

TECHNICAL SPOTLIGHT

Ashes & Diamonds

Former music executive celebrates Napa's greatest hits, bringing 'old school' winemaking at a new winery designed to evoke the past

By Stacy Briscoe



Ashes & Diamonds winery was designed in a midcentury modern theme by Barbara Bestor of Bestor Architecture.

TV sitcoms and Broadway musicals aren't the only outlets celebrating the art of the revival. As you drive up to the Ashes & Diamonds winery, tucked nearly out of sight from Highway 29 in Napa, Calif., the building itself emits a simultaneous call to modernism and retro throw-back. In fact, this time-warp sensation is woven throughout the winery, the winemaking and even the wines themselves.

In 2013, Kashy Khaledi, founder and owner of Ashes & Diamonds, left his 20-plus-year career as a creative executive in the music industry in Los Angeles to pursue a latent desire to make his impact in the world of wine.

"Working in such an iconic midcentury building (at Capitol Records) gave me considerable inspiration to draw from that era," Khaledi said in an interview with *Wines & Vines*. "I started to read books like 'Great Winemakers of California' by Robert Benson, who interviewed icons who'd made their imprint in the '50s, '60s and '70s," he said, referring to Robert Mondavi, Bob Travers, André Tchelistcheff and John Daniel Jr., among many others who "made Napa Valley what it is today."

With a piqued interest in the era, Khaledi became immersed in studying — and tasting — wines of the post-Prohibition period in Napa Valley. "When you drink a glass of wine ... it teleports you to that place," said Khaledi, who noted it was a glass of 1968 Beaulieu Vineyard Georges de Latour Cabernet Sauvignon that truly sparked his vision of what Napa wine once was, and, in his mind, what Napa wine could be again. "The frontier of modern California wine, alongside the cultural and political upheaval of the era — that sense of unbridled idealism that anything is possible, that was just the right amount of romance to intoxicate me."

So in 2014, just a few months after he left his position as a creative executive at Capitol Records, Khaledi purchased the Napa Valley estate that would become Ashes & Diamonds winery. He bought the land from his father Darioush Khaledi, owner of Darioush Winery, who, in 2015, planned, permitted, but never built his intended second business, Carevan Serai Winery. The land was already planted to 38 acres of Merlot and Cabernet

Franc, which is used exclusively for the estate wine, Grand Vin. There are also mixed plantings of Syrah and Chardonnay on the estate, but Khaledi said these varieties do not fit the Ashes & Diamonds program. "Nor do I think they particularly excel in our vineyard — so I sell those off," he said.

Architectural artistry

The Ashes & Diamonds winery, which totals 22,750 square feet, includes a 5,500-square-foot hospitality space and a 17,250-square-foot production area. Though designed to support up to 10,000 cases in production, the winery currently makes only 6,000 cases, 90% of which is sold direct-to-consumer (DtC) via the tasting room, wine club and website.

The winery was a completely new project, and a type that neither Khaledi nor architect Barbara Bestor of Bestor Architecture in Los Angeles had taken on before. "I had zero experience building a winery," Khaledi said. "I imagine this was the case for many of the early wineries in Napa, and why they were equally as unique."

Khaledi calls the opportunity to work with Bestor "serendipitous." It was a former colleague from his days working on the Beastie Boys' label and "fanzine," Grand Royal, who reminded him that she had helped design portions of the studio and office. "Barbara's equally influenced by classic California," Khaledi said. "If you're going to make classic California wines, you may as well be in classic California architecture, right?"

The goal Khaledi and Bestor set for the new winery was to construct what Bestor calls a winery that is truly "of California" and not one that is hanging on the tails of European design, which Bestor observed most wineries are. "I wanted to create a contemporary winery that looks at some of the architectural modern history of California as a sort of *terroir* of architecture," she said in an interview with *Wines & Vines*.

There are nods to some of the "greats" of mid-20th century modernist architecture: the iconic portholes of Albert Frey; the folded plate roofs of Donald Wexler; the floor-to-ceiling win-

KEY POINTS

Midcentury era influences architectural design and winemaking aesthetics.

The winemaking team engages with vineyard management staff to pick Bordeaux varieties earlier.

Winemaking is done with minimal intervention despite state-of-the-art winemaking equipment.

dows known to Craig Elwood — all incorporated into a boxy, Eames-like structure.

The Ashes & Diamonds tasting room, made from wood-frame construction and finished in stucco, consists of a rather small interior footprint at just 2,000 square feet. This is because the hospitality area flows into the exterior courtyard.

“The tasting room itself is a domestic reference with its simple box shape. But the shaded exterior structure is bigger and more exaggerated,” Bestor said, adding that creating a flow between the two spaces makes the overall hospitality area feel more organic and humanistic. The courtyard’s varying elevations of rolling landscape and zigzag paths are in sharp contrast to the flat rows of vines lining the estate. But it is that seamless flow from indoor to outdoor — both structurally and aesthetically — that is indicative of the classic California architectural design.

The production area of Ashes & Diamonds, a pre-engineered metal building clad in insulated metal panels, is, despite its utilitarianism, in keeping with the California living theme. The large, flat, blank walls hide the industrial aspects of the building while simultaneously providing the feeling of openness — toward the vineyards as well as the tasting room — and the courtyard acts as a seamless navigation between the two structures. “The crushpad, as an indoor-outdoor space, is able to tie into the larger circulation of the winery,” Bestor said. “It becomes a part of how you interact with the space when you visit.”

How you interact with the space — and how you interact with the wines. When asked about the standout features of her work on Ashes & Diamonds, Bestor specifically called out the contrast between the modernist “world of steel” lining the external structure and the use of soft materials and bright colors of the interior design that evoke a more tactile and “homey” experience.

When asked why he chose a midcentury modern design for his winery, Khaledi had a similar answer: “In the book ‘Great Winemakers of California,’ there is discussion of ... the use of stainless steel tanks with slick and seamless welding, which we employ as well,” he said.



The indoor-outdoor hospitality area combines domestic comfort with exterior grandeur.

But speaking to the wines these industrial vessels hold, “The era (1950s through 1970s) had a technicolor brightness,” he said. “The through-line to our wines ... is the freshness, the brightness.”

Vivacity comes from the vineyard

Outside of the Ashes & Diamonds estate vineyards, the winery also sources fruit from various vineyards throughout Napa Valley, including those from the Oak Knoll, Mount Veeder, Atlas Peak, Oakville and Rutherford AVAs. The portfolio does, indeed, touch the eclectic *terroir* known to Napa, creating what production winemaker Andrew Brooks, calls “a greatest hits list” of Napa.

The anomaly is the Cabernet Sauvignon that comes from Bates Ranch vineyard in Santa Cruz County. “We add great sites to our portfolio of single-vineyard wines in California,” Khaledi said. “The notion of selling a Santa Cruz wine in a Napa Valley tasting room is part of our greater narrative about classic California wines, and how they took the world stage after the 1976 Judgment of Paris.”

Because Ashes & Diamonds works with a variety of vineyards, the staff works with a variety of vineyard management teams. Even at the Ashes & Diamonds estate vineyards, the day-to-day farming is performed by a vineyard management company. But whether at the estate, up valley or in the Santa Cruz Mountains, vineyard management companies work very closely with, and under the direction of, the Ashes & Diamonds winemaking team.

“We have an open relationship with our growers because the goals for our fruit are

really different than others in this area,” said Brooks, referring to the somewhat unconventional low Brix levels at which they choose to pick their red Bordeaux varieties. “We’re interested in this idea of ‘first ripeness’ over maximum ripeness,” Brooks said. “And there are farming practices that need to be put into place to make sure we get there.”

Ashes & Diamonds’ winemaking team is very involved in the various vineyards, tasting for that first, “red-fruit” ripeness, with the sugar levels still low, but the acidity levels high enough to produce the freshness the winemaking team is looking for in their wines. That freshness translates into Bordeaux-style wines that are ready to drink upon release, but that can also age gracefully for years. For Ashes & Diamonds, this means that harvest for red grapes can begin as early as Labor Day, ending around the last week of September.

Brooks described the farming practices as all “normal techniques,” regarding cover crop, canopy management and fruit load, in order to get primary metabolites in line with secondary metabolites. To monitor the fruit’s progress, the Ashes & Diamonds team does not employ any phenolic analysis, nor, Brooks said, do they look for a specific Brix measurement before harvesting, instead relying on their active involvement in the field through every stage of vine growth.

“It’s about visually looking at the vineyard, evaluating the plants, touching the fruits, smelling and tasting the fruits, understanding where the fruit is, where you need it to go and whether or not the plant can do that,” Brooks said.



Ashes & Diamonds Winery

4130 Howard Lane, Napa, Calif. 94558 • (707) 666-4777 • ashesdiamonds.com

OWNER
Kashy Khaledi

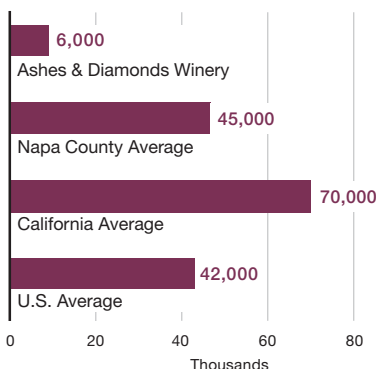
WINEMAKERS
Steve Matthiasson,
Diana Snowden
Seysse

YEAR BONDED
2017

DIRECT-TO-CONSUMER
SALES:
90%

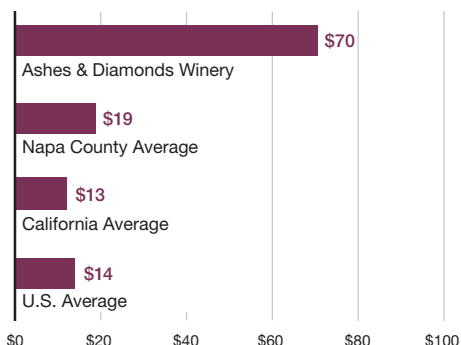
VINEYARD ACREAGE
38

WINERY CASE PRODUCTION



Source: Wines Vines Analytics

WINERY AVERAGE BOTTLE PRICE



Source: Wines Vines Analytics

The Technical Spotlight is a regular feature highlighting wineries in North America that have recently opened or undergone major renovations and improvements. *Wines & Vines* seeks to report how facility design and winemaking equipment is used to achieve a particular winemaking style while also exploring new trends and techniques being used in the industry. If you think your winery would be a good candidate for the feature, contact us at edit@winesandvines.com.

BUILDING THE WINERY

Architect	Bestor Architecture , bestorarchitecture.com ; Von Raesfeld & Associates , vra-arch.com
Contractor	Facility Development Company , fdc-comp.com
Engineering	Delta Consulting & Engineering , deltacivil.com
Landscape architect	Creo Landscape Architecture , creolandarch.com
Mechanical engineering	TEP Engineering , tep.net
Lighting	McClure Electric , mcclureelectric.com
Concrete/flooring	Top End Terrazzo , topendterrazzo.com

Nods to the “greats” of mid-20th century architects include the iconic portholes of Albert Frey.



MAKING THE WINE

Receiving hopper and vibrating sorting table	P&L incline belt, P&L Specialties , pnlspecialties.com
Destemmer	Pellenc SPW-M, Pellenc America, Inc. , pellenc.com
Presses	JLB basket press, Bucher Vaslin, bvnorthamerica.com bladder press, Pera America , perapellenc.com
Fermentation tanks	Sonoma Stainless , sonomastainless.com
Pumps	Air diaphragm, flexible impeller, centrifugal; Pera America , perapellenc.com
Barrels	French, various coopers
Bottling line	Peregrine Mobile Bottling, LLC , peregrinemobilebottling.com
Winemaking software	InnoVint, Inc. , innovint.us
Analytical equipment	Standard wet chemistry equipment, ETS Laboratories , etslabs.com

PACKAGING

Glass	Saverglass, Inc. , saverglass.com
Corks	Portocork America , portocork.com
Capsules	Lafitte Cork & Capsule, Inc. , lafitte-usa.com
Label printing	Herdell Printing and Lithographers, Inc. , herdellprinting.com
Case goods storage	California Wine Transport , californiawinetransport.com
Label Designer	Brian Roettinger , instagram.com/brianroettinger

Brooks said Steve Matthiasson, Napa Valley winemaker and viticulturist, did a large majority of the vineyard sourcing. Many of the vineyards used in the Ashes & Diamonds collection are sites farmed by Matthiasson himself. "He's well-connected in terms of finding sites appropriate for the styles of wines we're making," Brooks said.

Besides consulting, Matthiasson is also one of two head winemakers for Ashes & Diamonds. Khaledi first met Matthiasson in 2014 and said the two immediately hit it off because of their common interests in punk rock, skateboarding and literature. "That's how we communicated," Khaledi said. "I had zero knowledge of viticulture and winemaking, so we communicated in cultural terms."

The inexperienced entrepreneur may not have known all the technical terms of winemaking, but he understood what Matthiasson meant when he said he "makes Cabernet Franc like the Minutemen song 'Corona,' but not like Creed's 'Higher.'"

On Matthiasson's advice, Khaledi took a backpacking trip through France as a "crash course" in wine. Here, he met Ashes & Diamonds' second head winemaker, Diana Snowden Seysses, enologist at Domaine Dujac in Burgundy and winemaker at Snowden Vineyards in Napa Valley. "We immediately hit it off, but on a different tangent,"



Tanks are equipped with TankNet data-logging and control system and pumps for automatic pumpovers.

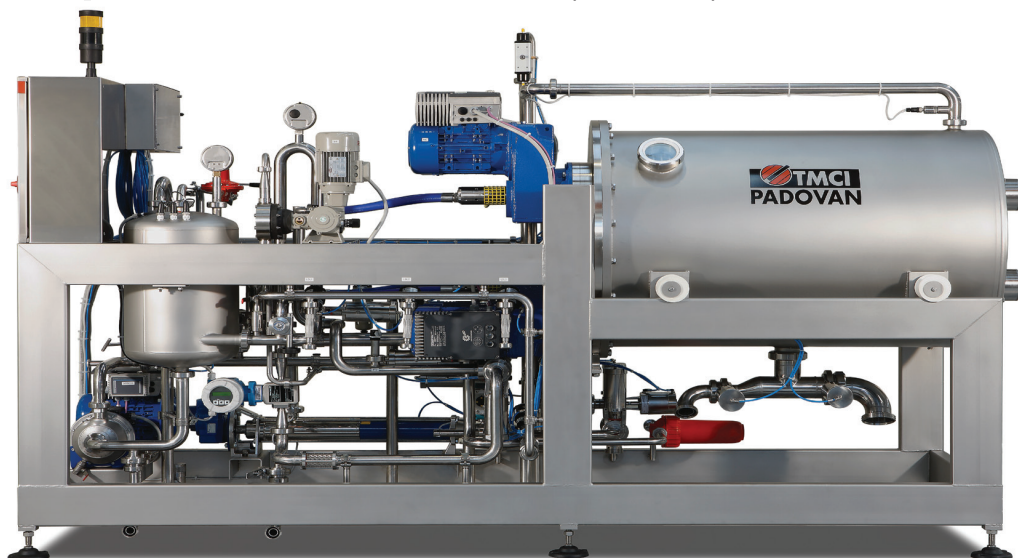
Khaledi said. "Both Diana and I tend to follow our bliss. We drank a bottle of Ridge Monte Bello and immediately zipped to Santa Cruz to bang on Paul Draper's door for advice, which ultimately led us to Bates Ranch."

Production facility

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Barrels at Ashes & Diamonds are specifically chosen for restraint and minimal oak impact.

together. Though Ashes & Diamonds has been making wine since 2014 (formerly in a custom-crush facility in Sonoma County), the construction of the winery didn't begin until July 2016, and was completed just in time for harvest 2017.

Because neither Khaledi nor Bestor had ever designed a winery before, they turned to those with more experience than they to help decide what to include in the winemaking production building. "We were fortunate to work with a few friends in the community like Nigel Kinsman (winemaker and co-owner of Kinsman Wine in Napa), who worked with the Araujo family on Wheeler Farms. His contribution was paramount to the choices we made in the production facility," Khaledi said. They also worked with Petaluma-based architectural firm vonRaesfeld & Associates and Napa-based general contractor Facility Development Co., both of which have worked on numerous new wineries.

"Kashy wanted maximum flexibility. He wanted to provide all the possible tools for any person's winemaking interest," Brooks said, explaining that all the general tech one would expect to find in a modern winery can be found at Ashes & Diamonds. That being said, Brooks also noted that, in keeping with the aesthetic of the wines Khaledi is interested in producing, the actual winemaking is kept very simple and "old world" in style, with very little tech actually involved. "The major thrust is the diligent work done in the vineyard. So the fruit comes in needing very little, and we can safely make it into wine without ruining it," Brooks said.

Khaledi described the winemaking at Ashes & Diamonds quite similarly: "There are

certain rules we all abide by," he said, adding that his part in the winemaking process is more aesthetic in taste than oenological in crafting. "We don't manipulate our wines, and we do the bare minimum so as not to obscure the expression of the vineyard."

Red winemaking

Grapes from all vineyards are harvested by hand, then sent through the P&L Specialties incline belt for cluster sorting. Grapes then move on to the Pellenc SPW-M destemmer, which Brooks said, because of its construction, allows for more control over how the destemming activity actually happens — down to tailoring the amount of stem inclusion. But the majority of Ashes & Diamonds' grapes are completely destemmed. This, Brooks said, is how they're able to "gear big mountain fruit toward lightness and freshness."

The exceptions to this rule are the Merlot grapes from the Ashes & Diamond estate used for the Grand Vin, which see about 20% stem inclusion — a stylistic choice made by Seysses, who, Brooks said, has a lot of experience crafting delicate wines with stem inclusion from her years working with Pinot Noir in Burgundy.

After destemming, the grapes are pumped into stainless steel tanks, custom built by Sonoma Stainless in Santa Rosa, Calif., for maceration and primary fermentation. The berries are left whole and are in the tanks for a maximum of three weeks, again to promote freshness. "Leaving things intact is a good way to maintain balance of tannin, acid, fruit and alcohol," Brooks said. "But we're not strong believers in extended mac-

eration ... you have to be careful not to over-extract the tannins."

The tanks are plumbed to both hot and cold glycol and are connected to a TankNet data-logging system that allows Brooks to closely monitor the juice's temperature throughout the maceration process.

During its time in tank, the wine will undergo a combination of punchdowns, rack-and-returns and occasional pumpovers, as needed. Cap management is never performed more than twice per day. Although the tanks are equipped with automatic pumpovers, it's not a feature the Ashes & Diamonds winemaking team utilizes. "At this point, we're not pumping over frequently enough to see any advantage from having pumpovers happen automatically," Brooks said.

After its time in tank, the free-run wine then moves on to barrel aging. Pomace moves on to the press, but Brooks said they're still working out what type, basket or bladder, works well with the Ashes & Diamonds wine-making style. Ashes & Diamonds has one of each at the winery, a JLB 12 basket press and a Pera Pellenc SPC 40 bladder press. "Press wine is generally reintegrated early to maximize integration where possible," Brooks said.

The barrel room is home to predominantly French oak barrels. "We use, like, half a dozen coopers," Brooks said. Though all Cabernet sees a little bit of new oak, Brooks said that they specifically choose barrels from forests known for their restraint and minimal impact and choose toast levels that never exceed a medium or medium-plus. "The wines are gentle, so the barrels need to be gentle," he said.

There are just a handful of American oak barrels in the Ashes & Diamonds barrel room. These touch a small percentage (about 25% to 35% of the final blends in total) of the single-vineyard Cabernet Sauvignon made from Rutherford in Napa Valley and Bates Ranch in Santa Cruz. "It's a hat-tip to the Napa wines of yesteryear ... and California wine pioneers who 'dabbled' with American wood, like Tchelistcheff," Brooks said.

Red wines age in barrel for 18 to 20 months, with topping once a month and rack-and-returns completed only if the winemaking team feels the wine needs an extra push in development. "This (rack-and-return) happens at most two times in a wine's life — if at all," Brooks said, stressing the importance of minimal intervention in the Ashes & Diamonds winemaking program.

White winemaking

Ashes & Diamonds makes only one white wine, simply called Blanc, a 50-50 blend of Sauvignon Blanc, sourced from Ryan's Vineyard, in Napa's Oak Knoll District and Semillon, sourced from Yount Mill Vineyard, in Yountville, Napa Valley.

Ryan's Vineyard is a site Matthiasson, along with his partner and the vineyard's owner, Jim

Verhey, farm organically, so Ashes & Diamonds enjoys complete control of the grapes from bud to bottle, with Matthiasson acting as both viticulturist and winemaker. “Yount Mill is an old-vine, dry-farmed, four-generation-old site that produces Semillon just the way we like it: age-worthy and complex,” Khaledi said, saying that once the white blend ages for a few years the “raciness” of the Sauvignon Blanc mellows, giving way to the earthier flavors and textures known to old-world Semillon.

Due to a miscommunication when ordering equipment for the winery, Ashes & Diamonds spent its first year without a white wine press. Instead, Brooks took the grapes to a friend’s neighboring winery to have the hand-harvested white grapes pressed.

This year, however, the winery has invested in a Pera Pellenc press. After pressing, the juice settles overnight in a utility tank, to remove the heaviest lees, and then is transferred to barrel for “dirty fermentation” and aging. The white wine sees only French oak, and since the first vintage, in 2015, the winemaking team has been incorporating less new oak influence each year — 40% in 2015 compared to 25% in 2017. The wine stays in barrel for 10 months, without stirring or any other agitation, before bottling.

In general, the wines do not undergo secondary, malolactic fermentation. However,

Brooks said that in 2017, because of extensive heat during September, the Sauvignon Blanc was picked a bit earlier than they would have liked, resulting in a leaner flavor profile. Thus, they encouraged four barrels to undergo malolactic fermentation. In keeping with the theme of “old school” winemaking and “minimal intervention,” Ashes & Diamonds’ preference is for native yeast fermentation.

Other winemaking tools

Ashes & Diamonds uses InnoVint for its winery-management software. As the winery is still in its early years, Brooks stresses the importance of a reliable software system that can keep records of winemaking techniques for years to come. He said that after several experiences using out-of-date, unreliable programs, InnoVint is a database software he actually likes: It’s modern, device-friendly and developed by a young company that’s open to suggestions and willing to discuss new ideas of implementation with clients.

Ashes & Diamonds also has an on-premise lab. But like other “new-fangled contraptions” in the winery, the winemaking team uses it sparingly, performing basic analyses (sugar, acid, pH) to aid their hands-off approach. “Your own sensory instrument is the most sensitive one,” Brooks said.



Head winemaker Steve Matthiasson.

It’s that “old school” vibe, that “old world” winemaking, that focus on vineyard management over high-tech tools that produces wines that will one day themselves harken back to a time and space uniquely their own. “It’s about subtlety, rather than flashiness,” Khaledi said. “We want the vineyard and vintage to be present in every bottle.” 🍷

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