

COWHORN'S GREEN TASTING ROOM

BY BARBARA BARRIELLE

WHEN BILL AND BARBARA STEELE left Wall Street and bought 117 acres in the Applegate Valley of Southern Oregon, they departed from the norm. They planted Rhone varieties because their research indicated syrah, viognier, grenache, roussanne and marsanne would do well on the farm. And the grapes have flourished. Year after year winemaker Bill Steele earns awards and accolades as the top Rhone producer in Oregon.

Cowhorn's wines have achieved near cult status, but what excites the Steeles is complete biodynamic farming and promoting a polyculture at the farm that incorporates crops that thrive together: grapes, lavender, cherries and an asparagus crop that tops 8,000 pounds and makes Cowhorn the foremost asparagus producer in Oregon. And, in one corner of the property a small orchard of hazelnut trees inoculated with Périgord truffles awaits the time when this patch yields its coveted crop.

When I called Bill to discuss Cowhorn's tasting room building that is the first winery building to earn The Living Building Challenge and the first such in Oregon, he had to call me back because a local farmer had stopped by to inquire about vermin castings from worms, used to make high bacteria compost tea. This is par for the biodynamic course at Cowhorn.

The Living Building Challenge (LBC) is considered the world's most progressive and rigorous standard for green buildings, those with net-positive or net-zero energy that are free of toxins and have lower carbon footprints many times below a comparable commercial structure. For the LBC certification, requirements are ambitious and must be maintained over twelve months of continual use.

Cowhorn's achievements were not accomplished without a team dedicated to learning the Learning Building Challenge's requirements then sourcing the materials and building

constraints necessary for this carbon neutral standard achieved by about 20 buildings worldwide, including the Etsy headquarters in Brooklyn, N.Y, The Packard Foundation in Los Altos, CA, and the Bullitt Center in Seattle, WA.

In the case of Cowhorn, the team that brought their LBC certified tasting room from concept to reality was Green Hammer in Portland. Led by Alex Boetzel, director of operations and sustainability, Green Hammer did their research into the stringent requirements for design-build firms, vetting hundreds of materials and building methods to completely redefine

"waste" in the built environment from water to energy to building materials. This resulted in a database Green Hammer can now apply to upcoming projects seeking high "green" standards.

"We were a good team for bringing this project to fruition," says Boetzel. "The tasting room at Cowhorn is a prime example of a project that represents our firm's belief that the building industry can and does play a critical role in reversing climate change.

"The certification is not easy to achieve. At the time Cowhorn was certified, only 20 such buildings internationally had earned the certification despite thousands of attempts by some of the world's leading and largest architecture and construction firms."

The team of Green Hammer and the Steeles has a joint commitment to biodynamic culture and reducing emissions in all aspects of living.

"Together we worked through obstacles and pursued incentives

and grants that assist rural businesses to improve efficiency and lower energy consumption," says Boetzel.

As the Living Building Challenge organization points out. "Cowhorn Vineyard and Gardens joins a handful of institutions around the world dedicated to creating inspiring, healthy buildings in which people live, work and play." And, in Cowhorn's case, they drink beautiful wines as well.

Plan your visit to Cowhorn at cowhornwine.com and learn more about visiting Southern Oregon at southernoregon.org. 🍷

