

Blueprint for success

Winery design can create powerful link to customers



John Hilliard and Christian Bruce, co-owners of Hilliard Bruce Vineyards, check out the herb garden outside their tasting room.

By [Tom Bronzini](#)
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When John Hilliard and wife Christine Bruce consulted with architects about a winery for their 101-acre ranch near Lompoc, they wanted something that met the highest environmental design standards and more.

They sought a beautiful, contemporary look reflective of the time in which we live. Their showcase building has delivered a powerful boost to their wine business.

“A little bit more money, maybe 10 or 20 percent more money, and all of a sudden you’ve got something cool in architecture rather than just a rehash of another Tuscan winery,” Hilliard said during an interview and tour of the facility. It is Santa Barbara County’s only LEED-certified winery, recognized for green design that conserves energy and water and uses environmentally responsible materials.

The building is extraordinarily beautiful for a winery, where designs of production spaces often are more oriented toward efficiency. It is fronted by a 120-foot-wide, two-story expanse of glass that offers views of the Santa Rita Hills. Geometric LED light fixtures change color at regular intervals to bathe the interior in interesting hues, becoming more dramatic as dusk arrives. A centerpiece chandelier of dozens of cascading LED bulbs glows a warm yellow while using the electricity of one 120-watt bulb.

“The one thing that is true about having a winery with beautiful design is it will, in and of itself, draw customers to you,” Hilliard said. “That whole thing that if you build it, they will come, really is true.”

Before building their winery, the couple had been making wines from their 21-acre vineyard at Central Coast Wine Services in Santa Maria. Christine, who raises Arabian horses on the ranch, concentrates on making chardonnay and John does the pinot noirs. They have consulted with viticulture experts and studied winemaking through the UC Davis extension and the Alan Hancock College Viticulture and Enology program.

The eye-catching winery has drawn wide notice to Hilliard Bruce wines, even though the facility is not open for tastings and only hosts a handful of special events each year.

“We built this and then all of a sudden we got a flood of interest,” Hilliard said. “It really made the difference. All of a sudden the business is really doing well and before it just wasn’t performing as well as you’d hoped.”

The winery has a capacity to produce 5,000 cases a year. The design concept came from talking with several architects and plans were drawn by Val Milosevic, who died earlier this year. Tom Davidson of Lee & Associates managed the project and Christine Bruce selected colors and finishes.

The winery is built into a hillside so the barrel room, 14 feet underground, benefits from natural insulation. A 10-kilowatt solar array on the roof supplies a third of the facility’s power, and the estate has an additional 35 kilowatts of solar on the ground. Solar tubes, 40 feet long, direct natural light from the roof to the ground floor. Wine is transferred by gravity flow. Water is reclaimed after it flows through floor drains and three layers of rock and then on to detention ponds.

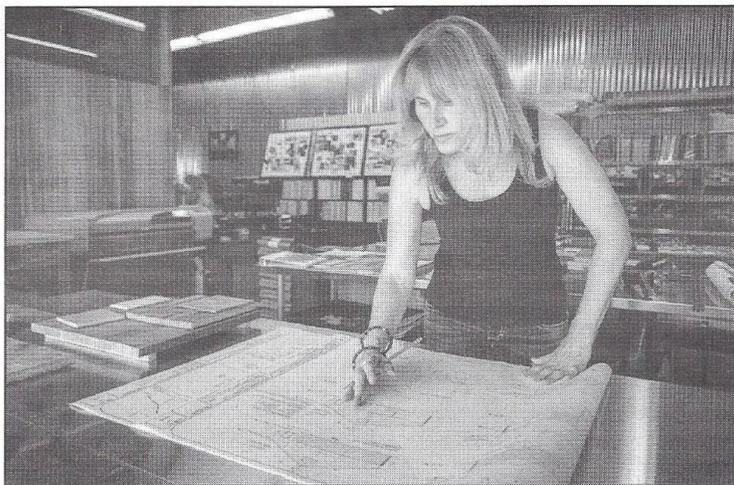
The winery is LEED-certified silver by the U.S. Green Building Council and the vineyard is farmed to Sustainability in Practice standards.

“This winery was brought to us by the financial collapse of the world,” Hilliard said. The couple seized an opportunity to build when interest rates plummeted.

“Spending your money on a beautiful building, it’s like you’re spending your marketing money upfront, but it’s so effective to spend that money upfront on a beautiful facility that just keeps paying dividends from then on,” Hilliard said. “You don’t need a PR agency when you’ve got a place like this.”

Hilliard studied finance at the University of Texas, was a marine insurance broker in Houston and later built up his father’s Texas shipyard company from a single shipyard to four on the Gulf Coast. Along the way he was a full-time professional artist for five years. After the couple’s move to California, he remains on the board of the shipyard firm. Christine Bruce studied piano at Boston University and Berklee College of Music and was a professional jazz keyboardist before pursuing her passion of horse breeding.

DESIGN PROJECTS



Shannon Scott, a Los Olivos interior designer, has three winery projects pending.

Shannon Scott, a Los Olivos interior designer who has about a dozen wine tasting rooms in her portfolio and three winery projects pending, agreed with Hilliard’s view about the impact that design can have.

“Really it’s about how you feel in the space,” she said. “We come back to where we feel good. You can go to a place that might have the best food or the best wine in the world but if it doesn’t feel good to be there you don’t really want to go hang out there again.”

Scott, owner of Shannon Scott Design, has also worked on hotels, restaurants, private residences and senior living facilities. She is a past winner of a Business Times 40 Under 40 award. Through her design work and referrals, she developed a niche business in tasting rooms and wineries.

She described three winery projects she is working on with architects, clients and contractors. Each stems from a client's vision that is fleshed out in ever-increasing detail through drawings, photos, and sampling and testing of materials.

A private winery in Santa Ynez will have the look of an old farmhouse that was converted into a winery. It will be built with reclaimed wood and 300-year-old limestone from France, and will have hand-plastered walls and steel doors and window frames.

"It's got to be authentic and real," Scott said. "We don't want something that is a dime a dozen, you see anywhere. It's got to look and most likely be hand fabricated." Jones & Jones Planning & Architecture in Los Olivos is the architect.

A multi-phase project with R.P.M. Architects of Santa Ynez for the Pence Ranch in the Santa Rita Hills will include a tasting room, an entertainment barn with an exposition kitchen, a private residence and a winery. Scott said the look and feel would be of a ranch barn with contemporary and rustic touches. It will feature Cor-Ten steel plates that develop a weathered character, white walls, coated concrete floors, glass and old wood along with some pieces that feel industrial.

A Spear Winery project, also with Jones & Jones, will deconstruct and reconstruct a landmark fading white barn visible from Highway 246 on the way to Lompoc.

"This is a property that's really about the experience," Scott said, "so the front will be almost all glass. There will be doors that can close across it." Visitors will have views of the hills and the silo out front, and they will be able to see the winery in operation through a glass partition in the building. There will be a good sized tasting room and a retail space, and a level below will house more production facilities.

Scott studied interior design at Alan Hancock College and later through a UC Santa Barbara extension program. She joined a design firm and worked on hotel projects including the Fess Parker Doubletree in Santa Barbara and the Parker family's Wine Country Inn in Los Olivos. After starting her own firm, she was hired by Eli Parker to design his first Epiphany tasting room in Santa Ynez and a later one in Los Olivos. That led to more tasting room work, including Consilience, Tre Anelli, Stolpman, Tessa Marie Wines and Byron.

Environmental consciousness is an important part of her work, Scott said. That includes selecting energy efficient fixtures and reclaimed or sustainably sourced materials.

Scott said she enjoys finding out what represents the client and their wine so visitors get that same sense. "That's what the fun part is and that's the fun challenge," she said, "is to really bring out what their vision is and help them define it and then create that for them."

- See more at: <http://www.pacbiztimes.com/2015/09/11/winery-design-can-create-powerful-link-to-customers/#sthash.XjdB5ixi.dpuf>