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IN MONDRAGON, SOUTHERN FRANCE, THE WINERY VISITOR CENTRE BY ARCHITECTS H2O IS BUILT IN THREE RADIATING WINGS AND CLAD IN LARCH PINE THAT WILL FADE TO GREY WITH AGE



# Grape & grain

A winery pavilion designed to age beautifully

WRITER: ELLIE STATHAKI

This bijou commission for a winery building was the first of its kind for French architects H2o (see Architects Directory, W\*125). Having tackled several modest interior design jobs in its home city of Paris, the practice is certainly no stranger to small-scale building. However, this 58 sq m project for the Domaine la Cabotte winery in Mondragon, southern France, offered a new and welcome challenge.

The winery's owners called upon H2o for a multi-tasking addition to the estate, one that would bring together three separate functions: a wine tasting area for visitors, an office space, and a washroom for the vineyard

workers. These functions were previously dispersed within the existing and much larger wine production building nearby. The new structure would act as a visitor centre and flagship for the winery and its 30 hectares of vineyards. The owners, Marie-Pierre and Éric Plumet, are relations of Antoine Santiard – one third of H2o's founding team, also comprising Charlotte and Jean-Jacques Hubert. The Plumet family has been involved in winemaking for three generations.

Wineries provide a great platform for architectural experimentation: they walk a playful line between workplace, industrial facility and retail, and are often designed»

## France

AN OENOPHILE'S EXPERIENCE  
IN THE WINE-TASTING WING  
IS HEIGHTENED BY THE VIEWS



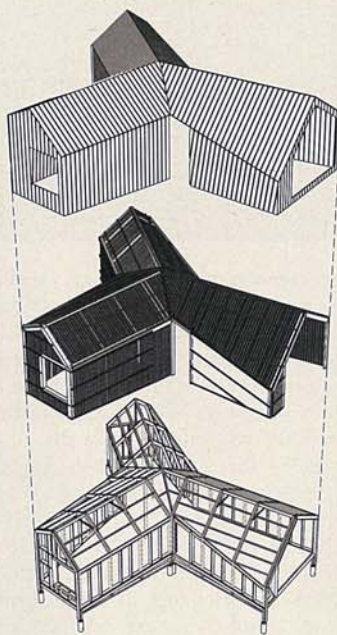
to be as luxurious as any smart hotel; they are invariably located within idyllic landscapes; and, frequently acting as an architectural trademark for the client's business, they offer fertile ground for dramatic designs. No wonder the genre has attracted some of architecture's biggest names, such as Frank Gehry, Richard Rogers and Renzo Piano.

H2o grasped the opportunity. Created in response to its context and local construction techniques, the star-shaped centre is made out of solid and laminated Douglas pine timber, clad in natural larch pine that will turn grey with age. While researching the commission, the architects visited regional craftsmen in order to learn about different local building methods. 'The building needed to communicate the values and spirit of Cabotte while also being functional,' explain the architects. 'We needed to guarantee a purity, a clean complexity, a bio-dynamism.'

As a gesture that links visually as well as symbolically the centre's interiors to the outdoors, the structure's three distinct wings each point towards a relevant feature in the surrounding landscape. The services look towards the existing wine production building, the office is turned towards the site's main entrance, while the wine tasting

### Three tiers

The building's three layers, from pine frame to insulation to larch cladding



area offers peaceful views of the nearby Mont Ventoux, beautifully framed by a floor-to-ceiling window.

The entrance leads straight into the heart of the structure. A clean white interior throughout provides a neutral background for the different activities to unfold, while the structure's wood cladding is also used to create a bar in the wine tasting area. The irregular sloping roof makes for a striking ceiling and stilts raise the base of the building in order to level the floor.

H2o has had plenty of commissions in Paris, such as a recently completed nursery, but it is fast spreading its reach beyond the capital. Recent and ongoing work includes an urban planning project in Normandy, involving the public space around Évreux Cathedral, and in Guise, restoring the Familistère de Guise commune.

The humble visitor centre for Domaine la Cabotte is H2o's smallest new-build in scale, but certainly not in scope. 'It deals with several issues at once: image, identity, modernity, sensitivity, landscape and tradition,' the architects explain. 'There is an obvious dialogue between the volumes and the landscape.'★

[www.h2oarchitectes.com](http://www.h2oarchitectes.com)