

VINEYARD

HAVEN



WINEMAKERS CREATE THEIR DREAM HOME IN NAPA'S WOODEN VALLEY

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In this slice of classic Backen & Backen architecture, clients enjoy 360-degree views of Napa Valley.



Heavy timber and a charred cedar wall (which hides a TV) are married with delicate steel and glass doors for a rustic, contemporary juxtaposition.

WHEN PH.D. BIOPHYSICISTS Glenn Rice and Cynthia Hoy purchased this property in 2012, it consisted of a house, tool barn, and muddy pond. The couple, who'd been coming to Napa for years from their homes in Silicon Valley and San Francisco, discovered a part of wine country called

Wooden Valley that felt like Napa 50 years ago. And they fell hard for it. With no desire to become farmers, the wine-loving pair decided to plant some roots—vineyards specifically. “It was pretty cool to have neighbors who drove tractors over Mercedes Benzs,” says Rice. “But building vineyards on steep slopes under Napa Regulatory Oversight is quite a challenge and not for the faint of heart or wallet.” And so, Quantum Limit Vineyards was born.

First, the initial home survived the 2017 fire—but just barely. Then the homeowners spent a year trying to work with a fake French style roof and 8-foot ceilings before beginning their four-year design project with Backen & Backen. “Our vision was to take advantage of the spectacular views of the Howell Mountain Range, San Francisco Bay, and Mount Diablo, and have a true indoor-outdoor house.”

Like all projects, the architects took inspiration from the topography, views, and local flora. In this case, inspiration was abundant. “It’s rare to have a home with panoramic views on all four sides—this truly has 360-degree views, each unique and magnificent,” says Stephanie Gerwin, principal architect, who focused on a reconnection to nature.

The approach to the 69-acre estate is a curved drive through massive oak trees, leading to neat rows of vineyards, and culminating with the house and barns overlooking the expansive valley floor. “The site itself was the biggest challenge,” Gerwin recalls. “Its hillside location and proximity to the vines required extensive grading, major retaining walls, and careful drainage design with limited room for staging and logistics. Every step required precise coordination to minimize disruption to the vineyard while keeping the project moving.”



The scope entailed the main house, guest house, and entertainment barn, all operating at ‘net carbon-neutral’ courtesy of the 100kW solar power generation onsite. “The residence combines modern design with traditional craft in a vineyard setting, which required a highly technical approach,” says general contractor Jim Pitcher of CRC Builders. “It’s architecture and nature moving as one.”

The team paired expansive structural steel and glass with a warm timber frame interior, creating what Pitcher calls, “a rare balance of contrasts.” Key high-performance materials, such as flush cedar baseboards and steel trimless doors and windows kept the design clean and refined.

The exterior features a corrugated metal roof and custom-milled cedar siding with a wire-brushed, matte finish

reminiscent of naturally weathered wood. The main hall is lined with charred cedar (shou sugi ban), while hand-troweled, custom plaster walls add depth, shimmering softly as the evening light moves through the house.

“Watching the great room take shape—with its cantilevered steel, automated pocketing doors, and timber frame interior—was a defining moment that captured the strength, transparency, and warmth of the design,” Pitcher recalls. “Walking the finished estate at sunset, with the glass doors wide open to the vineyard, and seeing how seamlessly indoors and outdoors blended—was a powerful reminder of why we build.”

The homeowners hoped to “force” guests outside to witness the beautiful nighttime. For the courtyard, they used tiles found traveling through Morocco; there they were so



enamored with a local craftsman’s work, they commissioned him to create a beautiful blue carpet mosaic for their fountain. “The courtyard offers an intimate outdoor space filled with light and sound to balance out the more exposed areas of the view terraces overlooking the vineyards,” Gerwin says.

Much of the home is a balance of stunning public spaces and intimate sanctuaries. For the latter, a spa-like bathroom offers a moment to exhale in the outdoor shower and bath, surrounded by stone walls and plantings. Inside, the woodsy library lends itself for quiet contemplation with its moody, cozy color palette. “Everything is surrounded in diamond cut cabinets and

bookshelves in a classic Backen grey-brown paint—it’s not your typical old-world library,” says Rice.

For the open, gathering spaces, the palette is light and bright. In the kitchen, walls disappear, allowing the space to flow from indoors out. “We are famous for pocketing our exterior doors; this time we also hid the windows in our wall pockets to make the kitchen counter a pass-through experience when entertaining,” Gerwin says. “The juxtaposition of the heavy timber next to the delicate steel and glass doors creates a rustic, richly textured material palette, executed in a crisp, contemporary manner of detailing.”

ABOVE Timberframe and Restoration Hardware helped finish and outfit the living spaces of this home.

OPPOSITE Having doors and windows disappear into the great outdoors was essential for living and entertaining.



LEFT Outdoor showers were a big wish so guests could experience the best of California living.

BELOW “This home is where modern steel and glass meet the warmth of timber, opening seamlessly to the vineyard—it’s architecture and nature moving as one,” says builder Jim Pitcher.

Those 11-foot floor-to-ceiling glass doors open up at the push of a button to a pavilion overlooking Howell Mountain. Guests who’ve lived in Napa all their lives and come to Wooden Valley for the first time say it’s the best view anywhere in the County—even better with wine in hand made a few feet away.

“We are always outside on rocking chairs watching the sunset, tasting some unique wine of the day, or sitting around the swimming pool with a pitcher of mojitos made from our garden mint, Rice says. “This house draws you outside.” **CH**



ABOVE “This house is a masterpiece distillation and derivatization of Backen’s best work, situated on a remarkable 360 degree panorama of the best views of Napa Valley,” says Glenn Rice.

LEFT The homeowners’ global art collection includes Larrakitz statues from the Australian Kimberly, primitive art from Papua New Guinea and West Papua, and tile from Morocco used on the courtyard pool.