

NATURE

by Janet Parmer |

Navigating through the newly dug, 15,000-square-foot storage caves at Cade Winery on the slope of Howell Mountain is a whimsical and surprising journey. The decidedly nonconformist caves, with their curvy, undulating walls, are actually built in the shape of a medieval shield—a unique design that reflects the signature motif of the winery's owner, the PlumpJack Group. As it evolves, the winery is likely to distinguish itself in other ways as well. From organic grapes and environmentally friendly practices to a management team that is committed both to the community and to the preservation of the land it occupies, Cade is determined to leave a soft footprint, not a scar.

John Conover, general manager of Oakville's PlumpJack Winery, is at the helm of the new venture, which also includes the investors who helped build the PlumpJack Group's highly successful collection of restaurants, retail stores, and resort hotels. San Francisco financier, philanthropist, and composer Gordon Getty and San Francisco Mayor Gavin Newsom are Cade's primary backers.

Cade was established to produce estate-grown cabernet sauvignon and merlot grapes on a steep, rocky, 1,800-foot hillside overlooking the Napa Valley that boasts stunning vistas of the Vaca and Mayacamas mountain ranges. The word *cade* is a Shakespearean term for a cask or barrel. (Shakespeare inspired the name PlumpJack as well. In *Henry IV*, Sir John Falstaff, a fun-loving rogue, was dubbed "plump Jack" by Queen Elizabeth. Getty actually wrote *PlumpJack* as a work for the San Francisco Opera, and the name stuck for the business enterprise.)

Although the decor of the tasting room at sister winery PlumpJack is evocative of an opera set—complete with a medieval shield on the wall and an ornate iron chandelier—Cade stands in stark contrast, with a bold, contemporary design constructed of steel, glass, and concrete. The caves, in addition to adding an unusual design element, are meant to be unobtrusive and environmentally respectful, requiring no heating or cooling and leaving the land above as nature intended.

"We didn't want this to be a barn or a Tuscan villa," says Conover, explaining that Mexican architect Juan Carlos Fernandez was hired because he grasped Cade's special sense of place. Other than the vineyards, winery building, and a hospitality center that is set to open this autumn, the forested hillside will be preserved as open space.

Conover, who moved to St. Helena from Marin County 24 years ago, is optimistic that Cade wines will live up to expectations. Cabernet sauvignon vines thrive on rocky soil, and wines made from hillside-grown grapes usually have more intense flavor, he says. Cade wines will be grown organically, and the same team working down in the valley for PlumpJack will be making wine at Cade.

"Great wine has been made on Howell Mountain, and I wasn't worried about whether we could continue making good wines," Getty says. "John [Conover] and [winemaker] Tony [Biagi] came to me with an idea, and I looked at the cost and said, 'sure.'" Getty was convinced that as long as Conover put together a group



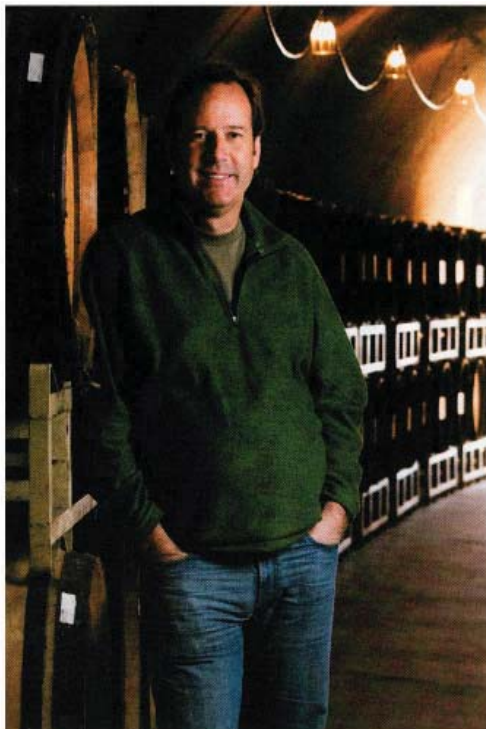
PHOTOGRAPH BY MARTIN SUNDBERG



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CADE WINERY, THE LATEST NOTCH ON THE EXPANDING PLUMPJACK BELT, ROLLS OUT HEAVY-HITTING WINES WHILE TREADING LIGHTLY ON THE EARTH

Cade Winery, Napa Valley



John Conover (left) and winemaker Anthony Biagi

of passionate, committed people, success would follow. Getty and Newsom leave the day-to-day winery decisions to Conover and winemaker Anthony Biagi, but are consulted on key business strategies and expansion plans.

Getty considers the wines created at Cade to be premium wines—but not cult wines—and expects that PlumpJack clientele will be curious to taste what Cade is producing. He notes that it's important for small wineries such as PlumpJack to preserve their wine industry niche. "The strategy is in not using the name too much, and actually, with boutique wines, you don't want to make too much of it," Getty explains.

The small, family-style approach applies to people as well. After a particularly hectic harvest last year, the owners invited PlumpJack and Cade employees and their families to the winery's Kids Crush day, when the whole community squashed grapes together by hand and feasted on peanut butter and jelly sandwiches.

"This is one of the most fulfilling things in my life," says Conover. "It's one of the few things in my life that has turned out better than expected. The whole team is a pleasure to work with, and the people are so proud to be working here."

Conover hopes winery employees will continue to take an active role in the Howell Mountain community and wants Cade to set an example of environmental sensitivity. The winery boasts an energy-efficient wine-processing facility and was constructed to conform to standards set by the U.S. Green Building Council's Leadership Environmental Energy Design (LEED) program.

"You're part of the fabric of the community, and that makes you think about stewardship of the land," Conover says. "We want to leave the area in better shape than when we bought it. It costs more to do it this way. Why do it? It's the right way. It's a multigenerational approach, and it makes all the sense in the world."

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