

RETURN TO THE WINE
COUNTRY

The transformation of a vineyard into a plot for family living
reconsiders the relationship between structure and site

Words Eleanor Rice Photos Joe Fletcher



Facing the house from across the swimming pool and vineyard is a reclaimed timber barn. A single row of vines have been removed to form a footpath that runs between the house and the outbuilding



“IN THE WINE COUNTRY ARCHITECTURE IS EXPERIENCED MUCH SLOWER”

Lined up behind the house, clad in sustainably harvested red cedar, is a thriving grove of oak trees. In their stature, they have created a natural windbreak that protects the family home from the elements and allows it to sit unseen within the green environment

Content on starting a family away from the city bustle, a couple discovered a small Zinfandel vineyard plot in the rural valley of St Helena. With the creative expertise of FIELD Architecture and Shawback Design, the unique site is now home to an alluring cedar-clad family house which reflects the rusticity of its whimsical surroundings. The U-shaped, gable-ended structure is topped with a slender steel roof that nods to the local vernacular. To achieve the crisp, clean contours of the building, guttering has been integrated flush into the roof and runs down the side of the house replacing only a single width of cedar cladding. Jess Field of FIELD Architecture describes this simple solution for an uninterrupted surface as “a graceful move, but not a show piece.” It is these modest subtleties throughout the design that foster a much-desired feeling of effortless luxury. As the owners of this plot are two Pinterest executives, it is with no surprise that the interiors were also carefully considered. Crafted with entertaining in mind, the home benefits from an open-plan layout punctuated with steel-framed doors and windows to connect the couple to the outdoors. External living areas, a sheltered porch and a swimming pool that glistens in the Californian sun all help reinforce this and encourage the owners and visitors alike to explore beyond the house. The main body of the structure, as well as the two perpendicular wings, open out to the garden on one side and the vineyard on the other. Each of these wings (one for sleeping and one for guests) ventures deeper into the vineyard to take advantage of the tranquility and privacy that the captivating setting provides.

A sheltered porchway not only acts as an entrance to the house, but also as a metaphoric representation of the couples' return to the country following a life built in the city. "The project starts with extending the story of the place and weaving it with the new owners."



ENTANGLED IN THE VINEYARD

In all of their projects, FIELD Architecture begin with a reading of the land as they see architecture as part of a conversation with nature. Architect Jess Field explains how in this instance the tranquil vineyard setting informed the design.

"We look to how architecture can characterise a place and in the wine country, architecture is experienced much slower. The buildings are tucked into the landscape and the vineyards; they're not buildings you drive or walk past. You go there as a destination and you stay there, and you can stay on one vineyard estate for a whole day. So we didn't want the architecture to be easily exhausted. Rather we wanted it to have a slow release, like wine itself. The other thing we looked at is how dynamic the natural environment is in the wine county. Rock faces that are hard and glistening at one point in the day are muted at another. And then a whole bed of greenery will turn to gold and then to brown in winter. And so our formal movements aren't meant to be sculptural in their own right, instead we wanted them to frame the landscape so that the landscape can take on the role of the big formal movements."



The reclaimed timber barn features a floor-to-ceiling, steel-framed window that lets light flood into the airy space. A statement chandelier composed of glass globes sits at its centre and can be seen through the barn entrance from afar

"WE LOOKED AT HOW DYNAMIC THE NATURAL ENVIRONMENT IS IN THE WINE COUNTRY"



“THE PALETTE OF MATERIALS FROM INTERIOR TO ARCHITECTURE ARE ALL CONSISTENT”



Two cement cores stand either side of the main living area. One forms the chimney and the second embraces the kitchen cabinetry. The kitchen itself was envisioned as a solid block of wood in which the counter was carved out to add to the crisp aesthetic and clean lines of the architecture





"DARK TIMBER AND STEEL TRUSSES
PUNCTUATE A SLEEK, AIRY INTERIOR"





"WE WANTED THE ARCHITECTURE TO
HAVE A SLOW RELEASE, LIKE WINE ITSELF"





HOME PROFILE

PROPERTY DESCRIPTION

Red cedar cladding and a steel roof form the basic structure of this family home on the site of a vineyard. Boasting high-pitched ceilings supported by dark timber trusses, the interior is open and light. The main body of the home contains the kitchen, living and dining area and extends out towards the vineyard with two wings. One of these is used as a sleeping quarters and the other houses the guest facilities. Outdoor living areas including a covered porch and decking area invites visitors outside to enjoy the beautiful landscape. And as you step off the decking into the middle courtyard area you're greeted by a shimmering swimming pool which looks out towards a reclaimed timber barn sitting at the bottom of the Zinfandel vines.

LOCATION

On the plot of a Zinfandel vineyard, St Helena, California, USA

ARCHITECTURAL BRIEF

Two executives of Pinterest were looking to grow their family and wanted to move away from the city to do so. Their new home needed to accommodate spaces for entertaining and social gatherings both indoors and out. While they wanted a low-profile, unassuming house, the design needed to maintain the sleek and modernist feeling that would become reminiscent of their previous cosmopolitan lifestyle.



"THE BEDROOMS IN THE LATERAL WINGS EXTEND DEEPER INTO THE VINEYARD, THEIR OWN PRIVATE POCKETS OF LANDSCAPE"



Soaring high-pitched ceilings punctuated with defining dark timber and steel trusses have been stripped of any lights and instead have been left airy and bare. However, expansive steel-framed windows and doors let in light and are an extension of the structure's use of steel



MEET THE ARCHITECTS

FIELD Architecture was formed by father and son, Stan and Jess Field.

What made timber the right material choice for the external cladding?

The timber on the barn was reclaimed, and the main house uses sustainably harvested western red cedar. It's a ubiquitous material that we were comfortable with in the language of working buildings and they complemented the corrugated roof.

What is the relationship between the architecture and interior design?

Interior appointments are integrated into the architecture, much like the landscape architecture is, so there's no distinction between the different modes of design. The same paver stones in the landscape are featured on the fireplace. The palette of materials from interior to landscape architecture were all consistent. Everything is incorporated into the form of the building, so that in the kitchen for example, the entire cabinetry is envisioned as a single block of wood with the counter space carved out of it, anchored into a cement monolith that frames the space. Because the architecture was clearly and crisply designed and the interiors are fluid, the furnishings created these eddies to congregate and rest in.

PROJECT NOTES

ARCHITECT

FIELD Architecture
fieldarchitecture.com

LIGHTING

Vita Pehar

KITCHEN

Phoenix Woodworks;
Concreteworks

INTERIOR DESIGNER

Shawback Design

DOORS & WINDOWS

Jada

CONTRACTOR

Grassi & Associates

FLOORING

First, Last
& Always, SLF

STRUCTURAL ENGINEER

GFDS

Zinfandel vines are similar to small trees in their height thus the house needed to be raised slightly. "We wanted the home to be just high enough so we're not just seeing the vines in profile, instead they become this fantastic carpet of green," explains Jess

