

Biography of Tom Kundig, Principal, Olson Kundig Architects

Lead Architect for the reconstruction of Mission Hill Family Estate



Photo by: Brian Sprout

Tom Kundig first met Anthony von Mandl in the mid-nineties. After a brief session in Seattle, von Mandl invited him to the winery to see the site. Kundig remembers being almost overwhelmed by its natural beauty. He instinctively knew that any architecture would be second to the landscape.

He recalls that first site tour with von Mandl, thinking, only half jokingly, that he was in the company of a madman. The weather was bad and von Mandl had gone on ahead of him, leaving Kundig out of hearing range for most of the walkabout. But, that did not stop von Mandl. The animated expression and wild gesturing convinced Kundig to take a chance and sign on for what, he now admits, has been the project of a lifetime.

He was chosen to lead the transformation of Mission Hill Family Estate after an extensive international search. Ironically, von Mandl found him next door, in Seattle.

His experience in designing galleries studios, museums and his love of nature, coupled with a sense of shared values with proprietor von Mandl, sealed his fate. Kundig has won numerous awards for his private residence design. He has also worked with Stephen Holl on Seattle University's Chapel of St. Ignatius. In addition to his work on Mission Hill Family Estate, his current projects include a church and a boutique hotel. Described as an intuitive architect, Kundig is frequently published and is a sought after guest lecturer.

Architecture runs in Kundig's family. His Swiss-born father was an architect, but when the younger Kundig left home for college, he was convinced that he'd do anything except follow in his father's footsteps.

At the University of Washington, he learned, much to his surprise, that he really wanted to be an architect. The marriage between artistic, technical and

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the Seattle-area and his own consultancies in Alaska and Switzerland shaped Kundig's design philosophy.

Together, Kundig and von Mandl have built a place where life slows down. Deliberately, the entry gates force cars to slow their speed in order to pass through. An allée of oak trees helps transition the visitor from the hurried pace of daily life to the timeless world of winemaking.

Curved entry arches mimic the hills and mountaintops visible beyond the winery site and allow the visitor to pass through into an inner courtyard that frames the landscape at every turn. The centrepiece of that piazza is a fully operational 12-storey bell tower, a project that Kundig calls "pregnant with history." The design challenge, to embrace the tradition *without* crossing the line to the ecclesiastical.

A museum-style reception hall, home to a Marc Chagall original, is about the fullness of emptiness, according to Kundig. The goal, to edit out the extraneous and allow

visitors to experience the simplicity that comes from a tranquil environment. That attitude carries through to the barrel aging cellars, blasted into volcanic rock and supported by curved arches that span their width. For Kundig and von Mandl, the cellars are about the protection and careful aging of wine. Again, the architectural philosophy was to edit back to the essential reason or purpose of the space.

Kundig is a proponent of second glance architecture. His goal is that visitors discover something new about the space every time they return. At Mission Hill Family Estate, he has strived to create an architectural environment with a primitive modernist aesthetic.

Tom Kundig is the recipient of the 2008 National Design Award in Architecture Design, awarded by the Smithsonian's Cooper-Hewitt National Design Museum. He is currently a principal in the design firm of Olson Kundig Architects.

