



A huge, two-sided bar with seating now accommodates more visitors eager to sample Gruet's wines. A drop panel and champagne-colored pendants make the space more cozy, as do family portraits and an art installation (on wall at right) that shows the winemakers' move from France to New Mexico.

Douglas Merriam

## pouring with panache

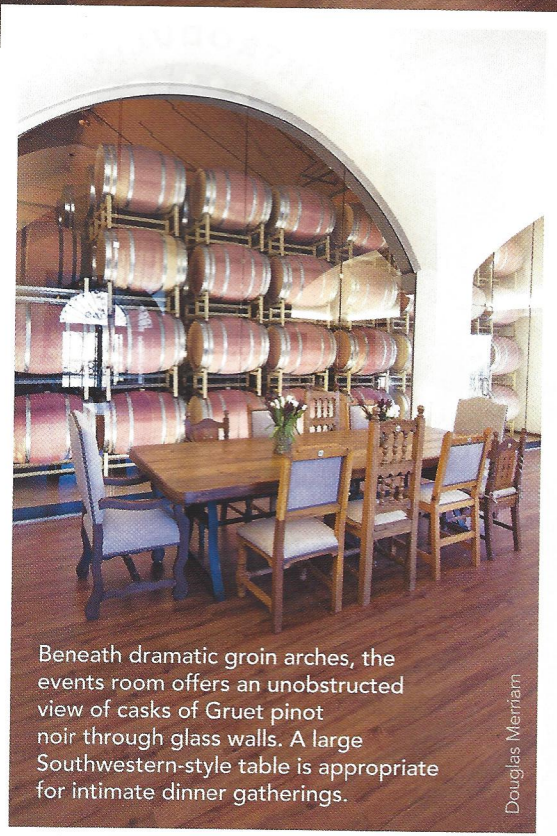
Gruet uncorks new and revamped tasting rooms

**Y**ou'll find bubbles everywhere at Gruet Winery in Albuquerque—but not just in the casks and bottles where the vintner's award-winning sparkling wines are produced. A recent renovation of Gruet's main facility on Pan American Freeway is a subtle but joyful homage to the delightful effervescent refreshment that has put the French-turned-New Mexican winemakers on the oenological map. From the spherical drop chandelier and circular tiles marking the entryway to round holes punched into metal accent walls and clavos hammered into doors, Gruet's revamped tasting room spaces are now as subtly bubbly and light as their wines. And they've been a long time coming.

"Our old space was intimate and served its purpose at the time," says Regina Wilson, who has been Gruet's tasting room manager for 12 years. "But I think the expansion at this time was perfect. It's our 25th anniversary, and it's sort of catapulting us to that next stage. The new spaces make such a statement."

Indeed they do. The comprehensive renovation, courtesy of veteran designers HVL Interiors of Santa Fe and Tanglewood Construction of Rio Rancho, includes a chic, stylish new tasting room, a dramatic events room, and a private VIP room, among other areas.

"It's a little bit French, a little bit modern industrial, and a little New Mexico," says project leader Steffany Hollingsworth of



Beneath dramatic groin arches, the events room offers an unobstructed view of casks of Gruet pinot noir through glass walls. A large Southwestern-style table is appropriate for intimate dinner gatherings.

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HVL Interiors designed the cozy VIP room with rich textiles, mocha-colored walls, soft lighting, and New Mexico-flavored décor.



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HVL. Because the Gruet family hails from France, the design initially played more to the European, but as Hollingsworth notes, “They were clear that Gruet is a *New Mexico* winery, so we ended up incorporating many Southwestern elements.” Elements like the dark wood two-sided bar and wall-length back bar; the gorgeous, scrolled metal door at the entrance to the events room; and ranch-style furnishings and sliding barn doors in the VIP room.

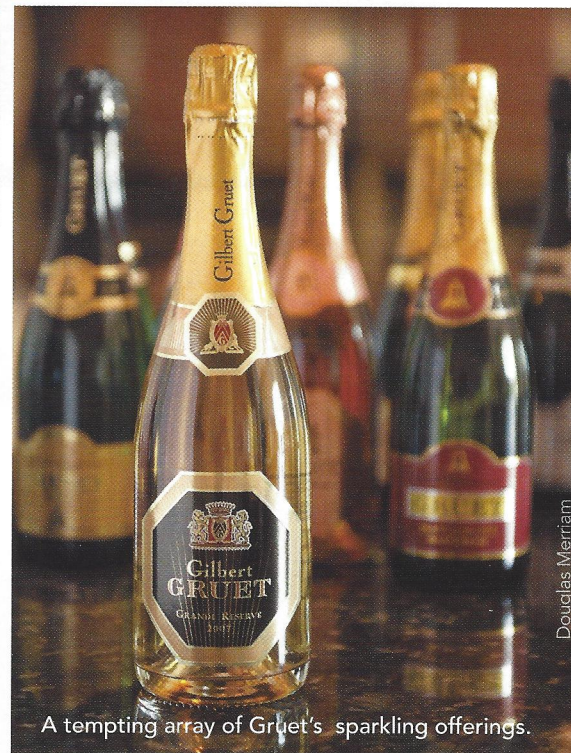
“I think the expansion at this time was perfect. . . . The new spaces make such a statement.”  
—Regina Wilson

Family—and history—are important at Gruet. Woven throughout the various spaces are family photographs and artistic reminders of the company’s trajectory. A 3-D string art composition by installation artist Sarah Voglewede connects the founding of the winery in Bethon, France, in 1952, to its relocation to New Mexico in 1984. Pieces of

old winemaking equipment hold places of honor in cases throughout the facility.

Ultimately, however, the goal of the renovation was to highlight the company’s stellar wines, from stills to sparklings, and to encourage visitors to unhurriedly sample a few in a modern, sexy space. Where the previous tasting room was dark and rather cramped, the new version is light, bright, and airy, with minimal décor and sleek, industrial furnishings and tables. Between the two-sided bar, the center tables, the wall bar, and the warehouse—a tiny part of which was used as the temporary tasting room during the renovation and which is still used, with massive vats as a backdrop, for tastings—there is ample space for oenophiles eager to taste, gather, and linger over conversation. For anything bigger, the rentable event room is jaw-dropping, its glass wall showcasing casks of pinot noir. A major redo of the landscaping and patio area by Surroundings is the next phase of the renovation and will offer even more seating.

In addition to the Albuquerque renovation, Gruet also recently opened a gleaming new tasting room in downtown Santa Fe at the Hotel St. Francis. Likewise designed by HVL Interiors, the compact space is marked by



A tempting array of Gruet’s sparkling offerings.

Douglas Merriam




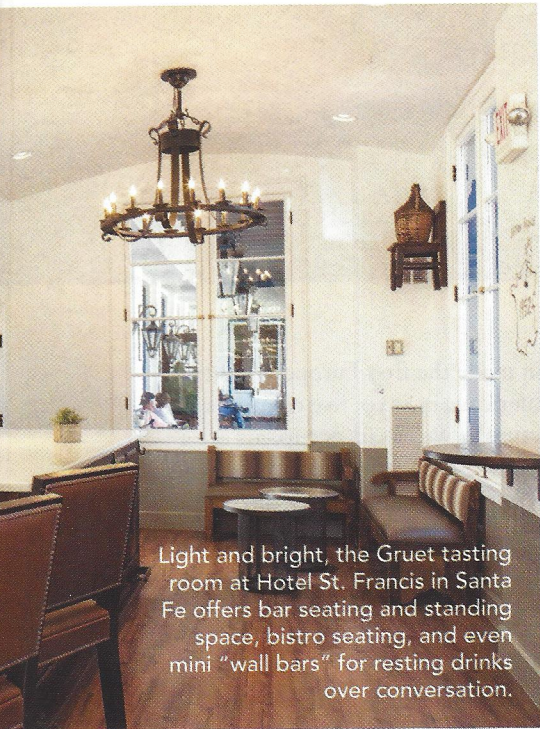
Gabriella Marks



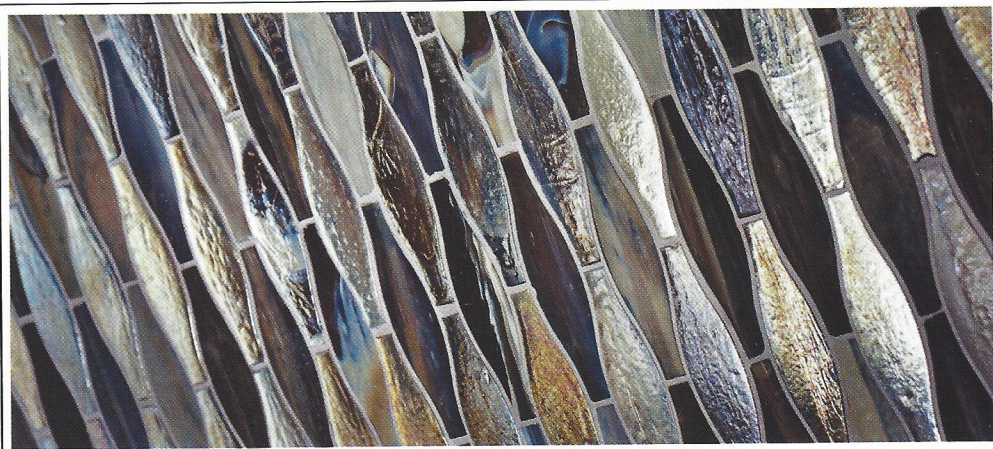
Above: Industrial modern seating and a clever wall-length bar offer plenty of space to enjoy a glass of bubbly in the Albuquerque tasting room.

natural light, a long bar, and seating for a couple dozen dedicated samplers. The tasting room was put to the test in October, when a large (and rowdy) bunch of revelers inaugurated it during its grand opening. With spirits high, Gruet family members toasted their guests, to much enthusiastic raising of glasses in return.

Ah, those tiny bubbles. Released from the bottle, they race upward, an irresistible call to celebration. With their new and renovated tasting spaces, Gruet is doing the same: elevating spirits while simultaneously raising the bar—quite literally—on design. 



Light and bright, the Gruet tasting room at Hotel St. Francis in Santa Fe offers bar seating and standing space, bistro seating, and even mini "wall bars" for resting drinks over conversation.



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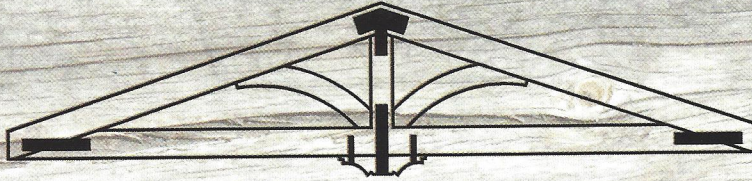
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