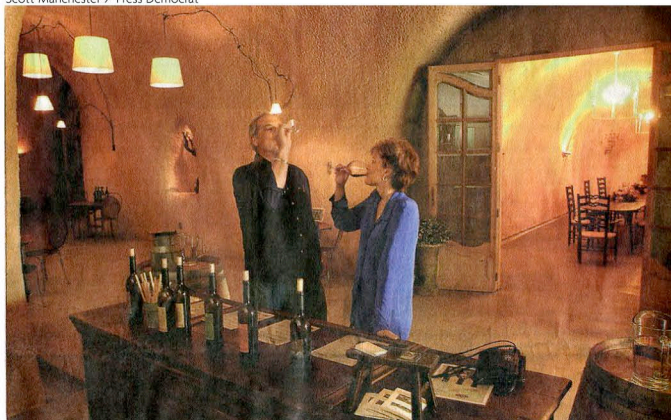


THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 25, 2004

Time Out

THE PRESS DEMOCRAT
SANTA ROSA, CALIFORNIA

Scott Manchester / Press Democrat



J Mays and Marie Volm of Arcadia, Ariz., taste wine in the wine cave tasting room at Bella Vineyards, 9711 West Dry Creek Road, Healdsburg; 866.572.3552; bellawinery.com.

Wine Spelunking

by **GEORGE LAUER**
the Press Democrat

There's plenty of wine and atmosphere to discover when you go exploring the wine caves of Wine Country

Holes in the ground are logical, good business for wineries. They keep wine temperatures low and minimize evaporation, they're less regulated than above-ground construction and they don't require new real estate.

Caves, however, are something else entirely.

Caves have an earthy, elemental, back-to-the-womb appeal.

The word and its relatives — cavern, underground chamber — carry well-aged undertones that blend nicely with the wine industry's rosy-hued image.

Many wineries pair the practical with the marketing possibilities and open their caves to the public. Some decorate for the holidays and schedule events.

Some wineries light their underground tunnels with candles. Wine country caves house art galleries, theaters, ballrooms, kitchens—and some kind of internal spark of imagination that's harder to come by above ground.

“Even if they're man-made, which most of the wine caves around here are, caves have an organic, old-world feel.”

SCOTT ADAMS
owner of Bella Vineyards

“Even if they're man-made, which most of the wine caves around here are, caves have an organic, old-world feel,” said Scott Adams, owner of Bella Vineyards in Healdsburg's Dry Creek Valley. “When people step underground, they have a sense of stepping back in time and into the inner sanctum of wine production.”

Bella Vineyards' U-shaped cave is built into a hillside with zinfandel vines growing only a few feet above the cave's entrance. It was completed about a year ago and houses the winery's tasting room and rows of oak barrels, sending off a rich, yeasty aroma that permeates the cave.

Elinor Hoyt Wylie, the early 20th-century American poet and novelist, might have had the cellars of Bacchus in mind when she wrote:

If you would keep your soul

*From spotted sight or sound,
Live like the velvet mole;*

Go burrow underground.

