

# San Francisco Chronicle

## Travel

Lifestyle

### Charles Krug Winery's new tasting room has glamour in store

By Carey Sweet

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When you're working with a structure built in 1872, on an estate founded in 1861, it's a given that the space might need a bit - well, a lot - of updating. That's what the Charles Krug Winery team was looking at in 2012, when it decided to transform its former tank room into a tasting room for its St. Helena property. At the same time, the building is on the National Historic Register, so too much change wouldn't be good.

Enter architect Howard Backen, who has designed many of Wine Country's most fashionable properties, including Ram's Gate Winery, Solage Calistoga resort, and Press restaurant. In November, his work was unveiled as a new hospitality center taking over what was previously a production area filled with storage tanks.

And what a difference. Tastings that previously were held in a somewhat stark, low-ceilinged ranch-house space nearby get a big bolt of glamour now. High, open-beam ceilings draw the eye up, a giant wall of 1861 label wine draws the eye over, and minimalistic clusters of rustic furniture draw crowds through with ease.

**The vibe:** A family-owned entity as renowned as Mondavi, with a tasting room as busy as this one constantly is, might get away with some indifferent service. Yet the staff is on its game, and actually seems to enjoy being so. As soon as my guest and I walked in, a greeter welcomed us and asked if she could help us find a space at the packed bar, or at low-slung blue-gray armchairs and bistro tables in the lounge area. As we sidled up to the bar, a host waved us in, pausing from other customers to set us up with glasses and a tasting menu.



Carey Sweet, Special To The Chronicle

If the bar is packed at Charles Krug Winery, there are cozy armchairs and tables in the lounge area.



The Charles Krug wine cellar.