

# FABLED VINES

In the Napa and Sonoma Valleys, the personal stories of California vintners—whose commitment to sustainability has changed the wine country landscape—are reflected in the architecture and design of wineries and surrounding resorts.

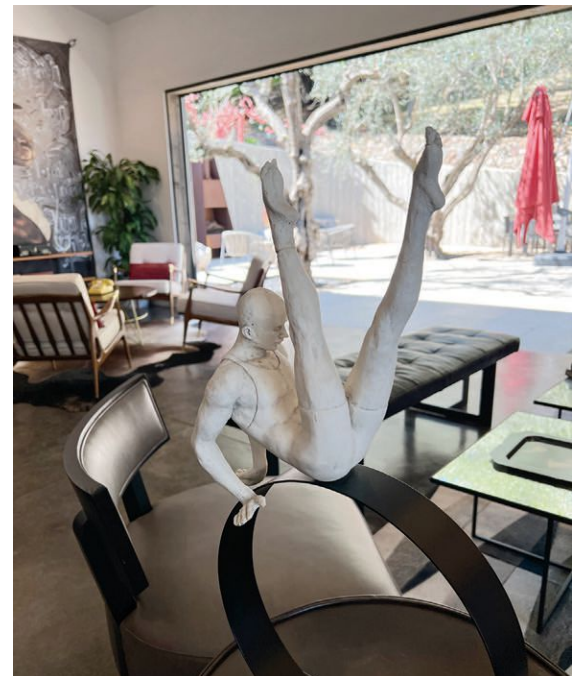
BY JUSTINE AMODEO

**B**rian Wise may have learned about terroir, the environment in which a particular fruit is produced, on the fruit farm he grew up on in Washington state, but it was his years travelling internationally as the young founder of the oil company, Ecological Engineering Systems (later, Western Gas Resources), where he developed his appreciation for world-class wine.

But it wasn't until 1993 when Wise purchased a former, infrastructure-free cattle ranch in what would later become Sonoma's Moon Mountain District that his passion project for he and his wife Ronda was launched: B. Wise Vineyards. There, on a ridge overlooking Sonoma Valley, Wise dug a cave and built a house with the rocks, ran everything on generators, and now the couple grow and cure their own olives and peaches, make their own prosciutto, and run a winery whose caverns and fermenting and aging tunnels are a combination of art gallery, design showroom and eclectic inn.







Opposite page: The view from Sleeping Lady Vineyard, where Brion is located; this page, clockwise from top: Brion's restored bank barn; Brion's tasting room; Wild West art in the tasting room; inside the cave at B. Wise; a glass wall reveals fermentation barrels at Brion.





COURTESY OF BARDESSONO



This spread: The outdoor and indoor areas of Bardessono Hotel and Spa and Lucy Restaurant are made from salvaged wood and stone from the original property; hot air balloons at sunrise appear over the Bardessono pool deck.

The series of rooms and alcoves devoted to hospitality culminate in a spacious salon where the Wises share their wines with selected guests. Ronda's signature touch is evident throughout—a warmly eclectic environment that mixes vintage furniture with Wild West Remington bronzes and art posters from 1920s Paris in subtly themed rooms that are filled with curiosities. “That’s the fun for me,” says Brian. “It’s an engineering puzzle with a foundation in aesthetics.”

Wise’s Brion label was launched from single-vineyard Cabernets in 2002 and by 2014 became a standalone brand. But it wasn’t until 2021 that Brion’s boutique indoor-outdoor tasting room, with tony interiors by Ronda, opened in a renovated 1876 bank barn built into the hillside on the property of Sleeping Lady Vineyards at the base of Mount Veeder in Yountville. The smartly designed gravity-flow winery is filled with artwork and windows that offer expansive views of the valley and surrounding vineyards. The winery makes single vineyard cabernet Sauvignons, overseen by a trio of talented winemakers, with only two by-appointment tours available daily.

Brion is an example of what Heather Sandy Hebert, in her coffee table book, “The New Architecture of Wine,” refers to when she writes: “Whether

a modern expression of California’s agricultural vernacular, a cutting-edge structure rendered in glass and steel, or a piece of wine country history reimagined in a contemporary style, the new architecture of wine expresses what the California wine country experience is right now.”

### SLEEPING GREEN

Right now, pandemic weary travellers are seeking getaways with sustainability in mind, with the wine country the perfect stop for farm-to-table restaurants, close to 100 Napa Green-certified wineries and the eco-friendly Bardessono Hotel and Spa in Yountville. As one of only seven LEED Platinum-certified hotels in the U.S., every detail of this contemporary property—with geothermal wells, solar panels and reclaimed building materials (like repurposed Tufa stone quarried in Napa County 80 years ago for the original Bardessono family wine cellar), as well as the organic linens in the 62 guest rooms and suites (and three private villas)—was considered for its sustainability.

The eco-spirit of Bardessono, originally instilled by Lucy Bardessono, the matriarch of the family who had a penchant for farming cultivated on the historic Bardessono grounds in the 1920s, was

captured by WATG Architects, who designed the hotel to be sustainable yet luxurious. Reusable materials can be found throughout the hotel. While maintenance of the wood was a project concern, using wood to capture the concepts inspired by wine barrels and the site’s surrounding wine country were important to the architects, so salvaged wood became the material of choice. Recycled steel was also used on the building’s façade in the form of rusted steel panels, which were designed to represent the colors found in wine, the surrounding vineyards and the equipment used to care for them.

The stone in the arrival walkway is sourced from the former Bardessono family’s wine cellar, salvaged and then cut into panels for a modern, welcoming touch. To encourage guests to enjoy the region’s temperate climate, the ground-level guestrooms have private courtyards that feature outdoor showers and tubs. All guestrooms include large dual-pane glass windows which are designed to take advantage of natural light while controlling glare and yielding warmth during the colder seasons. Wandering throughout the property, guests encounter various landscape features and sculptures encouraging a connection with nature before retreating into a space that does the same.





## SIP N CYCLE

You've come to the wine country to taste the wine, and whether you pedal or walk your way through the wineries here, there are plenty of experiences to choose from. With Wine Country Bikes, you can rent electric or regular bikes for self-guided tours of the wine country, and with Getaway Adventures (the two businesses have merged) Wine Tasting & Biking in Healdsburg, riders can savor the wines of the Dry Creek and Alexander Valleys on one of the best bicycling day trips anywhere in the country. Award-winning guides take you on a 10-12 mile journey where you will visit two or three wineries and enjoy a tasty picnic spread. Included is the use of hybrid bikes and helmets, unlimited water, lunch prepared by Oakville Grocery and professional local guides. (Wine tasting fees are additional).

For breakfast, lunch or dinner, guests can indulge at Lucy restaurant and bar, Bardessono's locally focused signature eatery where Executive Chef Jim Leiken elevates Lucy's legacy with conscious cooking and a locavore ideology. With a culinary philosophy ruled by the seasons, the Lucy menus are created with ingredients selected from Bardessono's organic farming garden and use only locally and regionally-sourced ingredients from farms and purveyors, in menu items like the breakfast tagine with spiced chickpeas, wild mushrooms, cherry tomatoes, ginger raita, toasted pinenuts and sunnyside organic egg; or dinner choices such as roasted butternut, carrot and sweet potato soup and sauteed petrale sole with artichoke and black truffle cream, wild gulf shrimp, marcona almonds, crispy sunchokes, lemongrass, ginger, red curry toasted peanuts and thai herbs.

The artfully crafted restaurant opens up to a spacious patio overlooking a courtyard of pools and fountains made from reclaimed olive press stones and sculptures that shift and change depending on your angle. Passionate about intellectual exchange and artistic expression, Bardessono has partnered with San Francisco's Andrea Schwartz Gallery to feature a number of up-cycled works of art throughout the lobby, grounds and guest suites.

Letting nature guide the nourishment of both body and spirit, the B Spa at Bardessono cultivates an environment that celebrates natural beauty, with products comprised of all organic ingredients from locally and regionally-based companies. Named one of the top wellness spas in the U.S. by Organic Spa Magazine, the spa offers services that include full-body massages, couples' treatments, facials, wraps and body polishes in four treatment rooms. Try the Napa Valley Vino Polish with local crushed grape seeds, oil, natural salts, lavender and other nutrient-rich ingredients followed by a Bardessono Signature Massage, where guests can choose from custom blends of aromatic oils synergistically combined with rhythmic, free-style techniques. Ask for Marci, whose magic fingers can relieve any mind, body or spirit tension.

If energizing is what you want, the Fitness Deck, offering up-to-date equipment, Pelotons and onsite yoga, is available in a private and small group capacity. The rooftop pool is open year-round—get up at sunrise and you'll see the hot air balloons rising over the vineyards and the pool deck. Or grab a free bicycle from the bike shop off the entryway and explore Yountville.

## HEARD IT THROUGH THE GRAPEVINE

Utilizing Bardessono's complimentary Lexus SUV shuttles for around town transfers (you can also test drive the new 2022 Lexus models: RX450h, LC500h, and IS350) we head to Cliff Lede Vineyards, which was founded in 2002 by Cliff Lede following the acquisition of 60 acres in the Stags Leap District of Napa Valley. With a focus on producing wines from estate vineyards, Lede engaged industry experts to redesign and replant the majority of the Yountville estate. The plantings were so specific and precise to each soil type and exposure that, to keep track without having to refer to a clipboard, Lede decided to name each block after some of his favorite rock songs and albums. From "My Generation" to "Dark Side of the Moon," he created what is known today as the Cliff Lede Vineyards "Rock Blocks."

Lede grew up involved with his family's successful construction business in Canada and first discovered the Napa Valley on a business retreat in the 1990s. Determined to plant his roots in the Stags Leap District for its complex and age-worthy wines, he remained patient until a Stags Leap District estate was for sale, and he established Cliff Lede Vineyards. When the southwest facing hillside



just above the Silverado Trail became available the following year, he acquired that as well, naming it the Poetry Vineyard. The modern winery, designed by world-renowned architect Howard Backen and completed in 2005, combines time-tested techniques with innovative technology.

As part of his expansion, Lede opened Poetry Inn's five-suite luxury boutique hotel the same year, perched high above the valley floor overlooking the winery and vineyards. He purchased the Savoy Vineyard in 2009 to create a new brand, FEL, named for his mother, Florence Elsie Lede. Last year, the Backen-designed Poetry Inn's interior aesthetic was reimagined by St. Helena based Erin Martin Design, whose team worked with a mélange of textures and natural materials in order to create a stimulating and modern, yet comfortable, contrast to Poetry Inn's timeless Napa elegance. Each suite is themed after famous poets such as Emily Dickinson and Robert Frost, with decorative artwork by artist Michael Duté who was invited to use Poetry Inn's walls as his canvas.

## SONOMA VALLEY VINES

Healdsburg, the quiet farm town that's nestled in the confluence of three of Sonoma County's major viticulture areas—the Alexander, Russian River and Dry Creek Valleys—is surrounded by hiking and biking trails, a lake where you can kayak or fish for bass, and more than 100 vineyards tucked into the vine-covered hills. With roots in agriculture and preservation, Healdsburg has only grown as a sustainable mecca for food, wine, art and lodging, including h2hotel, which opened in 2010.

Entering h2, guests encounter artist Ned Khan's Spoonfall, which uses rainwater captured from h2's green roof and is made up of 2,000 espresso spoons that fill with water, dip on a hinge and pour droplets into the lower spoons. Inside the airy lobby, artist Stephen Galloway designed the series of striking photographic glass installations surrounding the elevators to depict the canopy of a Live Oak tree—a



KIM CARROLL



COURTESY OF h2HOTEL

From top: h2hotel's designer living room with photography by Stephen Galloway and glass art by SKlo Studio; the hotel's entry outside Spoonbar features the sculpture Spoonfall by artist Ned Khan.

## DESIGNER MEALS

RH Yountville is the first-of-its-kind food, wine, art and design experience located in the heart of Napa Valley. The elegant compound is comprised of five contemporary yet classically-inspired structures where you can dine under the soaring glass roof of the indoor/outdoor restaurant surrounded by heritage olive trees, savor a glass of wine in the historic ma(i)sonry building beautifully transformed into a two-story wine vault, or enjoy tastings of limited production wines in the trellis-covered outdoor living rooms. Sip a handcrafted espresso from the barista bar or explore a boutique design gallery showcasing artistic installations of RH interiors and RH modern collections from renowned designers integrated with rare and found objects. RH Yountville also includes an interactive design atelier offering professional design services.



COURTESY OF RH YOUNTVILLE



species of oak indigenous to Sonoma County and ubiquitous amongst the Healdsburg hills. Floating on lobby shelves are Healdsburg's SKLO Studio's colorful misshapen glass sculptures.

As the first property in Sonoma County to earn LEED Gold certification, h2hotel was designed by San Francisco architect David Baker to attract sustainability minded tourists with its minimalist design, eco-chic decor and environmentally conscious details. The four-story, 36-room hotel features an undulating green roof that filters rainwater, EV charging stations, a bright and airy lobby with an all-in-one "Receptobar," and a solar-heated pool.

H2hotel prioritizes the protection and conservation of Healdsburg's scenic landscape by employing an erosion-control plan to minimize runoff and leaves 60 percent of the site as open space to promote biodiversity. The hotel also works closely with local community groups to protect Foss Creek, which runs through the property. Environmentally conscious guests will appreciate the green components in guestrooms, including sustainable bamboo flooring, chemical-free rugs from Peace Industry, recyclable paper hangers, all natural shampoos, conditioners and body washes made in the spa at Hotel Healdsburg (h2's sister property) in refillable containers, and glass water glasses made from recycled wine bottles.

## SUSTAINABLE FARMING

For well over a decade, sustainability has been a fundamental element in how Steve MacRostie has approached growing and making wine. Raised in Sacramento and in the process of preparing for medical school, MacRostie earned a biology degree from Washington's Whitman College in 1968. Afterwards, he served in the U.S. Army, where he trained as a cryptographer and was deployed to Vicenza in the Veneto region of Italy. While there, he travelled to France, Germany and Spain where European wines were an epiphany; he fell in love with the idea of winemaking and after the army, abandoned a career in medicine to enroll in the enology program at the UC Davis.

After 12 years as a young winemaker for Sonoma County's Hacienda Winery, with the support of his wife Thale, he founded MacRostie Winery and Vineyards. In 1997, he established his own Wildcat Mountain Vineyard in the Petaluma Gap region on the borderlands between Carneros and the Sonoma Coast. In May of 2012, MacRostie earned the Certified California Sustainable Winegrowing (CCSW) designation, the gold standard for sustainability certification, and again in 2015, for Wildcat Mountain Vineyard and Thale's Estate Vineyard in the Russian River Valley. That same year, The MacRostie Estate House, designed by Douglas Thornley of Gould Evans Architecture of San Francisco, opened as a

contemporary interpretation of the agrarian type of buildings in the neighborhood. The structure—fashioned from materials that include integral colored concrete flooring, stone tiles, western red cedar siding, abundant glass and simple steel—features a pitched, barn-like roof with exposed Douglas fir beams.

Thornley's design, with floor-to-ceiling glass doors and windows that oversee the 13-acre Pinot Noir vineyard, Thales Vineyard, the Mayacamas, Mount St. Helena and Geyser Peak in the distance, incorporates a gabled roof cut in half and flipped so that the eaves touch, forming a butterfly-type roof that lifts up at the entry and maximizes both

the vineyard view and the light.

At the communal table in the center of the Estate House, we try the Chardonnay. Not usually huge fans of white varietals—we were part of the ABC (Anything But Chardonnay) movement—we are now hooked on MacRostie's Wildcat Mountain Chardonnay, what Wine Spectator's Kim Marcus describes as "rich and well-structured, with honeyed accents to the apple and pear tart flavors. Toasty and light buttery accents linger on the spicy finish."

## WHERE ART AND WINE BLEND

Tipsy from our tasting, we arrive back at h2hotel



The MacRostie Estate House features a pitched, barn-like roof with exposed Douglas fir beams.



Cliff Lede's art-filled grounds; the Poetry Inn sits perched high above the valley floor overlooking the winery and gardens.





and enjoy Spoonbar's famous Wednesday night fried chicken dinner special, with an apple and baby green salad, crispy but tender on the inside fried chicken with sweet and spicy cola BBQ sauce, Joe-Joe potatoes and honey butter biscuits. We have Chardonnay on the brain so we choose one from the wine list to pair with our meal.

While h2hotel offers guests complimentary Dutch cruising bicycles, electric bikes are also an option at Healdsburg's Getaway Adventures, especially if you're navigating the hillsides. The next morning, after grabbing some coffee and chocolate and tahini croissants at Quail and Condor, a friendly neighborhood bakery, we pick up e-bikes and head down Healdsburg's spacious bike trail to Aperture Cellars, one of the area's newest and most notable wineries.

For Aperture founder and winemaker Jesse Katz, the path to becoming one of the wine world's most notable producers began as a young boy while travelling with his father, the photographer Andy Katz. Katz made his name as one of the greatest photographers of his generation, with work that graces not only coffee-table books, galleries and album covers around the globe but most of Aperture's signature bottles, connecting the origin of the winery's namesake as the camera function that opens and closes the lens.

The elder Katz brought his son along as he travelled to wine regions for his books on Napa, Sonoma, and then Burgandy, Tuscany and Bordeaux, where Jesse says he became fascinated with wine. "But it seemed like you needed it your bloodline," he says of his travels. While in business school in Santa Barbara, Katz had a part time job at Fess Parker and "saw there was a career path for someone not born into it." He applied to wine-making schools and attended Fresno State with a full scholarship to study viticulture and enology, working full time at the school's vineyard and fully-operational winery.

After falling in love with Bordeaux varietals and surrounding himself with the best winemakers, Katz, at 25-years-old, became the youngest head winemaker in America when he joined Lancaster Estate in Sonoma's Alexander Valley.

Katz started Aperture wines in 2009 and grew it slowly, purchasing the property for Aperture Cellars in 2016 and finishing construction in 2019. In July 2020, in the midst of the pandemic, the hospitality space opened with wines made in Katz's vineyards.

For the design of the space, after interviewing 10 architects, Katz settled on Mexico City-born architect Juancarlos Fernandez of St. Helena's Signum Architecture, who also designed Cade Estate Winery, Odette Estate Winery and Philippe Melka's newest award winning winery Melka Estates. What impressed Katz about Fernandez's designs were "how

This spread: At Aperture Cellars, architect Juancarlos Fernandez created a design with walls that fold open and into each other like the aperture of a camera.



PHOTOS: JOE FLETCHER







unique and spectacular each was to the brand, to the proprietor, to the winemaker,” says Katz. “It wasn’t the architect’s style, but the integrity of the brand showcased through the architecture.”

Katz said he and Fernandez drove around the property to find the best location, so that every seat in the estate house had vineyard views and the outdoor patio space was just a few feet from the vines. Katz wanted a lot of glass, windows and elements of the brand showcased throughout, and he says Fernandez created three dimensional shutters, an aperture which when closed offers private rooms and when open, “all walls fold into each other so it a versatile building” that takes advantage of the natural artwork created by the play of light and shadow throughout the day. “The mentality behind the winery was to create one of the most state of the art, industrial chic wineries in the world,” says Katz. “We can sanitize every piece of building, we put a lot of technology into the building.”

The interiors in the tasting rooms were designed by H Palmer design’s Hailey Palmer, whose family has a long lineage in Healdsburg. Palmer created a high-end lounge/fine dining feel but also integrated Andy Katz’ photography on the gallery walls. “My father worked closely with us on that part,” says Katz. “We wanted vineyard views, but on the eastern walls is a gallery space, and we choose artwork from throughout his career that has nothing to do with wine to showcase his amazing work. Every photo is intentional including in the bathrooms. These images are a photobook of my childhood and life growing up.”

Aperture Cellars controls 140-plus acres of vineyards in the Sonoma Valley, specifically sourced for their unique terroir and soil composition, which contributes to some of the most complex and well received bottles around. Katz, who consults and creates wines for a number of other properties—at Emeril Lagasse’s Carnivale du Vin in New Orleans last year, Katz set a world record for the most expensive single bottle of wine ever sold at auction with a six-liter bottle of his The Setting Wines 2019 Glass Slipper Vineyard Cabernet Sauvignon, which sold for \$1 million—emphasizes the aesthetics of how the vines were planted and the varietals chosen.

“When you visit the property, you see the manicured vineyards and the winery,” says Katz, “but well before that, we had 56 soil pits that we dug, laid out 32 acres of vineyards with 11 different soil types, set up the blocks, root stocks, clones and varietal. A lot of block and sub blocks were created to showcase the uniqueness of the terroir to its best potential. We look at the art of winemaking just as we look at art itself.”

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