

Wine by Design

Sean Stanwick Loraine Fowlow



Quintessa

Walker Warner Architects

Location: St Helena, California, USA
Completion date: 2003

In the wine business for over 40 years, Augustin and Valeria Huneus are, without a doubt, the quintessential vintners of Napa Valley. Seeing themselves as dedicated stewards of the land promoting soil-sensitive, sustainable and biodynamic viticulture processes, their philosophy for winemaking is that the wine should be known for the property from which it originated, rather than its varietal composition. Together, they have spent more than 14 years developing the Quintessa vineyards from terrain that had never before yielded a single grape, nor any other crop for that matter. In fact, quintessential is the word that inspired them to name the winery Quintessa.

The site is in the heart of the Rutherford appellation of Napa Valley's Silverado Trail and achieves the highly improbable by possessing all the diverse characteristics of a great wine estate: five rolling hills, a lake and a river, several microclimates and a varied mix of soils with limited vigour. With such a strong reverence for what is clearly sacred land, building a state-of-the-art winery and visitors' centre that would complement the bucolic serenity of the 280-acre Napa Valley estate while also representing the quality and elegance of the Quintessa brand presented a unique challenge.

The winery – which held its grand opening in 2003 – is a perfect extension of the Huneus's holistic philosophy and is all about the sympathetic integration of architecture, winemaking and landscape. On approach the building is quite subtle; the elegant crescent-shaped wall nestles itself within the contours of the land, and is in fact almost indistinguishable from it. The rough-cut stone captures Napa Valley's historical palette and is softened by its integration with verdant plantings and mature trees. But the building also makes a dramatic gesture as the 20-foot-high glass doors open to reveal an elegant and functional winery while the outstretched arc forms a natural outdoor amphitheatre for winemaking. Visitors are allowed to view the entire process, starting with the visitors' centre atop and ending with the wine caves buried below. With finer details of steel and wood that would make Frank Lloyd Wright sit up and take notice the steel, concrete and stone used in the caves reappear in the visitors' centre which houses the tasting room and library.

Production of the Bordeaux-style blend is now fully on site and employs the gravity-flow process, making full use of the contoured terrain. Trucks swoop up the circular driveway to deliver the grapes to the crush deck on the second level where they are sorted, de-stemmed and lightly crushed. The crushed grapes are then funnelled through roof hatches to the fermentation tanks below. The homage paid to the rich environment is ubiquitous; Huneus

Opposite: **Quintessa.**
Production of the Bordeaux-style blend is now fully on site and uses the gravity-flow process, making full use of the contoured terrain. Loaded from above, crushed grapes are funnelled through roof hatches to the fermentation tanks below. Quintessa produces approximately 6,000 six-bottle cases annually.



Above: **Quintessa.**
The outstretched arc forms a natural outdoor amphitheatre for winemaking. The rough-hewn stone captures Napa Valley's historical palette and is softened with plantings and mature trees. The building also makes a dramatic gesture as the 20-foot-high glass doors open to reveal an elegant and functional winery within.



WINERY
ADDRESS 1601 SILVERADO TRAIL, ST HELENA, CALIFORNIA 94574, USA
TELEPHONE +1 707 967 1601
WEBSITE WWW.QUINTESSA.COM
OPENING HOURS VISITORS' CENTRE OPEN DAILY 10AM–4PM
TOURS TOURS FOR GROUPS OF 10 OR LESS DAILY 10:30AM, 12:30PM, 2:30PM BY APPOINTMENT ONLY
DESIGN STYLE AN EXERCISE IN CONTEXTUALISM; A CRESCENT-SHAPED STONE FORM TRACES THE CONTOURS AND FORMS A NATURAL AMPHITHEATRE FOR WINEMAKING
RECOMMENDED WINES & ICEWINES BLENDS OF CABERNET SAUVIGNON, MERLOT AND CABERNET FRANC. QUINTESSA 2001 THROUGH QUINTESSA 1994
PREMIUM VINTAGES / NEW RELEASES QUINTESSA 1995 – BERRY, PLUM AND CASSIS FRUIT WITH ENOUGH ACIDITY TO CUT THROUGH RICH SAUCES CAN BE ENJOYED IMMEDIATELY BUT A DECADE OF CELLARING WILL BE WORTH THE WAIT
TASTINGS / SPECIAL EVENTS \$25 TASTING FEE, WAIVED WITH PURCHASE
VINTNERS / PROPRIETOR AUGUSTIN AND VALERIA HUNEUS, VINTNER/PROPRIETORS; AARON POTT, WINEMAKER; JACQUES BOISSENOT, MASTER BLENDER



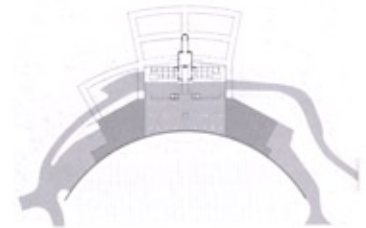
Above: Quintessa.
Sitting in the heart of the Rutherford appellation of Napa Valley's Silverado Trail, Quintessa is a perfect extension of the owners' holistic philosophy for viticulture, and is all about the sympathetic integration of architecture, winemaking and landscape. The elegant crescent-shaped building nestles itself within the contours of the land, and is in fact almost indistinguishable from it.

relies on a modern version of the basket press and uses French oak fermenters, with the size of the tanks dictated by the size of the specific blocks of the vineyard they service. No stainless-steel tanks here. When fermentation is complete, 'wine must' is drained from the tanks to the winepress located in the central hall.

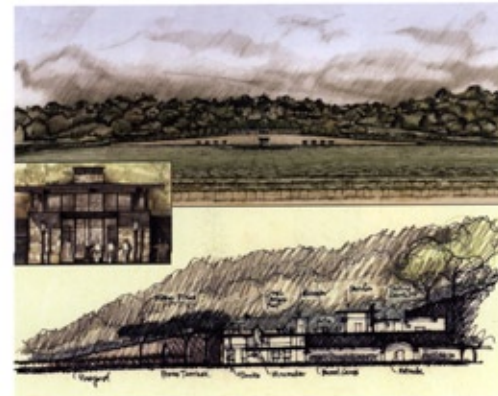
It's no secret that a well-built cave begets a great wine and at Quintessa the barrelling caves are the real treat. Clearly the most modern in the Napa Valley, they form an extensive network radiating in three directions. At the point of convergence stands a sentinel-like sculptural fountain with a halo of light from above, as if to offer a blessing of thanks for the fruits of the earth. Long orderly rows of barrels line the dimly lit walls, along whose length music wafts. Under the protection of an irrigated green roof, the barrel cave and wine-storage room make use of thermal mass and night air ventilation for refrigeration. And at over 17,000 square feet, this wonderful low-slung curved edifice will certainly contribute to the recent trend of 'wine-cave envy' sweeping the Napa Valley.

The Quintessa vineyard is perhaps one of the most diverse yet carefully conceived grape-growing environments in the Napa region. So as to take full advantage of the varying soil conditions and maintain the land's long-term integrity, Huneus has planted a clonal differentiation for each varietal, including European as well as American clones of Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot and Cabernet Franc.

The process is apparently working as the 1996 Quintessa is often talked of as a Californian classic. Since the debut of the 1994 vintage, of which just 1,000 cases of this limited production wine were released, *Wine Spectator* has honoured Quintessa by awarding five of its six releases 90 points or higher on the 100-point scale. Quintessa now produces approximately 6,000 six-bottle cases annually.



Above: Quintessa.
With a network of caves set deep into the hill behind, this wonderful curved edifice will certainly contribute to the trend of wine cave envy sweeping the valley.



Left: Quintessa.
Early architect renderings show the strong desire of the winemakers to promote soil-sensitive and sustainable viticulture processes.

Right: Quintessa.
 Radiating outwards in three directions, long orderly rows of barrels line the dimly lit walls, along whose length music wafts. At the point of convergence, a sentinal-like sculptural fountain lit with a halo of light from above, offers a blessing of thanks for the fruits of the earth.

Below: Quintessa.
 The visitors' centre is a beautifully symmetrical pavilion sitting atop the production facilities and housing the tasting room and library. Finer details of steel and wood sit comfortably against the rough-cut stone facades.



Above: Quintessa.
 The homage paid to the rich environment is ubiquitous; Hureau relies on a modern version of the basket press and uses French oak fermenters, with the size of the tanks dictated by the size of the specific blocks of the vineyard they service. No stainless-steel tanks here.

Below: Quintessa.
 Longitudinal section shows extent of Quintessa's underground network and earth integration techniques for barrel aging.

