

INTRODUCING MA(i)SONRY NAPA VALLEY

THE LIFE AESTHETIC

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ARTISAN WINES. ACCLAIMED ART. AN ECLECTIC DESIGN GALLERY. MA(i)SONRY NAPA VALLEY ARTFULLY BRINGS TOGETHER FOUNDER MICHAEL POLENSKE'S VISION OF THE LIFE AESTHETIC.

"If you know wine, you care about the different grape varieties," notes Michael Polenske, founder and curator of Ma(i)sonry, Napa Valley's most personalized tasting destination. "But if you *really* know wine, you want to know about the different winemakers. In the Napa Valley these people are rock stars."

When Ma(i)sonry opened six years ago in an ivy-covered, quarry-stone building in Yountville, it offered visitors wines from just two wineries: Bordeaux-inspired Blackbird Vineyards, and Lail Vineyards, an insider icon owned by Napa royalty - Robin Lail's family were proprietors of the Inglenook property for generations. Then, with a guiding hand from Polenske, the Valley's rock stars began lining up.

"We work only with artisan winemakers and wineries we love," Polenske likes to say. But even love hasn't always been enough to gain a spot on Ma(i)sonry's now-coveted list. "We have been approached by probably 250 Napa brands at this point," he says, "and Napa is the greatest wine-growing region in the United States. Still, we have chosen only 22 wineries so far. We've said 'no' nine times for every time we've said 'yes,' and believe me it hasn't been easy."

To the wineries and winemakers who do make the cut, Ma(i)sonry can be thought of as the big-time of the small-time: These wineries are all personal-scale, with extremely limited production, and nearly all sell out every vintage. The names of their guiding lights may not be familiar to the broader wine-buying public, but the winemakers celebrated at Ma(i)sonry are names to conjure with in the collector's community.

The issue for many wine lovers is how to sample these hard-to-find wines. Only a handful of the Ma(i)sonry wineries have tasting rooms; for most, Ma(i)sonry is their tasting room. Your best bet otherwise at sampling wines like Skipstone, made by premier consultant Philippe Melka, or Chester's Anvil by terroir expert Aaron Pott, or Casa Piena by industry insider Thomas Rivers Brown might be to add your name to their mailing list or scan a high-end restaurant wine list in a state of hope.

But showing up at Ma(i)sonry can be a lot more fun. In a valley filled with places promoting tours of the barrel room, bustling tasting bars and burgeoning racks of logo-wear, Ma(i)sonry offers none of those things. Instead, it is an immersion in what Polenske calls "The Life Aesthetic."

The Life Aesthetic begins with Ma(i)sonry's handsome stone building. An early 20th-century structure listed on the National Register of Historic Places, it has served many uses in its time - as a farmhouse and a country inn - but probably never so many at once. At the same time that Ma(i)sonry is the Valley's most highly curated wine tasting destination, it is also a design gallery, an art space and an events venue.

Walking through Ma(i)sonry's door is like entering the home of a wealthy, eccentric uncle who has traveled the world collecting tufted leather armchairs, vintage French gym equipment, antique globes and surgical spotlights, but who also has an eye for contemporary art. Polenske's various galleries and sculpture gardens - Ma(i)sonry is a star in this constellation - represent about 50 painters and photographers and 50 sculptors, any of whom may be displayed here at any given time.

The best plan of approach is to call ahead and book an appointment; you want to be certain there's a wine consultant available. Ma(i)sonry, it turns out, is a curated experience on both ends: a highly edited wine selection offered through a highly tailored tasting experience.

"Some people just come to have fun, but if you are here to buy and learn, we'll take you on a journey," notes Polenske. "Our team is really good at engaging clients in a dialogue." The trip starts by constructing your tasting profile: Name some wines you like, or a style of wine, or grape varieties, and they'll start you tasting from there. By design, Ma(i)sonry's 22 chosen wineries cover a lot of tasting territory. Each was selected to typify their particular grapes, styles and specific places in the soil. It is wine education as a tapestry of flavors and aromas, woven by the great masters of the craft.

And there is a take-away, too: Ma(i)sonry offers memberships with different levels of service and privileges, from quarterly shipments of boutique wines to invitations to special events - winemaker dinners, book signings, artisan designer trunk shows - and the ultimate: a concierge service. Says Polenske, "When our members come to town, we'll help them set up their itineraries and make reservations. We can get them access to places that they either might not know about or couldn't access on their own."

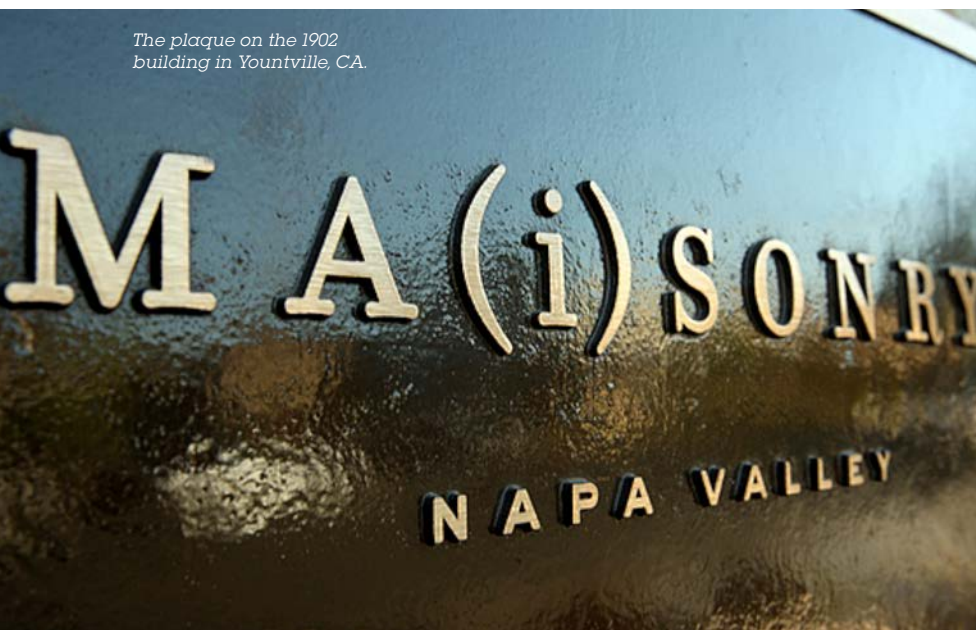
Napa Valley is a place of many pleasures - some obvious, some less so. Ma(i)sonry's serene, almost secret stone house in Yountville is a personal portal inside the Life Aesthetic. RH



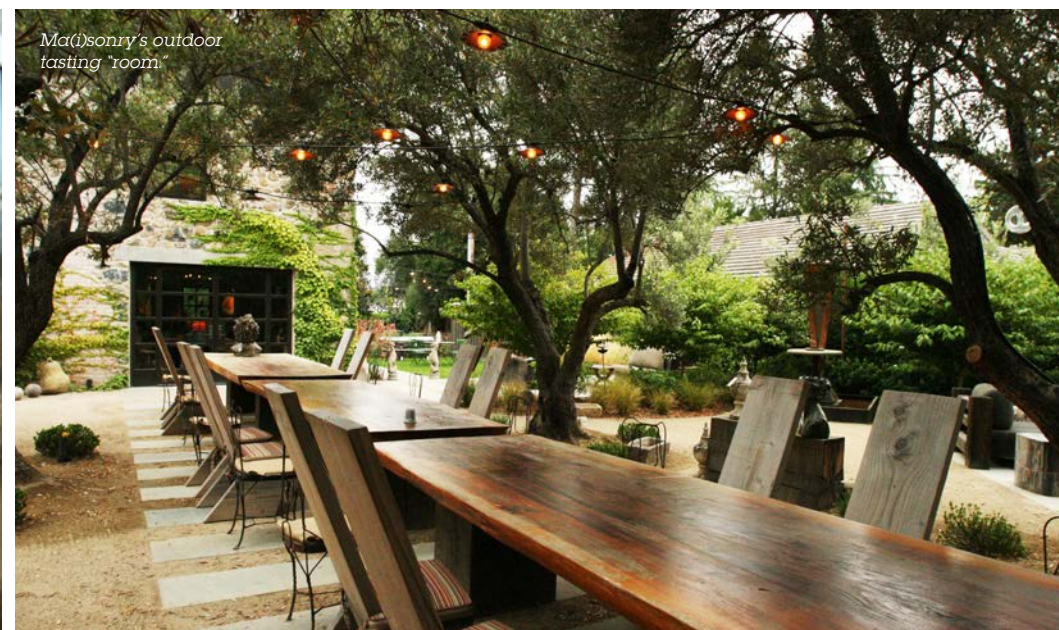
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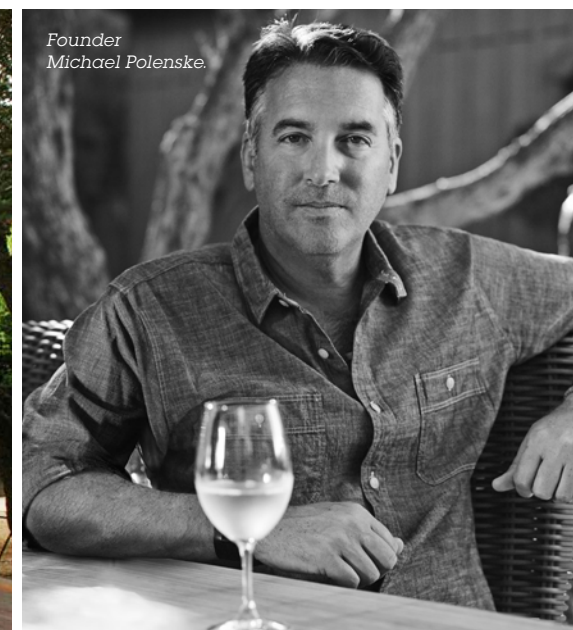
Ma(i)sonry Napa Valley.



The plaque on the 1902 building in Yountville, CA.



Ma(i)sonry's outdoor tasting room.



Founder Michael Polenske.



Ma(i)sonry's gallery.