

House of Wine

Mountain Life

Vanessa Grigoriadis · Updated: Dec 13, 2016 · Original: Oct 17, 2001

A great ski house is often adorned with some family history—summit portraits on the mantle, Junior's first mittens remade as a Christmas ornament, Grandpa's skis on the wall. But the very building blocks of Pete Mondavi Jr.'s Lake Tahoe ski home have been passed down through generations.

A decade ago, a truckload of three-story-high old-growth redwood wine barrels from the Napa Valley winery his grandfather bought in 1943 were retired, and Pete found them too stunning to discard. The barrels—fashioned from long, perfect planks of 1940s redwood—stood 30 feet tall and had once contained up to 30,000 gallons of wine each, with every vintage spending at least a year in the massive casks. "You could never get this wood today, six-inch-wide and three-inch-thick old-growth redwood, says kindly, soft-spoken Pete, who resembles Tom Selleck. "At first we just did little stuff with it, like an outdoor table. But I wanted to do more.[NEXT """]

A lifelong skier and lover of the outdoors, Pete came up with just the answer: He'd use the planks to build a ski house on the north shore of Lake Tahoe, about three hours from his home in Napa Valley. Pete first learned to ski when he was 3 years old, driving up from Napa with his father for day trips to Sierra Ski Ranch (now Sierra-at-Tahoe). "Those days started at 4 a.m., he says. In 1997, he bought a half-acre plot of land in North Lake Tahoe, and a semi-tractor trailer filled with wine barrels rolled in shortly after. Architect Kurt Reinkens, a principal in Truckee-based MWA Architects, who designed the four-bedroom, four-bath, 3,200-square-foot house, used the barrel walls to construct the home's exterior facade—as well as cathedral ceilings that soar 13 feet above the heated tile floor of the home's open living and dining rooms. "The outside of the planks are the part of the wood that was inside the barrel, holding the wine, so you get this nice stain, Pete says.

Even though the house may be made from the tools of his trade, Pete says that the great pleasure of having a ski house is being able to escape from business. "Napa Valley is a hectic life, he says. Pete, along with his father, Peter, and his brother, Marc, now preside over the winery his grandparents bought, Charles Krug—Peter Mondavi Family, known for its Bordeaux-style reds. He's worked there from the age of 8—unwrapping wine glasses for the retail room, sanding new tanks, laboring in the fields. "My grandmother started me on water and wine from age 6 or so, he says with a laugh.

It was a quiet family business until 1965, when a family feud between Pete's father and his uncle, Robert, led the latter to begin his own rival winery down the road. The brothers didn't speak for 30 years, though there's recently been a rapprochement. (To symbolize their mending relationship, they partnered on one barrel of wine, auctioned off for \$401,000 at the charity-fundraising 25th annual Napa Valley Wine Auction last summer.) [NEXT """]With this kind of history, family has become very important to Pete, and his Tahoe house reflects that. It's an inviting space for Pete, his wife, Katie, and their 8-year-old daughter and 11-year-old son. All of them ski, and during the winter they try to get up to the house three weekends each month. Though friends from Napa come up once in a while—every New Year's Eve Pete and Katie play host to a group from their Stanford freshman dorm, where the couple met—the home serves primarily as a family retreat.

Pete and Katie have fostered togetherness—though not too much togetherness—with the home's design as well. So that the kids could have a place of their own (and somewhere to hang out in private with friends when they're older), Pete and Katie separated the bedrooms: The master suite is up a short set of stairs, and the kids' bedrooms, each with its own bath, are downstairs, connected by a comfortable playroom strewn with toys and DVDs. The bedrooms are modest, housing not much more than a bed with colorful linens and a chest of drawers. Even the master suite is only 450 square feet. "We didn't care that much about the bedrooms, Pete says. "What we really wanted was a fantastic great room, somewhere we could be together as a family.

The home's great room, at 880 square feet, is a show-stopper, and not only because of its soaring cathedral ceiling. A long, west-facing bay of 10 floor-to-ceiling windows with stunning mountain views has something to do with it, too. "A lot of homes we do out here are what I call a 'Paul Bunyan experience,' architect Reinkens says. "But Pete was ready to break tradition and do something modern—yet not too modern. Indeed, despite the wall of glass, black marble countertops and spare décor, the home feels warm, lived-in and appropriate for the mountains. From the outside, the home definitely doesn't appear to be contemporary. "Pete wanted the house to be as hidden and understated as possible, Reinkens says. "He didn't want an ego statement—he wanted a hideout. [NEXT """]Pete, who is trained as a mechanical engineer, was involved in the building of the house, and the whole family contributed to the interior décor and furniture, most of which doesn't have name-brand designers on the tags. Setting off the great room's black-tile floor, a tan L-shaped couch and matching rug border a broad coffee table with an inlaid checker board. Nearby, the fire inside the elegant Tulikivi soapstone fireplace shipped from Finland crackles softly.

Even with such a special great room, the Mondavis find themselves spending their time where most families do—in the kitchen. This morning, Katie stares down at a slightly burnt bagel she's about to serve her daughter. "Um, how brown do you want your bagel? she says, laughing. A storm is rolling in, and the sky is gray. The Mondavis' 12-year-old dog, Sage, naps by the fireplace.

Tonight, after a day of skiing, if the storm doesn't turn too ugly, the family will gather here once again, all pitching in to make a dinner of tomato-basil risotto. But before that comes hors d'oeuvres, and, of course, wine. "Wine after skiing, says Pete. "It's a great combination.

[NEXT """]

Location North Shore Lake Tahoe, Calif. **Closest skiing** The Mondavis' house is an easy drive away from Squaw, Northstar-at-Tahoe and Alpine Meadows. Square footage 3,200 Lot size .5 acres Architect Kurt Reinkens, MWA Architects Building cost \$250 per square foot Unique traits The Mondavis recycled old-growth redwood wine barrels from their Charles Krug—Peter Mondavi Family winery, creating the home's facade and cathedral ceilings. Design priorities Spending time with their two children is always at the top of their list, hence the soaring 880-square-foot great room, where the family loves to hang out. [NEXT ""]**Kitchen couture** The Mondavis kitted out their Tahoe kitchen with polished granite countertops and backsplashes, glass-door cabinets that show off the couple's wine-glass collection, a stainless-steel Thermador stove with an above-range faucet for convenience, and a bread-warming drawer. The kitchen is separated from the open great room by a counter-level granite-topped bar, where guests can sit on leather and redwood stools and talk to the Mondavis as they cook.[NEXT ""]**ANGLE OF REPOSE** The modern angles of the open living/dining room are softened by a warm redwood ceiling, neutral floor tiles and a buttery leather couch. Outside a pair of sliding-glass doors, last season's epic snowfall piles up on the porch. Top right: Pete and his wife, Katie, relax with a glass of red on the window seat, which runs the length of the open space. Bottom right: In the basement, the Mondavis' temperature-controlled wine cellar, which holds 4,800 bottles, features some of the world's finest vintages. A blazing Tulikivi soapstone fireplace, imported from Finland, efficiently warms the great room's conversation area. A modern shaped black coffee table inlaid with a chess/checkers board is perfect for long evenings spent playing games by the fire.h a chess/checkers board is perfect for long evenings spent playing games by the fire.

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