

# A NEW BLEND

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PHOTOGRAPHY BY JOHN LEE

## *A YOUNG ARCHITECT IS CHANGING THE LOOK OF NAPA AND SONOMA, ONE WINERY AT A TIME.*

JUANCARLOS FERNANDEZ'S process is a bit different than that of other architects. For one thing, he sips wine while he works on new concepts, preferably a vintage made by one of his many wine-producing clients. Apparently, the method is working: The 43-year-old Mexico-born architect opened Signum Architecture, his own practice, in 2011, and is preparing to see five wineries of the firm's creation open in the next two years. At this pace, it's hard to imagine a design professional who will have a more significant impact on the look of Northern California's Wine Country. And that look won't be same old, same old. "I am interested in doing work beyond the traditional barn style," Fernandez says. "It's been done already, many times." So when drawing the plans for the recently opened Brand winery in St. Helena (pictured), he looked not to the surrounding barns and sheds in the region, but east to the mining buildings of Nevada and Colorado. "Those structures are very tall because they had to accommodate large mining equipment, and they are made of now-weathered corrugated metal. It is the perfect look for this winery." Add stark contemporary flourishes to the industrial edifice, and you have what can only be described as a new varietal in the field of Wine Country architecture.