

CALGARY HERALD

California's green wine scene

While in Napa a short while back, I had the opportunity to visit Cade Winery, a relative newcomer that is the latest addition to the Plumpjack group of companies, a San Francisco-based consortium owned by former San Francisco mayor Gavin Newsom and the Getty family.

Cade sits atop Howell Mountain, an architectural gem that holds the distinction of being one of the world's most environmentally conscious wineries. The winery is in line to receive gold LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) certification and, after touring the property, I could see why.

Ninety-nine per cent of the winery's electricity is generated by solar panels and the facility uses 67 per cent less water than a conventional operation. Most of the building--right down to the furniture-- is made from recycled materials, including the insulation in the walls, which is produced from recycled denim.

Two wines from Cade have just arrived in Alberta: the 2008 Sauvignon Blanc (\$43) and 2006 Cabernet Sauvignon (\$90), both decidedly higher-end efforts that have been generating some very good press.

The folks at Cade are not unique in their efforts to go green, but they have taken environmentally conscious winemaking to a new level, raising the bar for other producers, at least in California, if not beyond. Organic viticulture, which vastly reduces the use of chemical fertilizers and pesticides, has become near-mainstream in many wine-producing countries, but wineries are another matter.

Conventional wineries use scads of water and electricity each year and, in drought-plagued regions such as California and South Australia, conserving resources has become paramount to survival.

About 20 minutes down the road from Cade, in the Oakville district of Napa Valley, is Shafer Vineyards, a blue-chip producer whose top wine--the Hillside Select--is a perennial candidate for the best Cabernet Sauvignon produced in Napa. At about \$350 a bottle, it is not for the faint of wallet, but in all fairness, it is a world-class wine that holds its own against the best from just about anywhere.

Like Cade, Shafer has been proactive from an environmental perspective for many years. All Shafer's electrical needs are met by solar panels--the winery generates so much solar electricity that it actually returns some to the state grid, an important role when you consider the No. 1 source of toxic air pollution comes from generating conventional electricity (visit shafervineyards.com for the full story).

We like to think of wine as a natural product, but many wineries around the world have a negative impact on the environment; producers like Cade and Shafer are to be commended for their efforts to change that. Cheers!

Geoff Last is a Longtime Calgary wine merchant and writer and a regular contributor to City Palate magazine. he instructs on food and wine at the Cookbook Company Cooks.

Best Cellars

Wine: Shafer 2006 One Point Five Stags Leap District Cabernet Sauvignon

Country: California, from Napa Valley

Suggested retail price: \$114, GST included