

Organic reds, quirky Hundertwasser architecture

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"Appointments" have to be loosely observed at Quixote, which is tricky to find after one exits Silverado Trail and starts down a winding road back into the Stags Leap Palisades. When you think you've reached the end of the road and missed the turn, make a left and proceed to 6126.

Here, under a gold-leaf dome, waits the surprise of any day in Napa Valley: a colorful, quirky structure that looks part temple, part fairy tale, inspired by an equally colorful and quirky friendship between winery owner Carl Doumani and the Viennese artist, architect and philosopher Friedensreich Hundertwasser. Hundertwasser died in 2000, but not before instilling a lot of life into the winery, which he designed in keeping with his rules of no straight lines, green (planted) roofs, turret caps and plenty of color. Even the beams in the ceiling of the barrel room wiggle.

Like many by-appointment tasting rooms in the valley, Quixote recently has reached out for more visitors; its Web site makes it easy to call or e-mail for an appointment, and though weekends are beginning to fill up, same-day weekday appointments are not difficult to come by.

The vibe: Architecture is king during the \$25 tour of Quixote (which begins once all visitors are accounted for), but one needn't be an expert to digest the information. Guide Anne White pours out the story of the Doumani-Hundertwasser collaboration in a very informal and funny style made all the more charming by her Irish brogue. I'm not sure any question stumped her as she spouted off the dates, the materials, the philosophy - without sounding a bit rote. It's a small building and a small property, which perhaps explains why visitors are received so warmly they feel like guests.

The team: Doumani bought the Stags Leap Ranch in 1971 and then restored and expanded the Stags' Leap Winery before selling it off to Beringer. One of the valley's more colorful characters, Doumani kept this "little" 27 acres and established two literary labels, Quixote and Panza. Aaron Pott (Quintessa) is a longtime consultant.

New winemaker Matt Reid has Failla and Seavey on his resume, and is co-owner of PWR (People's Wine Revolution). Michael Wolf manages the organically farmed vineyard.

The wines: Quixote produces 3,500 cases a year, all from estate grapes. It is best known for its Petite Syrah, which costs \$40 to \$70. But Doumani loves Cabernet Sauvignon, so Quixote bottles that too. Current releases included a Grenache-Mourvedre when we visited, but the hit of the day was the 2004 Panza Claret, screw cap and all. There's nothing here for the white-wine drinker.

The experience: After our informative and fun tour, we were seated at a big table in the dining room, which had a lovely view of the grounds; in better weather, visitors will have seats on the patio. White sat at the head and supervised the leisurely tasting, which included three generous pours among the current releases, two bonus tastes from the library (2002 and 2004 Petite Syrahs) and a visit from the winemaker, who came in raving about the 2009 Cabernet that had been picked less than 30 days ago. So we got a bonus taste of that too, and lamented that it would probably be another five years or so before we'd get a bottle.

The extras: Quixote has a wine club.

Nearby: Regusci Winery, 5584 Silverado Trail, Napa, (707) 254-0403, regusciwinery.com; Pine Ridge Winery, 5901 Silverado Trail, Napa, (707) 253-7500, pineridgewinery.com; Hartwell Vineyard, 5795 Silverado Trail, Napa, (707) 255-4269, hartwellvineyards.com.

If you go: Quixote Winery, 6126 Silverado Trail, Napa, (707) 944-2659, quixotewinery.com. Visits by appointment only 10 a.m.-4:30 p.m.; \$25 tour-tasting Wed.-Fri. (about 90 minutes), \$20 tasting Sat.-Sun. (allow 60 minutes).

Rating: Rating: THREE STARS

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