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THE CIRCULAR CELLAR REFERENCES THE DESIGN OF CHAPELS AND FEATURES EARTHQUAKE-PROOF BOTTLE HAMMOCKS. THE BOULDER, LEFT IN ITS NATURAL STATE BAR ITS POLISHED TOP, OFFERS A MARKER AROUND WHICH VISITORS CAN GATHER

ROCK STAR

A new Californian winery serves up a big taste of the local surroundings

For his newest winery, located in the historic Alexander Valley region in northern California, wine entrepreneur David Duncan enlisted Daniel Piechota, a local architect with strong connections to the area. Duncan's father established the Silver Oak wine label in the 1970s and the business has been growing ever since. It now works over 400 acres of land but Duncan is determined that the company's best wines are still to come.

The new winery is set in 70 acres of vineyards along the foothills of the Mayacamas Mountains, and the brief Duncan gave Piechota was to »

Wine & Design



THE WINERY BUILDINGS ARE INSPIRED BY CALIFORNIAN BARNs, AND ALTERNATE STEEL AND WOOD. THE PRODUCTION FACILITIES (TOP AND ABOVE) OFFER

A GRAPHIC, IMPACTFUL EXTERIOR, WHILE THE MORE OPEN TASTING ROOM, LEFT, FOCUSES ON THE EXPERIENCE FROM THE INSIDE, FRAMING VIEWS OF THE LANDSCAPE

create a striking facility that would ‘frame the vineyards’ around it.

The project is split into two main structures – a tasting room, which is positioned on the hillside, and the production facility, located in the valley below. To answer Duncan’s request for a completely contemporary structure, Piechota, counter-intuitively perhaps, started looking at traditional barn shapes. ‘Barn structures inspired me while I was driving around California. They hit that sweet spot for me. It’s not just the sentimental idea of a barn, but the abstraction of a barn,’ he says. ‘If you look from a distance, they are very abstract, not that articulated, powerful in their form.’

Each of the two resulting buildings features a different design approach. With the production facility, a graphic structure that connects and contrasts with the organic forms of the surrounding vineyards, Piechota focused on the external structure, and the visual impact from outside. The opposite is true of the tasting room, which is designed to be read from the inside out, with a strong focus on the internal architecture framing the views. Designed as a gabled pavilion, the open building is placed in close conversation with the surrounding nature.

Within the tasting room is the cellar, a dark, cool space with a granite boulder in the centre and leather bottle hammocks (designed to save the wine in the event of an earthquake) lining the walls. ‘We wanted the cellar to be an inward-focusing space in contrast to the outward focus and openness of the tasting room,’ says Piechota. ‘We see it as a dark

space for contemplation, quiet and reverence, almost chapel-like. We liked the idea of connecting the circular form of silos and barrels, both ubiquitous forms in wine-making, with the form of chapels. Think Saarinen’s MIT chapel, for example.’

Once the buildings’ forms were set, the architect worked on materials, alternating wood and steel to achieve a more monolithic aesthetic. Piechota used reclaimed materials throughout, and some of the ‘relatively random patterns of wood in the architecture’, he notes, have more to do with the equally random sizes of the raw materials available to him. Other elements of the design are born out of necessity. Vertical wooden panels, arranged in a rhythmic pattern over the production building’s window, were originally needed to control light into the fermentation room, but later became a distinctive visual feature throughout.

Another key part of the brief was smart use of water, an increasingly scarce resource in California. Near the tasting room, a ‘water spine’ is both an aesthetic addition and a functional element; referencing farming troughs for feeding animals, it doubles as an air-cooling device when the breeze flows over it.

The overall design of the winery is strongly informed by the landscape, with the rows of vineyards offering a natural geometric rhythm to the plot. ‘There is an intention for the vineyard and the buildings to be in sync,’ says Piechota. ‘We were shaping the buildings to shape the views.’*

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