



STEWART CELLARS

A CALIFORNIA AESTHETIC WITH A EUROPEAN SENSE OF PLACE

LOCATION: **YOUNTVILLE**

ARCHITECTURE: **ARCANUM ARCHITECTURE**

Located in the heart of the Napa Valley, Yountville is almost impossibly picturesque. Walkable, friendly, and home to some of the most venerated restaurants in the country, this small town has become a mecca for food, wine, and hospitality. A small-town sense of community mingles with heightened culinary sensibilities to create an air of magic.

James Stewart, who opened Stewart Cellars in downtown Yountville in 2016, is well aware of his role in this magical place. “Yountville sets the bar high in terms of the culinary and hospitality experience. We were very conscious of that bar and we wanted to exceed it.” It was important to the Stewarts to fit into the fabric of their new community and make a positive impact on the town.

To achieve those goals, James hired Anthony Fish of Arcanum Architects to design what would be the firm’s second winery project. “I looked at a lot of architects,” says James. “For me, Anthony brought together a combination of historic sensibility and a modern outlook that was very expressive of California.” James and Anthony are clearly friends, and the success of the space derives from the trust they have in one another.

Founder Michael Stewart, James’s father, began making wine as a hobby but the effort quickly

became a family collaboration. When James joined the business in 2005, the winery was producing 800 cases a year. Not a group to do things halfway, the family hired Paul Hobbs, whom James calls the “Steve Jobs of wine,” as consulting winemaker. Stewart Cellars is now a full family affair. James’s brother-in-law, Blair Guthrie, is the winemaker, and sister, Caroline Stewart Guthrie, who trained with Paul Hobbs in Argentina and has a natural talent for wine, runs day-to-day operations and “holds it all together.” James regards it as his job to give roots to the operation, take the long view, and establish it firmly for generations to come. Vintners are renowned for taking the long view, and this family is no exception.

Prior to establishing this foothold in Yountville, the Stewart wine-making operation had no public presence. James made numerous scouting trips from his residence in San Francisco, searching for the perfect home—one that fit the family’s vision for Stewart Cellars—for the winery’s new hospitality space. On one such trip, as James sat eating lunch at chef Richard Reddington’s Redd Wood, he looked out at Grady’s Garage across the street. Old and showing its age, the garage had been there forever. It was one of the few underdeveloped

parcels left on the town's picturesque main street. Inspired, James cold-called the owner to see if he would sell, never expecting him to accept the offer. But he did.

Together, James and Anthony explored the idea of what an in-town winery hospitality experience should be. The town's planning codes limited the individual structures to 5,000 square feet each, and a combination of uses was important to the city. This fit the family's vision perfectly: a collection of intimate spaces built around a series of three courtyards—a diminutive entry courtyard with seating for the small dining space, a large interior courtyard set between the tasting barn and the Nomad Heritage Library, and a third courtyard centered around an expansive heritage oak tree they went to great lengths to save.

The three structures surround the interior courtyard, a casual and flexible space that can be configured in any number of ways for various events and gatherings. At the front of the property a semitransparent structure acts as a vestibule of sorts, housing the popular Southside Cafe. Flanking the central courtyard, the Nomad Heritage Library and Tasting Hall are highly individual spaces, personal and welcoming. It all comes together in a California aesthetic but with a very European sense of place.

Stewart Cellars is also European in its layered sense of history and imagination. "I wanted to transport people into an environment that tells a story," asserts James. Inspired by the Stewart family's Scottish roots and the intersection of old and new, the team built both the story and the structures around the winery's massive stone walls. Gleaning their inspiration from ancient stone relics scattered throughout Scotland, the team envisioned a winery rebuilt within the ancient stone walls of an old Scottish abbey.

Although Stewart Cellars is entirely new construction, the layering of materials—raked cedar walls set within with stone walls that bookend the Nomad Heritage Library for instance—define an experience similarly layered over time, an ancient structure repurposed for contemporary use.

Built of local Syre stone, which is only found in the Napa Valley, the walls tell a local story as well. Though it's an in-town winery, Stewart Cellars is very much of the land and place. The masonry work was critical to the team's vision. Door and window openings were saw-cut to look as if they were hewn from the existing walls, and the stone coursing had to be perfectly imperfect to render the sense of agrarian history the team was striving for. Stone courses run right up to the edges of the clean-lined steel doors and windows, without the usual stone framework, and the steel frames are set into notches cut into the stone to hide their sleek edges.

"We had the stone taken off and reset three times," jokes James. "Our contractor had the patience of a saint." General contractors Jim Murphy & Associates are well known in the wine country for their exacting attention to detail, and the stone masons at Shannon Masonry are highly skilled at their craft.

James's personality comes through in every element of the design. He worked with interior designer Ken Fulk to create collected, curated spaces that reflect his diverse interests and passions. The Nomad Heritage Library, a cozy, almost moody



PREVIOUS OVERLEAF: In a nod to the family's Scottish heritage, the story of Stewart Cellars centers on the stone walls inspired by the stone relics scattered across the Scottish landscape.

ABOVE: Stewart Cellars is a collection of small-scale buildings surrounding a series of courtyards of varying scale.



It was important to the Stewarts that their new in-town hospitality center fit into the fabric of their new community and make a positive impact on the town. The diminutive restaurant at the front of the site acts as the property's front door.





LEFT: The Nomad Library, open to wine club members, is a quirky, curated space filled with books and a rotating collection of curiosities.

OPPOSITE: Every element of the design tells a story. The slim steel rods that line the Tasting Hall bar visually reference James Stewart's other wine label, Quell.

space that feels as if it has been there forever, speaks volumes about his personal vision and interests. True to its name, it is filled with books—all for sale—along with a continuously evolving collection of curiosities. James's obsession with science fiction is evident throughout, but the book collection is wide ranging and ever changing. This collection includes favorites from the entire family, including wine education, great reads, fashion, art, and architecture. Visitors can pick up books that range from the recently published *Women of the Napa Valley* to a copy of Ayn Rand's *Atlas Shrugged* or George Orwell's classic *1984*.

The Tasting Hall's bar, custom made by Concreteworks, is scored with slim steel rods. The rods, which start out separated and a bit chaotic and then subtly align to form a tightly aligned pattern as they travel the length of the bar, echo the design of James Stewart's own label, Quell.

In this assemblage of structure and spaces, contrast is important. Just as the contemporary materials and modern farmhouse vernacular contrast with the rough-hewn stone walls with their air of age, the quirky, collected nature of designer Ken Fulk's interiors provide a lively sense of contrast to the architecture. The indoor-outdoor spaces provide a direct connection to the landscape and the changing seasons.

Above all, Stewart Cellars beckons to the many who walk the town's lovely main street. "We were surprised by the amount of families we attracted," remarks James. "Your customers tell you what your place is going to be. It's important to have a vision, but then you need to be able to adapt and add to that vision as you go along. That's how your customers become part of your story."

