

San Francisco Chronicle

FOOD & WINE

WINE COUNTRY Modernist design at new Napa wineries

By **John King**

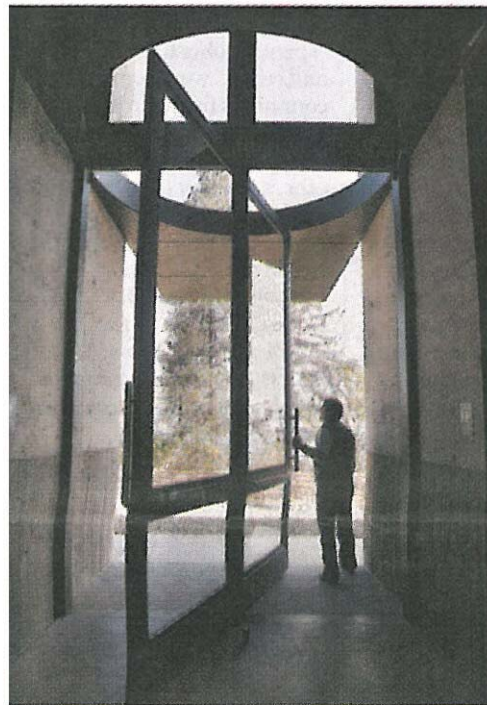
CHRONICLE URBAN DESIGN WRITER

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



Photos by Eric Luse / The Chronicle

Cade Winery, left, is made of concrete and channel glass.

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.

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.

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

E-mail John King at jking@sfnchronicle.com