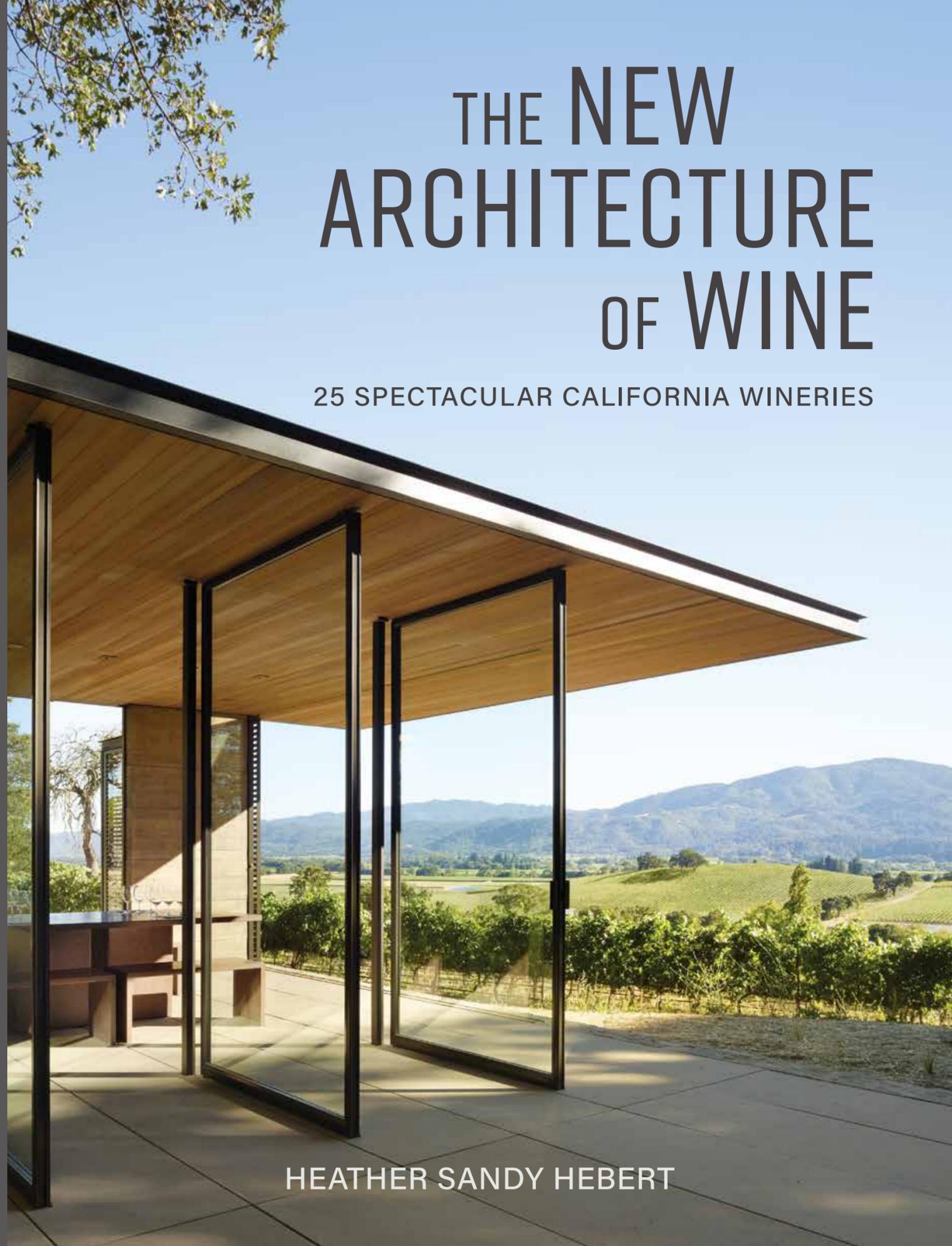




THE NEW ARCHITECTURE OF WINE

HEBERT

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# THE NEW ARCHITECTURE OF WINE

25 SPECTACULAR CALIFORNIA WINERIES

HEATHER SANDY HEBERT

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HEATHER SANDY HEBERT



GIBBS SMITH  
TO ENRICH AND INSPIRE HUMANKIND

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FOR MY DAD, WHO INSPIRED MY LIFE-LONG PASSION FOR  
ARCHITECTURE AND DESIGN.

FOR MY MOM, WHOSE DEVOTION AND UNWAVERING  
SUPPORT HAS SPANNED A LIFETIME.

FOR MY CHILDREN, WHO ARE MY GREATEST JOY.

FOR MY HUSBAND, WHOSE BELIEF IN ME KNOWS NO BOUNDS  
AND WHO GAVE ME THE CONFIDENCE TO FIND MY OWN VOICE—  
YOU ARE MY EVERYTHING.

"POSTMODERN WINEMAKING IS THE PRACTICAL ART OF  
CONNECTING THE HUMAN SOUL TO THE SOUL OF A PLACE  
BY RENDERING ITS GRAPES INTO LIQUID MUSIC."

—CLARK SMITH, *POSTMODERN WINEMAKING:  
RETHINKING THE MODERN SCIENCE OF AN ANCIENT ART*



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# INTRODUCTION

We live in what Esther Mobley, wine editor for the *San Francisco Chronicle*, has called the “Golden Age of Wine.” Long gone are the days when new-world wine had to prove itself against the pillar of old-world wine. The 40th anniversary of the famous Judgement of Paris, in which California wine asserted itself on the world stage, has come and gone. A new, second generation of vintners experiment and expand the definition of winemaking and the wine-making experience in California. And the lifestyle of California’s wine country speaks to visitors from all over the world—old generation and new—in a common language based on immersive experience of the land and seasons, a commitment to sustainability, artisanship, and community and a sense of ease that comes from living your values.

Those values speak loud and clear in the new architecture of wine. In the last decade, winery architecture has come into its own in California. In place of the imitations of old-world estates or expressions of grandeur made for the sake of grandeur alone, California vintners and their architects are creating wineries as expressions of the place that California’s wine country has become now, in its own right. Whether a modern expression of California’s agricultural vernacular, a cutting-edge structure rendered in glass and steel, or a piece of wine country history reimagined in a contemporary style, the new architecture of wine expresses what the California wine country experience is right now.

No other type of commercial architecture embodies and expresses the passion of its inhabitants, their communion with the land, and their personal stories quite like winery design. Perhaps that is why most winery architects also specialize in residential design. These designers are adept at capturing their clients’ aspirations, passions, and personal stories and expressing them through the medium of the built environment. This book is about the relationships between winemakers and the architects they trust to tell their story.

Howard Backen has distilled the essence of the agrarian winery building as it fits within the California landscape, so it is fitting that the first two wineries



we visit in this book are designed by his firm, Backen & Gillam Architects. A charming man with an easy laugh that erupts frequently, Howard is still going strong at 82. Besides his architecture, perhaps his most lasting achievement is his role in defining the relationship between architect and client as far more than business. His clients become his lifelong friends. And a younger generation of architects is continuing that narrative. In story after story throughout this book, the relationships between architects and winemakers are those of trust, admiration, and shared enthusiasm for land, place, process, and artistry. Their work together is a mutual endeavor to live consciously and express what the land wants to say.

Winemaking is a ritual, an event at once agricultural, industrial, and artistic. Wineries are not just places to process grapes into wine. Nor are they places simply to visit to drink and buy wine. They are an opportunity for guests to immerse themselves in the world of winemaking, for a little while at least, and become a part of its community. This is what makes the architecture of wine so compelling. For everything here has a story behind it, which is part of the shared narrative of the California wine country.

Cycles of time within wineries are an important part of the ethos. Vineyards are developed, harvests come and go, each year providing the winemakers with a better understanding of their potential. Buildings must be built to last; then when and if needs change, they must be adapted to reflect the developing nature of the wine industry, winemaking process, and the visitor experience.

After spending a year taking a journey through some of the best new winery design in California, I have learned that every winery has a story and that no two stories are alike. More than any profession I have ever come across, the industry is about people: family and community knitted together in a passionate effort to create artistry through the land. So, while this book is a celebration of architecture and wine, it is also mostly about people.

I hope you enjoy the journey as much as I have.

# THE NEW AGRARIAN





# MELKA ESTATES

ELEGANT DESIGN IN AN UNDERSTATED PACKAGE

LOCATION: **ST. HELENA**

ARCHITECTURE: **SIGNUM ARCHITECTURE**

Sometimes the most elegant design solutions come in small, understated packages. Such is the case at Melka Estates, just off Napa Valley's Silverado Trail. A simple form derived from the agricultural vernacular of the California wine country, the dark barn-like structure is nonetheless a dramatic fixture set against the green and gold hillsides of the Napa Valley. Humble and unassuming yet arrestingly beautiful, it is a perfect expression of the dynamism and the humility of both its owners and its architect.

Philippe and Cherie Melka and their architect, Juancarlos Fernandez, are perhaps three of the most recognized names in the Napa Valley, known for their talent, their intense commitment to their craft, and their humility. Maybe that is why they get along so well.

As business partners, the Melkas' pedigrees are lengthy. A native of Bordeaux, with a degree in geology and a master's degree in agronomy and enology from the University of Bordeaux, Philippe is as connected to wine and the land as it is possible to be. He began his career at the top, at Chateau Haut Brion, then worked with Moueix Company, Chateau Petrus, and numerous wineries in Italy and Australia. Armed with a degree in microbiology, Cherie began her wine-making

career at Ridge Vineyards, training under the legendary Paul Draper and working as the winery's enologist for five years. In 1991, their worlds came together with a chance meeting. While interning at Dominus, Philippe was visiting Ridge Vineyards to meet Paul Draper and taste his legendary wines when he walked into the lab and met Cherie. "Paul Draper was our matchmaker," laughs Cherie.

After spending a year and a half in France, the couple returned to the United States. Cherie worked with Beaulieu and Silver Oak Cellars. Philippe founded his company, Atelier Melka, and has spent over twenty years as a wine-making consultant to some of the Napa Valley's most prestigious family wineries, including Lail Vineyards, Dana Estates, Raymond, BRAND Napa Valley, and others. They cofounded Melka Estates in 1996, but it wasn't until 2017 that their wine venture had a home of its own.

The wine-making community in the Napa Valley is close and connected, as it is in the wine-making regions of Sonoma County and California's central coast. Since moving to the valley, the Melkas had lived in downtown St. Helena, raising two children and becoming deeply ingrained in the community.



**PREVIOUS OVERLEAF:** Melka Estates, with its simple yet arresting design, is a perfect expression of the dynamism and humility of both its owners and its architect.

**ABOVE:** A contemporary play on the traditional barn vernacular, the building is painted a deep shade of charcoal and grounded by the heritage oak that lies directly on axis with the structure's central breezeway.

But by 2011, they were looking for “less house, more land.” A hillside site fronting the Silverado Trail, planted with two acres of Cabernet Sauvignon, offered just what they were looking for. They began by building a house on the hillside—a prefab modular home by Bay Area–based Blu Home—overlooking their vineyards and the valley floor. Next, they worked with Juancarlos to renovate an existing barn on the property to serve as a hospitality space with an airy upstairs tasting area, and a large ground-level space for events. Juancarlos brought in Blasen Landscape Architecture to tie the structures together with landscape.

“Juancarlos was our touchstone for everything here—the house, the renovated barn, the new production winery, the landscape,” says Cherie. “We don’t make any design decisions without him!”

They continued making their wine elsewhere until 2014, when they approached Juancarlos about building a new production facility on the site. Completed in 2017, the new winery is a simple barn-like structure with an emphasis on functionality and efficiency. Set parallel to the adjacent Silverado Trail, it is comprised of two prefabricated buildings painted a deep shade of charcoal. A landscaped berm lining the front of the site runs visual interference between the winery and the adjacent roadway. “The stealth dark color and the simplicity of the design reflects Philippe’s humble and reserved personality, but at the same time it makes a bold statement, similar to the wines produced within the building,” says Juancarlos.

The new winery totals just 2,000 square feet of interior space and 1,400 square feet of covered exterior space. Three separate HVAC systems allow the wine-making team to move the wine from place to place as it progresses through fermentation and barrel aging—a French approach to the wine-making process. Mobile cooling units can be relocated from place to place. “In a small winery, it’s all about efficiency,” says Cherie.

Set on axis with the hospitality building, the two prefabricated structures that comprise the production facility are augmented on nearly every side with covered space formed by extrusions of the standing seam roof. Over the hospitality-facing facade, a deep overhang creates a covered crush pad that Juancarlos calls “a modular cave.” Two screened breezeways, one original and one added about a year later, provide flexible indoor-outdoor space along long facades to the east and west. A motorized shade protects the western facade from the intense afternoon sun.

An existing oak tree to the east defines the winery’s central point—the intersection of two strong axial relationships. Set on axis with the grand oak and perpendicular to the road, a breezeway between the two structures forms a vaulted cavern equally well suited for production or events. In fact, the flexible spaces within the barrel rooms, under the extruded roofline and between the hospitality and production buildings, provide a variety of areas for entertaining, which the Melkas do often. “We have amazing events here,” says Cherie.

The Melkas made their first vintage on-site in 2017, a fall season that saw some of California’s worst wildfires ever erupt in Napa and Sonoma counties. It was a tough first harvest, but everything was saved. “We waited twenty years to do this,” says Cherie. “It was a long road getting here, but we’re really happy.”



The standing seam metal roof extends over the crush pad, forming a protected area for both winemaking and events.



**ABOVE:** The production winery's simple form is simultaneously comfortable within the landscape and dramatically set apart from it.

**LEFT:** Cherie found the light fixtures in the central breezeway at Erin Martin Design in downtown St. Helena and loves the way they turn in the breeze.

**OPPOSITE:** Under a concrete bench, a backlit screen echoes the portrait detail of Philippe that appears on the Melka Estates wine labels.



# ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**HEATHER SANDY HEBERT** has spent her life immersed in literature, design, and wine. Raised in Marin County, at the southern edge of the wine country, she studied both literature and design and earned an MBA along the way. She spent over 25 years directing marketing for the San Francisco–based architecture firm founded by her father, Donald Sandy, FAIA. Throughout those years, she guided the firm’s marketing and brand identity and wrote about the firm’s multitude of projects, a great many of them in hospitality and wine. She left the firm in 2017 to pursue her love of storytelling and now works with numerous design, hospitality, and winery clients large and small to help them develop and convey their stories. *The New Architecture of Wine* is her first book. Heather lives in Marin County, California, with her husband and four children.

