

winemaking

TECHNICAL REVIEW

Inside Robert Mondavi Winery's Three-year Transformation

From Cellar to Tasting Room: A Renovation Shaped By History and Napa's Landscape

Katherine Martine



Meet the Author: Katherine Martine is the assistant editor for WineBusinessMonthly. She joined the company in 2023 and is responsible for assisting with production duties for the monthly trade magazine and the website. Katherine has five years' experience with various weekly news publications in Sonoma and Marin counties, covering city government, education, natural disasters, local business, public safety, agriculture and wine. She earned her Bachelor of Arts in journalism from San Francisco State University and has achieved the WSET Level 2.

AFTER A THREE-YEAR TRANSFORMATION, spanning the cellar, grounds and hospitality spaces, Robert Mondavi Winery reopened to the public on April 20, 2026, in conjunction with its 60th anniversary. The ambitious renovation included a complete overhaul of the winemaking facility and equipment, the addition of a new hospitality wing, and updates to landscaping and outdoor tasting spaces.

For the project, architects found inspiration in paying homage to the past and the natural landscape: the vineyards, the Mayacamas and Napa River, connecting each geological landmark, along with the winemaking, to the guest experience.

Efficiency, conservation and reuse of the old building's materials were also guiding principles for the building and design team when renovating the historic property.

"We wanted the new architecture to speak to the old," said David Darling, co-founder of Aidlin Darling Design, in an interview with WineBusinessMonthly (WBM).

Darling believes that winemaking is an art form with real people behind it. "Every opportunity we have to remind people of that fact and the reality of the vineyard as this living thing—that was driving the whole design process," he shared.

The winery started in 1966 with the famous collaboration of Cliff May and Robert Mondavi—it was a gamechanger at the time, Darling observed,

because it introduced a new paradigm of hospitality and winemaking and how people interact with it. "So, we didn't want to lose that," he said of the new design.

One of the first tasting spaces guests see is what Darling calls the living room, a space designed to be warm and convivial, harkening back to the '70s when winemakers often hosted visitors in their home. Photos from Mondavi's line the wall, and the space sets the tone for the visit.

According to Darling, the winery, like many others, had expanded gradually over the years, resulting in spaces that obscured views of the grounds and vineyard setting.

So, the architects' overarching goal was to peel back unnecessary layers to give the original 1966 building more "legibility," reinvigorate the open-air feeling of the space, and reconnect the guest experience to the land and the humanity of winemaking.

In the culinary wing of the property, for example, guests can view the gardens, the vines and the kitchen.

At one end of this wing, one can also see what's called the aqueduct (which features reclaimed slab work from the old building and a rock garden for when it's dry), an outdoor feature that collects water from the roof, reminding visitors of the narrative of water conservation and the "natural phenomenon." Further emphasizing the natural world is the new landscaping, which was intentionally made to look a bit more wild rather than meticulously manicured.

This feeling of connectivity continues into the new cellar where large windows and skylights bring in natural light. Designated walkways and viewing areas allow guests to see what back-of-house winemaking activity is like.

"What I really love about how we renovated this winery is it wasn't just focused on a piece of the winery, it wasn't just focused on only the guest experience, it wasn't just focused on winemaking: it was this really cool, holistic vision for the entire winery," said Kurtis Ogasawara, director of winemaking at Robert Mondavi.

Ogasawara noted that whether you're working in the cellar or in hospitality you come in and have this great connection to the land and a better work experience.



ALL PHOTOS: ADAM POTTS FOR ROBERT MONDAVI WINERY

Robert Mondavi's old oak fermenters were decommissioned and taken apart. The wood was then reused as ceiling paneling in the cellar and in other locations across the facility.

In the Cellar

"What's been fun for me as a winemaker [is], not only just doing the entire facility but really focusing on the winemaking process. Just about every bit of equipment that touches the wine we've upgraded and renewed," Ogasawara said.

Everything, from the destemmers, to optical sorters, pumps and tanks, etc., is new.

All 56 old oak, 16-ton fermenters were decommissioned and taken apart. The wood was reused as ceiling paneling at various locations throughout the winery and in the cellar.

Replacing those large old fermenters required 16 tanks in total—all closed-top—including two concrete eggs from Sonoma Cast Stone. The stainless-steel tanks range in size from 3-, 5- and 9-ton tanks, each outfitted with automatic pump-overs and TankNet programming. All automatic pump-overs are from Crush Mechanical in Napa. TankNet allows the winemaking team to taste each day at all hours of the day, which Ogasawara added has been nice for precision winemaking. Vintrace is used for the winery tracking system.

"As we dial things in, we're seeing that maybe that 16-ton pick," Ogasawara observed, with regard to the old oak vessels, "is now separated into two or three different picks."

Rather than sacrificing ripeness and picking all of the fruit together for one fermentation, the winemaking team can now separate grapes and pick at ideal ripeness. It unlocks the potential to possibly make a few more block-specific wines and fine-tune wine quality with precise pickings across the vineyard, Ogasawara explained.

One of the other huge upgrades they've made is the addition of warm glycol to the winery. Previously, the facility was only equipped with cold glycol for fermentation, now they can warm them and achieve precise temperatures quickly and efficiently.

There's also a new CO₂ evacuation system. While there's a purging system with the new design of the tanks, there's an extra line of stainless steel that will suck out CO₂ from the room.

There are also new basket presses and bladder presses, as well as new and extended areas for barrel storage with more precise temperature control. With this, the facility gained barrel space—total barrel capacity is about 5,000, twice the prior 2,500 capacity.

Downstairs there's an additional cold room in case more fruit is brought in; the winemaking team can store roughly 23 tons of grapes in macro-bins if needed.

For filtration, crossflow—as well as lenticular filters—are used.

The winery previously had its own bottling line, but that was removed. For the next bottling, the team will use a Constellation Brands-built mobile bottling line. According to the team, the winery is moving towards lighter-weight glass across its portfolio to improve the carbon footprint.

The Winemaking Process

Another interesting fact about the renovation, Ogasawara noted, is the winery's positive position in terms of vineyards during a time when many wineries are pulling back on vineyard acreage.

There's a new vineyard block of Cabernet Sauvignon planted at the northern half of the parking lot area. Total vineyard acreage is 440 acres, which includes the To Kalon estate vineyard in the Oakville AVA and the Wappo Hill vineyard in Stag's Leap. Both are certified organic.

Varieties grown include Cabernet Sauvignon, Cabernet Franc, Malbec, Merlot, Petit Verdot, Sauvignon Blanc and Semillon. Picking decisions are based on Brix, pH and berry weight, in addition to phenolics and color. Ogasawara says the main driver is taste.

WHITE WINE PROGRAM

White wines are whole cluster, direct to press. All white fruit is hand-picked at night or early morning and placed into macro-bins, delivered cold and put into press right away.

tech sheet

Robert Mondavi Winery
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robertmondaviwinery.com
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WINERY INFORMATION

Winemaker(s)	Kurtis Ogasawara
Vineyard Manager	Blake Wood
Year Bonded	1966
Winery Case Production	Approximately 85,000 9LE
Average Bottle Price	Largest-volume SKU: Napa Valley Cabernet Sauvignon, SRP of \$54.99.
Direct-to-Consumer Sales (%)	Roughly 35%

VINEYARD INFORMATION

Appellation	Oakville
Vineyard Acreage	440
Varieties Grown	Cabernet Sauvignon, Cabernet Franc, Malbec, Merlot, Petit Verdot, Sauvignon Blanc, Semillon
Rootstocks	110R, St. George, 420A, 101-14, 5C, 039-16
Soil Type	Gravelly loam, loam, clay loam
Climate	Mediterranean, marine influenced, strong diurnal shift
Vineyard Sourcing	To Kalon vineyard in the Oakville AVA and Wap-po Hill Vineyard in Stag's Leap
Sustainability Certification(s)	CCOF Certified Organic

VINEYARD EQUIPMENT

Fertilizer Applicators	Broadcast spreader, AG injector, sprayers
Frost Prevention	Frost fans
Gondola	Half-ton boxes
Irrigation Equipment	Electric pumps, inline drip Pellenc multi function XL60, L20, 345 Flail and rotary mowers Discs
Machinery	Clemens undervine weed knife Fischer undervine mower Quantum mist sprayers SA spreaders
Soil Testing and Analysis	Three-year review/amendment cycle
Vineyard Pumps	Electric
Weather Monitoring Systems	Western Weather

BUILDING THE WINERY

Year Built	1966
Size (square feet)	215,844 sq. ft.
Architects	Aidlin Darling Design, BAR Architects & Interiors
Contractor	Cello & Maudru Construction
Engineers	MEP Engineering, TEP Engineering
Interior Design	BAMO, Inc.
Structural/Civil Engineering	Summit Engineering
Landscape Architect	Surface Design
Refrigeration Design/Build	ColdFlo Mechanical
HVAC	Simpson Sheetmetal
Cellar Humidity Control	SmartFog (installed by ColdFlo)
Electrical Engineering	Lunardi Electric
Geotechnical Engineering	Miller Pacific
Lighting Consultant	EJA Lighting



COOPERAGE

Barrel Washers	Moog, Tom Beard
Barrel Racks/Pallets	Western Square

WINERY EQUIPMENT

Stainless Fermentors	Westec Tanks
Concrete Fermentors	Sonoma Cast Stone
Pump-Over Devices	Crush Fabrication
Press	Pellenc bladder press; Bucher Vaslin basket press
Heating/Chilling System	TankNet controls; ColdFlo glycol system
Racking	Bulldog Pup racking wand
Pumps	Bucher Vaslin Delta PMV must pump
Filtration	Pall cross-flow filter and lenticular filters

CRUSHPAD EQUIPMENT

Bin Washer	Tom Beard
Crusher	Pellenc
Destemmer	Pellenc
Receiving Hopper	P&L Specialties
Conveyors	P&L Specialties, Pellenc
Sorting	Pellenc optical sorter and mechanical sorter

WINEMAKING

Analytical Equipment	Unitech Scientific Chemwell, Mettler Toledo
Yeast	Scott Labs, Laffort, Enartis
Nutrients	Scott Labs, Laffort, Enartis
Malolactic Bacteria	Gusmer Enterprises

SOFTWARE

Point-of-Sale	Tripleseat
Reservations	Tock
Wine Production	TankNet, Vintrace
Vineyard Software	Vintrace

PACKAGING

Bottling Line	Constellation's mobile bottling line
Capsules	Ramondin, Maverick, Cork Supply
Closures	Portocork
Bottles	Ardagh Group; 1.5L from Saverglass
Label Design	Susan Pate, Pate International Design
Website Design	Nike Communications, Inc., Farsee

WAREHOUSING

Case Goods Storage	Pick, Pack and Ship
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OTHER

PR Agency	Nike Communications, Inc
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