

In Napa, Blending a House and Winery

By **NANCY KEATES**

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For interiors of Ruth's Chris steak-houses, Kelly Fleming designed a masculine look—lots of wood paneling and leather booths. For P.F. Chang's restaurants, she created an over-the-top Chinese-American theme with 11-foot-high replicas of ancient Chinese horses, murals and lots of yellows and purples.

Both projects were for Ms. Fleming's then-husband, Paul, who started the steak-house franchises in California and Arizona and founded P.F. Chang's. Now divorced, Ms. Fleming has built something for herself: a house and winery in Napa that look like they're straight out of Provence.

Photos: Winery Living in Napa Valley



The two buildings, separated by 12 acres of grapes, both resemble homes—an effect Ms. Fleming intended to mimic the way some wineries in France were traditionally operated out of residences. "I wanted them to be related. I didn't want the cattle-call feel of a lot of wineries here," says the 57-year-old Ms. Fleming.

To that end, both the 3,000-square-foot, three-bedroom house and the 16,000-square-foot winery are clad in ancient-looking limestone siding and topped with red-clay roof tiles imported from France. Both buildings have French terra-cotta floor pavers inside and out. Dining areas in both have long wooden tables, stone fireplaces and outdoor wood-burning pizza ovens. Gravel courtyards with olive trees are bounded by low stone walls in the front.

A closer look reveals New World differences. The windows in both the winery and the house, designed by an architect in Arizona, are made from steel and dwarf their French counterparts. Many rooms have big glass doors—a hallmark of modern architecture. "We wanted to make sure it didn't feel like something out of a theme park," says the architect of the winery, Tom Taylor of San Francisco-based Taylor Lombardo Architects.

Ms. Fleming drew on a trick she learned in the restaurant business: to decorate for low maintenance by having fewer, sturdier furnishings. As a result, the interior of the house, on a hill with a 360-degree-view, is sparse. The wood floors lack sealant, because that would require refinishing. The furniture—mostly wood antiques and comfortable, neutral colored sofas, gold mirrors and antique light fixtures—is meant to be timeless rather than trendy, so it shouldn't have to be replaced every few years.

Inside the winery, the décor requires even less attention. The kitchen—restaurant-huge, with six sinks and a commercial-sized stove—is almost all metal, except for the marble on the counters and the big center island, ideal for plating the lunches and dinners served there. A dining area holds a long wood table, a round iron chandelier and a stone fireplace—and little else. Upstairs in the winery office are two classic wood desks and unvarnished alder floors.

The landscaping around the house and winery is also designed to minimize effort. Instead of lawns, Ms. Fleming put in lots of natural grasses, gravel courtyards and stone patios. She minimized paint (using plaster walls inside, stone outside and steel-clad windows) so as to avoid retouching work. On the winery patio, she used bamboo overhangs that give the same light-filtering effect as awnings—but without as much cleaning.

Ms. Fleming and her ex-husband bought the 300-acre piece of land for \$1.9 million in 1998. The house, finished in 2003, came out at about \$1 million—exactly as she planned, even though she had to flatten the top of the hill by removing part of the hillside. The winery took almost four years to build because it involved dynamiting into the hill behind it to create two 3,500-square-foot stone wine caves. That, plus all the winemaking equipment, brought the cost to over \$7 million before the winery was finished in June 2009.

Kelly Fleming Wines makes about 1,000 cases of Cabernet Sauvignon and Sauvignon Blanc a year.

Ms. Fleming said she drew another lesson from her restaurant experience: Men often don't take women seriously. That's partly why she made her winery a mostly female endeavor. She and her daughter Colleen Fleming, 30, run the business and handle much of the grunt work, including overseeing the harvest, fermentation, marketing and sales. The winemaker is Celia Welch, one of the top in her profession in Napa; the assistant winemaker is Becky George. The two exceptions are the vineyard manager and Ms.

Fleming's 28-year-old son Robert, who does the winery's sales and marketing from Los Angeles.

The property's garden, which yields the ingredients for many of the lunches and dinners Kelly Fleming and her daughter serve at the winery, also takes up a lot of time. It has almonds, apples, peaches, pears, apricots, plums, lemons, persimmons and pomegranates, along with lettuce, radishes, carrots, chard, kale, broccoli, fava beans, cauliflower, onions, potatoes, strawberries and spinach.

Ms. Fleming grew up in Lake Oswego, Ore., studied fine arts in college and went to work as a flight attendant for Braniff International Airways. She met Mr. Fleming in Denver, before he started his restaurants.

Her knowledge of wine and Napa Valley grew during those restaurant years, when she'd visit to attend wine auctions and meet with winery and restaurant owners to pick which wines to serve.

Now that she lives full time in Napa, Ms. Fleming uses the winery as an extension of the house and entertains there. "That way, when I want to go home, everyone has to go home," she says.

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