Henry Canyon Road just south of Calistoga, is contiguous to Switchback Ridge's famed vineyard and is directly across the road from Duckhorn's Three Palms vineyard. The Blueline vineyard is named for the two streams that form the boundary of the property. They appear on maps to be two blue lines.

"For thousands of years, these streams have fishtailed back and forth, creating the rock and gravel beds that are the underpinning of the vineyard's soil structure," Smith



The beauty of cave walls covered in shotcrete, a circular door and the bottoms of bottles as part of the entrance make up the Hourglass Blueline Vineyard winery. The beauty of the bottles is best seen from the inside, looking out.

said. "If you look at the great vineyards of the world, almost all of them have a rock component of some kind. Rock is a key component for growing great grapes."

Several years ago, Jeff and Carolyn Duryea Smith looked for vineyard property to buy — in vain — and had given up when they took a Sunday drive and saw a "For Sale" sign on the Dutch Henry Canyon Road

property. They walked the property and fell in love with its 41 acres. They saw the rocks pulled from the land when the vineyards were planted and found the light soils, with not much clay, that they were seeking. The land transitions from the valley floor to hillside, where plants have adapted to receiving less water.

The Smiths bought the land

with partners Michael Clark and Richard Chilton in 2006.

Immediately, Smith took out 12 acres of the old vines. Now, the property is planted in cabernet sauvignon, cabernet franc and merlot. Bob Foley, winemaker for his own label and consultant to Switchback Ridge, Paloma and Pride Mountain, has crafted

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Hourglass

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the Hourglass estate cabernet sauvignons, which have reached cult status, and now crafts the Bluevine Vineyard wines. Likewise, Hourglass' vineyard team, Kelly Maher and Josh Clark, are overseeing the new vineyards. Within the next two years, malbec and petit verdot vines will be planted.

Last fall, Smith released

the inaugural vintage — 2006 — of the Hourglass Bluevine Estate wines, which includes cabernet sauvignon, merlot and cabernet franc.

During a recent tasting, Smith said he is excited about the merlot. "A lot of merlot vineyards are planted on the wrong soil and in the wrong climate," he said. That's not the case with the merlot.

The wine has lots of layers, Smith said, and a "lovely long finish, with red fruit, rather than black fruit flavors." A little bit of

cabernet sauvignon was blended into the merlot, which was aged in French oak barrels for 20 months before it was bottled. Smith said just one-third of the barrels were new, because they are "throttling back on the oak profile" with their wines.

Winery completed

In addition to replanting and managing a new vineyard, the Smiths are in the final stages of a three-year process to build a winery and dig caves on a part of the

property that would be no good for vineyards. They hired San Francisco architect Olle Lundberg because of his modern and efficient designs. Smith said that winemaking is the objective for the new building, not serving as a center for visitors. The project has two parts: the underground caves, which were ground and blasted away with 3,000 pounds of TNT; and a simple yet elegant crush pad, with its six stainless steel tanks, all kinds of pumps and stainless

machinery. The sheltered outdoor space is underneath a roof made of galvanized steel and translucent corrugated plastic.

According to a design statement from Lundberg, "Wineries these days are an interesting combination of science and magic: there is the very exacting process of making wine — full of stainless steel and laboratory equipment — and then there is the magic of making great wine, which is in part a miracle. In the end, it is of the soil and of

the moment, and if we could quantify it, everyone would make great wine."

Hourglass Bluevine Vineyard wines are available at a handful of local retail locations: Acme Wine Shop, Dean & DeLuca, St. Helena Wine Center and the winery Web site, www.hourglass.com. Half of their wines are sold direct to their mailing list customers and the remaining half is split between restaurant and retail.