

Joe Wagner, proprietor and winemaker of Copper Cane Wines & Spirits, greets us from the third-floor window of his downtown Napa tasting room, Quilt & Co.

# elements of Discovery

KEY TO BLDG. 1 WINES UNLOCK THE ORDINARY

story by **Meridith May** / photos by **Suzanna Mannion**

“People don’t want to just sit at a wine bar—they want an experience,” comments Joe Wagner, proprietor and winemaker of Copper Cane Wines & Spirits, the company behind popular brands Belle Glos, Napa Valley Quilt, Threadcount, and Böen, along with newcomer Araciél. “Customers like to be entertained, and the wine directors and somms on the floor can be the entertainers.”

Wagner realizes the power these gatekeepers of the on-premise market possess as well as their influence on bringing brands to the forefront by offering new concepts to their patrons. “Strategically, we look at retail, but when we know there’s an opportunity to show something unique, we rely on that hand-sell, driving interest on a one-on-one basis,” he adds.

With that statement, Wagner presented me with Quilt & Co’s small-production label, **Key to Bldg. 1**, a direct-to-consumer exclusive. Packaged with a waxed top featuring a real key, these are single vineyard–designated wines that Wagner says “gives sommeliers something relatable to share with their customers.”

The wine was named for the original building at Caymus Vineyards, Wagner’s first winemaking home, which was co-founded by his father, the renowned Chuck Wagner. “It was small, holding only three barrels high of our Belle Glos Pinot Noirs,” Wagner says of the facility—but he wasn’t thinking small when he started experimenting with other varieties. “Evolution is natural,” he points out. “We began by exploring different varietals and regions—small experiments that have since evolved into incubators for exciting new wines.”

For access to Key to Bldg. 1, visit the Quilt & Co tasting toom or the brand’s website: [quiltandco.com/collection/key-to-bldg1](http://quiltandco.com/collection/key-to-bldg1).



TASTING ROOM

WINE B



**Key to Bldg. 1 2022 Albariño, H. Verlassenschaft Vineyard, Santa Maria Valley, Santa Barbara County (\$30)** Salted caramel, pear, and hazelnut glaze over the palate. Expansive and expressive, elderflower shines a spotlight midway. The wine has a richness to it, but the bright acidity and chalky mouthfeel of dry river stone rein it in. It's a gorgeous Central Coast salute to this Spanish variety that's been unconventionally aged in 25% new French oak, with the remainder in neutral oak. **94**

**Key to Bldg. 1 2021 Grenache, Glasir Holt Vineyard, Sta. Rita Hills, Santa Barbara County (\$60)** Mouthwatering cocoa and cherry-plum liqueur are addressed by acidity that impacts the palate with grace and energy. Fresh and concentrated with a mineral core, this elegant and upright wine maintains weight and a generous amount of fruit. Glasir Holt Vineyard lies on the coolest western edge of this AVA, close to Lompoc. **96**

**Key to Bldg. 1 2021 Italian Red Blend, H. Verlassenschaft Vineyard, Block 4D and 4E, Santa Maria Valley, Santa Barbara County (\$60)** This blend of 75% Nero d'Avola and 25% Negroamaro is shadowed, moody, and concentrated with notes of plum liqueur, soy sauce, and lavender. Black cherry emerges on the well-defined and focused midpalate as acidity provides a fresh counterpoint to its holiday-spiced character. **94**



“These wines are the key to opening new conversations with customers,” Wagner enthuses of **Key to Bldg. 1**.



## Waxing Poetic

Belle Glos wines have become instantly recognizable by their colorful waxed tops and strategic pull tab. The bottles of **Key to Bldg. 1** are also decorated with hand-dipped wax covering a metal key, and the vineyard, vintage, and variety details are posted on the back rather than the front label.

At Quilt & Co, Copper Cane’s three-level tasting room in downtown Napa, Joe Wagner recently took me under his wing as we submerged bottles in colorful hot wax. “We’ve learned that people like to wax their own bottles, and it makes us more appealing at the tasting room to offer a memorable souvenir. They can single-, double-, or triple-dip and choose their hues—and this leads to word of mouth when they share that wine with friends,” he said, noting that “waxing creates an oxygen-deprived environment, so the wine maintains its freshness for much longer—but we also do it because it’s sexy.”



Wagner gives *Tasting Panel* publisher/editor-in-chief Meridith May a lesson in immersion: the art of the dip.