

# WINE NEWS

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## Pinot Noir digs in

Mountain Chards

Napa Garagistes

Crowning Cade

Malbec Maven

Mining Amador

Haute Burgers



# Cade

*crowns Howell Mountain*

By STEVE PITCHER



The just-released 2006 Cab is a noble heir to the inaugural '05, which the author called "rich yet forceful with deep black fruit flavors."

*Opposite page:* Elegantly minimalist in its esthetic, the hospitality center allows the panoramic view — and food and wine tastings by appointment — to grab most of the attention.



**N**apa Valley is home to many striking expressions of winery design. Dotting the terrain are edifices ranging from Sattui's imposing Castello di Amorosa, a recreation of a medieval Italian castello, and Domaine Carneros's 18th-century-style French chateau, to Darioush's vision of Persepolis, capital of ancient Persia.

Less flamboyant are the cream-colored, colonnaded, elegant Opus One confection emerging from a grassy knoll and the pastoral assemblage of New England barns that comprise Nickel & Nickel.

The contemporary marvel that is Cade Winery — a 54-acre estate on Howell Mountain just outside Angwin that officially opened in April — is at once part of this "statement" trend and a bold leap into the 21st century green movement: Recycled building materials have been employed in the most innovative ways and super-environmentally friendly practices were embraced in both the vineyard and cellar.

In contrast to its modernity, its name (like that of sister winery PlumpJack) is borrowed from 16th century parlance, from the era of Elizabeth I when "cade" referred to an oak cask or barrel. (PlumpJack was the queen's nickname for Sir John Falstaff, the portly rogue and drinking partner of Prince Hal, who later became Henry IV.)

Set partially into a dramatic hillside thick with Manzanita trees, the 9,000-square-foot Cade production facility is housed in a tall, rugged shell of concrete containing 30 percent fly ash (a coal by-product that reduces the amount of cement required) topped by an inverted black steel roof made up of 98 percent recycled material. Massive, horizontal cedar beams (certified by the Forest Stewardship Council as sustainable) and vertical slabs of thick glass soften the exterior. Insulation is fabricated from recycled blue jeans and the concrete mass of the structure allows for self-cooling.

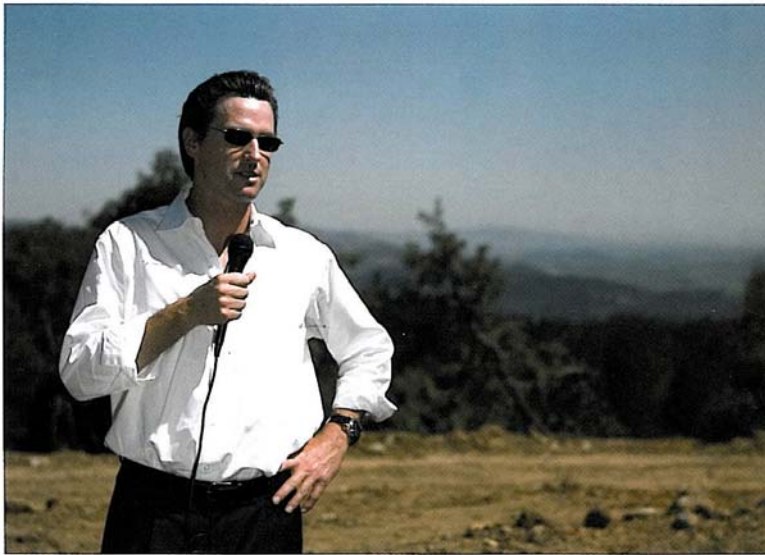
"We didn't want this to be another barn or a Tuscan villa," asserts partner and general manager John Conover. "The goal from the outset was to capture and reflect a special sense of place. Howell Mountain reds tend to be 'masculine' in style, so our architecture needed to be tough and strong, and yet not obtrusive." At the same time, Conover added, "We acknowledged from the first that we were to be a part of the fabric of this community, and that made us quite mindful about stewardship of the land, something we were very comfortable with. We want to leave the area in better shape than we found it, which is why we're committed to using strictly organic, sustainable farming practices."

Cade winemaker Tony Biagi, who also crafts the wine at PlumpJack in Oakville, worked closely from the outset with architect Juan Carlos Fernandez of the distinguished Lail Design Group in nearby St. Helena in conceiving and executing the remarkable winery and caves. A winemaker's attention to detail is clearly evident throughout.

"The first impression we wanted to create was one of visual excitement," Fernandez notes. "With dozens of wineries around the valley, our starting point was to remove the word 'traditional' from the project. I believe we accomplished this by designing buildings with a powerful presence and a prominent scale."

Inside the winery facility, ceilings soar, allowing light and natural ventilation into the spacious work area. Towering, stainless steel fermentation tanks, built in Missouri to Biagi's specifications, are the most prominent features. "They were designed with a cap-to-juice ratio of one-to-one or greater," Biagi explains, "which allows more of the cap to be exposed during fermentation. This, in turn, allows for a full extraction of color and flavor compounds." The tanks were also designed with full jackets that are split into two areas to provide cooling of the cap, while heating the juice and vice versa.

The tanks rest on individual concrete shelves protruding from the walls, a design concept that cleverly allows bins to be rolled underneath to collect



stems and skins, thus eliminating the messy operation that results when tanks rest on the floor. Each tank is dedicated to one of the 16 sub-blocks carved out by Biagi's team from the seven main blocks of the estate vineyard planted in 2003. "This way, we can harvest each block at its peak physiological maturity, without having to worry whether tank space is available," Biagi says. He expects production to top out at around 12,500 cases over the next ten years.

Fortunately, Cade's streamlined portfolio makes a statement every bit as arresting as the winery's formidable construction. Indeed, the first Cade releases — the 2005 Howell Mountain Cabernet Sauvignon, a cabernet-centric 2006 Napa Valley Cuvée and a 2007 Napa Valley Sauvignon Blanc — demonstrate Napa Valley first-tier potential, which is confirmed in spades by the 2007 Estate Cabernet Sauvignon I tasted in March at the estate with Conover and co-proprietor Gavin Newsom, who is also mayor of the City and County of San Francisco (not present was co-proprietor Gordon Getty).

The first wine made entirely from Cade's densely planted 21 acres of cabernet and merlot (situated on a southwest-facing slope at about 1,800 feet) exhibits even now the velvety texture and fine-grained tannins that mark the best of Napa's Cabernets, together with a firm, telltale Howell Mountain backbone. Vanilla custard, cassis and dried herbs in this aromatic, juicy wine are fleshed out with a

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## *CADE's wines are every bit as arresting as the winery*

luscious black cherry component (likely from the 14 percent merlot) that persists into the extended close. It's scheduled for release in September 2010, but is yet to be priced (expect it to be \$100+).

Though cost may have been an object when planning the \$20 million-plus winery, no expense was spared in formulating Cade's green business model. Plug-in sockets for hybrid electric cars are emblematic of the owners' goal to become the first winery in California to receive a "gold rating" from the United States Green Building Council; it is already the first Howell Mountain winery and the second in Napa Valley to be LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) certified — utilizing solar power, organic farming methods and a host of environmentally beneficial practices. Conover notes, "The LEED Green Building Rating System is the nationally accepted standard for design, construction and operation of high-performance 'green' buildings."

A guided tour of the 14,500-square-foot network of caves conducted by Conover and Biagi reveals curvaceous walls much smoother than the usual wine-country gunite, or shotcrete. The labyrinth was dug from compressed volcanic ash, or tuff, a major soil component on Howell Mountain, deposited many thousands of years ago when nearby volcanoes on Mt. Veeder and Mt. Nocti last erupted. High, arched tunnels and wide-open spaces, which fan out in a design that riffs on an

inverted version of the PlumpJack shield logo, provide potential storage space for 1,200 to 1,300 wine-filled barrels stacked three high. Spot lighting strung from long, swooping strands of black wire creates an eerily cool, spider-web effect. In one location, stubby concrete tanks for fermenting some of the sauvignon blanc resemble a collection of "Little Boy" atomic bombs.

The cumulative effect is especially impressive, even for seasoned visitors who have toured umpteen caves, old and new.

Last to be completed, the hospitality center continues the contemporary minimalist design features of the winery, but with more creature comforts. It takes full advantage of the magnificent, ridgetop location, presenting jaw-dropping views of the Mayacamas Mountains across the Napa Valley floor to the southwest, and equally breathtaking vistas of the Vaca Mountain Range on which the winery resides. An exhibition kitchen allows estate chef Kent Nielsen to offer food and wine pairings by appointment that feature organic, sustainably sourced ingredients.

Creating a wine estate like Cade from the wilds of Howell Mountain required both a considerable fortune and the audacity to think big in a shrinking economy. Gavin Newsom admits, "It was a real risk — a big investment compared to PlumpJack," a low-key cluster of farmhouse buildings. It helps that he was (and remains) a highly successful entrepreneur in the food, wine and hospitality businesses before being elected San Francisco mayor in 2003, and it certainly helps that Gordon Getty is a billionaire.

In April, Newsom declared his candidacy for the Democratic nomination for Governor of California in 2010. Campaigning will undoubtedly mean he'll have less time to monitor Cade's development, but he's pleased by what has been achieved thus far. "We're not perfect," he admits, "but we're constantly striving to improve." The mayor has a lot at stake in Napa Valley. "Everything I've got in my life is in these two wineries — really!"

Between Conover and Biagi, the fates of both wineries are in very capable hands. Biagi's youthful enthusiasm for the challenge that lies ahead on Howell Mountain is palpable. "Every winemaker wants the chance to create something of their own, to be the first person to set the style for a winery. Since we [the PlumpJack Group] prefer to think in the French estate model, I sometimes think, 'What would it have been like to be the first winemaker at Lafite-Rothschild?' I'm very respectful of the opportunity [at Cade]." ❖



## Tasting BAR

*The wines that follow were tasted open by the author, both with and without food, at Cade in March with winemaker Tony Bärzi.*

**Cade, 2007 Sauvignon Blanc, Napa Valley** — \$26: Sporting a distinctive Manzanita-leaf-green screwcap capsule, this elegant Graves-style blend incorporates 14 percent sémillon, which fleshes out the mid-palate and adds an extra layer to the finish without resorting to malolactic fermentation. Honeydew melon, hints of fig, gooseberry, cut grass and wet-stone minerality frame the bouquet. Like qualities are replicated on the silky-smooth palate, enlivened by crisp acidity, and enhanced by subtle notes of cantaloupe and guava. A vanillin nuance emerges in the extended close. (2,930 cases) Score: 92

**Cade, 2005 Cabernet Sauvignon, Howell Mountain** — \$64: Come-hither aromas of blueberry and cassis tinged with cocoa powder, black olive and violets are accented by a subtle, green herb note. Rich yet forceful on the palate with medium-full tannins and deep black fruit flavors. Finishes with a minty, black cherry flourish. Best decanted for early consumption. (400 cases) Score: 91

**Cade, 2006 Napa Cuvée Cabernet Sauvignon** — \$60: Blended with 23 percent merlot and 1 percent petit verdot, this claret-like effort impresses with aromas of fruity cassis and black cherry intermingled with cedar, anise and dark plum. Dark berries join red currant on the palate of this medium-to-full-bodied blend framed in medium-full, yet supple tannins. A smooth, luscious close. (2,200 cases) Score: 91 — SP

A labyrinth of curvaceous caves, dug from tuff (compressed volcanic ash), has the capacity to hold up to 1,300 barrels stacked three-high; production is expected to eventually top out at 12,500 cases.

**Opposite page:** Cade partner and San Francisco Mayor Gavin Newsom at the winery's groundbreaking in 2006. Construction went forward using largely recycled and renewable building materials; the resulting LEED-certified wine estate opened officially in April.

**Visiting Cade:** To make arrangements for tours, tastings and food and wine pairings, all of which are available by appointment seven days a week, visit [www.cadewinery.com](http://www.cadewinery.com).