

Napa Valley *Register*

10 Questions | Jarrod Denton, Signum Architecture

Creating a 'symphony' in architecture: Napa architect Jarrod Denton acts as a conductor to bring creative forces together

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Jarrod Denton is a partner at Signum Architecture in Napa.

Suzanne Becker Bronk Photography/Courtesy Photo

Jarrod Denton, a partner at Signum Architecture in Napa, compared the role of an architect to that of a conductor in a symphony.

“Like a conductor, an architect brings a collection of creative forces together to achieve a cohesive whole,” Denton wrote, “And like each new piece of music, every project is different.”

1. What was your childhood ambition?

I have wanted to be an architect since elementary school. It is an ambition that has never wavered.

2. What was your first job?

My first jobs when I was young followed a progression: from farm to hardware store to designing and constructing irrigation systems at the age of 14.

3. How did you get into the architecture industry?

During college, I worked in the construction industry. I also interned with a Santa Rosa architecture firm, which had a significant impact on the course of my career. The two partners were very different — one worked on affordable housing and the other was the mayor and worked on the design of high-end homes and hotels. I've combined those influences in my practice, specializing in the design of residential, winery and hospitality projects, while also working to serve the communities of which I am a part — on the design review board for the Town of Yountville, the oversight committee for Napa Valley College, Howell Mt. Enterprises, several homeowners' associations, and numerous other boards.

4. What is the biggest challenge your business or industry has faced?

Carbon neutrality. Building to achieve site net zero energy use really is the goal we have been working toward since starting Signum Architecture.

5. Who are some of your favorite architects?

Peter Zumthor for his deep knowledge of construction and his conservationist ethic, Santiago Calatrava for his organic and sculptural forms made possible by his training as a structural engineer and sculptor in addition to architecture, Carlo Scarpa for his design approach influenced by material, detail and history.

6. What are some buildings in Napa Valley that you consider architecturally notable?

My partner, Juancarlos Fernandez and I, together with our team, have been fortunate to design some of the Napa Valley's groundbreaking structures, including Hall Wines and Cade Estate, the first and second LEED Gold Certified wineries in California. We're very proud of that distinction, and that the design of these wineries, along with many others we've designed in the valley, continues to stand the test of time.

7. If you could design a dream project with an unlimited budget, for any one client, in any place, what would you build?

To be honest, an unlimited budget is not the ideal scenario for an architect. Working with constraints, and with a site that has some existing buildings or is part of a neighborhood, pushes us to provide better architectural solutions — solutions suited for a particular client, a particular landscape, a particular weather pattern, and so on. Blending a functional solution with a beautiful design is what differentiates architecture as a practice.

That said, I have been extremely blessed to design projects in many spectacular locations: the North Island of New Zealand, Costa Rica, the north shore of Oahu, Hawaii, the Mojave Desert, Carmel Valley, Sea Ranch, the Sierra Foothills and, of course, the Napa Valley.

Napa is a special place and it's where I have chosen to make my home. For me, a dream project here involves collaborating with other creatives, particularly with artists — as I did in the design of Hall Wines — so an art museum or installation would be a dream project for me.

8. If you could change one thing about your business or industry, what would it be?

I would love to develop a way to combine innovative one-off designs with fabrication methods that can streamline cost and build times. That would be revolutionary.

9. What's your favorite charity or nonprofit?

Napa Valley Youth Advocacy Center and Pacific Union College.

10. What's something people might be surprised to know about you?

Napa Valley has been my home for 33 years, but I love to travel. I recently cycled from Hanoi to Hue City in Vietnam (a distance of 409 miles).

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By Jennifer Huffman

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