

Robert Mondavi has set the bar for all future winery renovations

By **Jess Lander**, Staff Writer
April 23, 2026

 Gift Article



Napa's famous Robert Mondavi Winery reopened this week after a three-year closure and a major renovation.
Brian L. Frank/Special to the Chronicle

In a dozen years of reporting on wine and 15 years living in Napa Valley, I've witnessed countless multimillion-dollar winery revitalizations. In 2025 alone, there was the metamorphosis of Napa Valley's Cardinale, Pestoni and V. Sattui, and Anderson Valley's Roederer. But the renovation of Napa Valley's famous Robert Mondavi Winery, which reopened this week after a three-year closure and renovation, and which likely cost hundreds of millions of dollars, is the most exhaustive, expensive and beautiful transformation Wine Country has ever seen. Not a single detail was overlooked, and it should serve as the inspiration for every outdated winery planning a renovation, even if few will have the capital to pull it off.

Mondavi is the most recognized California winery and one of the most visited by tourists (likely only surpassed by Castello di Amorosa in Calistoga). That, combined with the fact that Napa Valley wineries are desperate for a tourism boost after a multi-year slowdown, makes Mondavi not only the most anticipated winery opening of the year, but the most anticipated winery opening in Napa Valley history by tourists, locals and wine industry workers alike.

Most wineries have stayed open during their renovations, working in phases and apologetically hosting guests in temporary spaces while construction was underway; Mondavi opened a flashy, temporary tasting room in Napa, which also required an extensive revamp. But the decision to close the estate for three years signaled from the beginning that this undertaking was likely bigger, in scale and expense, than any I'd seen before.

Despite this commitment, it was an open question whether the winery's parent company, Constellation Brands, was up to the task of preserving and revitalizing Mondavi's legacy as the most influential Napa Valley winery. When the conglomerate purchased Mondavi in 2004, the winery's reputation was already in decline. The brand was best known for producing cheap, mass-produced wines, like Woodbridge, and Mondavi was often categorized as a touristy "Disneyland winery." To many in the wine industry, a corporate takeover felt like the death knell of Mondavi.

Over the next two decades, as Constellation snapped up more premium wineries — including the top-selling Prisoner Wine Company (for which it built a controversial, prison-themed tasting room), Paso Robles' Booker, Oregon's Lingua Franca, and Ayesha Curry's Domaine Curry — the biggest news related to Mondavi was of legal disputes centered on Constellation's trademark of To Kalon, Mondavi's illustrious vineyard. Parts of the vineyard remain owned by other winegrowers; lawsuits have challenged the company's exclusive usage of To Kalon as a brand. Revered grape grower Andy Beckstoffer, who owns 89 acres of To Kalon, told the Chronicle that To Kalon "has to be a place and not a marketing concept that (Constellation) can do whatever they want with."

More concerning, midway through the Mondavi renovation and amid the wine industry crisis, Constellation began divesting from the business, offloading most of its low-priced wine brands, including Woodbridge. Earlier this year, the company closed a major production facility and laid off more than 200 workers. Constellation is now a bigger player in beer.

But the new Mondavi is undeniably stunning. It's colossal yet not overwhelming and luxurious without being ostentatious. I imagine this unveiling feels nearly as dramatic as it did in 1966, when Robert Mondavi was the first in the region to build a visitor center to promote tourism. On a smaller scale, there are tasteful homages to his heyday, such as hundreds of barrel staves from the old oak wine tanks repurposed into ceilings and walls. I was also completely charmed by the tiny tasting space inside the bell tower, previously used as a storage room.

Most winery revamps have come with higher tasting fees and Mondavi is no different: Its entry-level tasting fee rose from \$45 to \$60. It's competitive with its neighbors, but I wish it would offer a mini flight of two or three wines for \$25-\$30 to remain more accessible. It's something I've seen at other wineries, such as Mark Herold and Honig. Mondavi's food and wine offering, however, is notably more affordable than most comparable experiences, at just \$95. (That's the one I'd book.)

"We're bringing it back to the land," was the slogan that tour guides and Mondavi's PR materials kept coming back to. There's no small amount of irony there, considering the To Kalon lawsuits and the company's insistence that the hallowed land Mondavi sits on is a marketing tool. But Constellation has put a lot of effort into the idea. For one, it replaced the manicured green lawn in the winery's courtyard with a more natural Napa Valley habitat. ("The bees are really happy," lead architect David Darling told me. "You can hear the birds just having a party.") The To Kalon vineyard is on display from nearly every floor-to-ceiling glass panel — and there are many. Some of the walls, made from construction waste and gravel, resemble layers of soil, while the winery's fancy upgrades should result in higher-quality wines that better represent To Kalon's potential.

Whatever Constellation's future in the wine business, Mondavi got the makeover it desperately needed and deserved.

April 23, 2026



Jess Lander

SENIOR WINE REPORTER



Jess Lander covers breaking news and trends in the California wine industry, with an emphasis on openings and closures, acquisitions, the current wine industry downturn, and contentious debates on topics such as land use and government regulations. She also writes the Chronicle's weekly wine newsletter. Originally from Boston, Jess moved to Napa Valley in 2010 and published "The Essential Napa Valley Cookbook" in 2021.

How to reach Jess

To share a story tip or feedback, email jess.lander@sfnchronicle.com.