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Farm Worker Housing/Tourist Shelter in Napa Valley

By

Michael P. Kuchkovsky

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE

Master of Architecture

APPROVED, THESIS COMMITTEE

William Cannady, Thesis Advisor
Professor, School of Architecture

John Casbarian, Thesis Reader
Professor, School of Architecture
Associate Dean of Architecture

Gordon Wittenberg, Thesis Reader
Professor, School of Architecture

HOUSTON, TEXAS
MAY, 2001
During the grape harvest that lasts for two months between late August to early November, over 3,000 migrant farm workers migrate to the Napa Valley. With less than a 1% vacancy rate in the area, they sleep in fields, cars or on the streets. There is a great need and current consensus to house them. In addition to the farm workers, over 5 million tourists visit the Napa Valley every year. I propose a structure to house 4 farm workers during harvest that is located at the winery at which they work. The other 10 months of the year it is to be used by tourists visiting the wineries.
Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my mother, who taught me to respect those who need help through her actions, not just words.
Housing Situation for Migrant Farm Workers in the Napa Valley

During the grape harvest that lasts for two months between late August and early November, over 3,000 migrant farm workers arrive in the Napa Valley.

Total farm employment in September 1999 was 6,600 in the Napa Valley. With less than a 1% vacancy rate in the area, Migrant farm workers sleep in fields, cars or on the streets. The more fortunate among them share a motel room with a large group of other farm workers, move in with friends or other farm workers that live in the area year-round, sleep in a garage or find a place to sleep on the porch of a church. There is an estimated need for an additional 1,000-1,500 beds.
The lack of any kind of available housing, not just low cost housing that farm workers can afford is not likely to improve in the near future. The Napa Valley has a population of 123,000 residents. There are between 9,000 and 10,000 farm workers employed in the fields during the year. Projected non-farm job growth is 6.9% between 1997 and 2002. Housing unit growth for this same period is expected to be 3.9% for this same period. The anticipated inability of housing to keep pace with job growth in the region will only exacerbate the lack of housing for migrant farm workers.

A typical small Napa Valley dwelling inhabited by farm workers.

The chronic demand for and scarcity of housing in Northern California with median housing prices of over $300,000 has made it difficult for much of the population to afford housing. Earning in average $17,700, farm workers have the lowest family income of all occupations. They also have the added problem of needing housing for a temporary period of time, usually one and one-half to three months. In the past, many winery owner and grape growers provided housing for their workers.
Those workers who are able to find housing in a camp for migrant farm workers consider themselves lucky. They usually pay about $10 per day which includes a place to sleep, showers and occasionally meals.

The Mondavi Winery has its own camp for 52 workers. A camp started by Beringer Vineyards sleeps 24 farm workers. While both of these camps are still privately owned, they are jointly managed by the Napa Valley Housing Authority and The California Human Development Corporation.

A few other private wineries have their own farm worker housing. Niebaum-Coppola, Yount Mill Vineyards, Frank Wood & Sons, the California Grape Vineyards Nursery and Napa Valley Farm and Ranch maintain temporary farm worker housing with between 11 to 32 beds at each site.

Typical dormitory for farm workers.
But this lack of farm worker housing is endemic to the rest of California as well. In *Farmworkers in California* by The California Research Bureau, the authors write, “A shrinking supply [of housing] with an increasing demand has led to higher prices in rural areas, resulting in housing costs that are high relative to farm-worker income. Farmers reportedly provide less housing than in the past because few units meet federal and state regulatory standards.” Bugarin and Lopez, *Farmworkers in California*, California Research Bureau, California State Library, July 1998, p. 3.

Nationwide the number of seasonal and migrant camps throughout the United States has decreased. For example while there were 9,000 of these camps in 1955, the number dropped to 500 in 1998. See *The Right Home in the Right Place at the Right Price*, California Senate Office of Research, October 1999, p. 30.
There has been a decrease in the number of farm worker camps over the past 20 years.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Number of Camps</th>
<th>Number of Beds</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1985</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>400</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>300</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Compounding the current problem of housing scarcity is that many of these camps have closed down and no new camps have been opened. There has been a 25% drop in the number of beds available to farm workers in the past 15 years. In the 1980's there were 29 camps open and 400 beds available. Today there are 10 camps open and approximately 300 beds available. 165 of these beds are in county run facilities and 135 are in privately run camps. Camps have closed because of increasingly complicated government regulations, which has caused many winery owners and grape growers to stop housing their workers because of the burden of having to be a landlord.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Number of Additional Beds Needed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>1,000-1,500</td>
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</table>
The Best...

of the current camps is the Calistoga Farm Worker Center. It recently has had to increase the number of persons per room from 2 to 3, but it is well run and maintained. It currently houses 60 people.

Unlike most of the other camps it is open eleven months of the year, closing only for December. It runs at a deficit of between $45,000-$55,000 that is made up by the county.
The Newest Migrant Farm Worker Camp Founded in the Napa Valley

For the 2000 harvest, a group of housing advocates and other non-profit organizations founded a tent camp for the farm workers. The camp housed 30 individuals in 10 tents. It used portable toilets, a shower trailer and had picnic tables at which to eat. The land was donated, but the camps cost was still an estimated $55,000 for 3 months. The workers paid $6 per day, which included meals.
The city council is planning to use this camp as a model for future temporary tent camps.

Because the company that owns the land might need to expand, it is likely that this site will not be available next year.
of San Francisco its wines have some of the best terroir in the United States and some would say the world. The rise in California wine prices has led to an equally large increase in the price of agricultural land in Napa.

With the success of the American economy in the past decade, Californian wines are selling for premium prices. The booming economy also encouraged many people with money to found new wineries or buy old ones to run and expand. The combination of high profits and the romantic ideal of owning a winery has caused land prices to sky rocket in Napa. Prime grape growing land in Napa is now selling in excess of $100,000. The high cost of land has caused vineyard owners increasingly to refuse to house farm workers on land that could be used to grow grapes or sold for a record profit.
The growing popularity of wine has caused a concomittant increase in tourism to the Napa Valley. In 1999, an estimated 5 million tourists visited Napa. Many wineries have either built or expanded their tourist facilities.

↑ Wine Prices → Cultivating More Land +
   Harvesting More Grapes by Hand→
   ↑Demand for Workers→
   ↑Number of Migrant Farm Workers→
   ↑Demand for Housing→
   ↑Prices for Housing

But this expanded interest in wine has been one of the causes for the deterioration of housing conditions for farm workers. Wine producers are selling more bottles of wine for higher prices than they ever have before. In order to produce more wine, wine producers have increased the number of acres on which they grow grapes. To justify the higher prices for their wines, these producers have begun to harvest an increasing percentage of their grapes by hand. Both of these effects have caused an exploding demand for farm workers. The increasing number of farm workers working in the valley during a period of falling availability of housing for migrant farm workers, has worsened the housing situation by increasing demand during a period of contracting housing supply.
Very little new housing will be built in the Napa Valley, because of traditionally strict zoning laws. The Land Trust of the Napa Valley is appointed to keep as much land as possible in agricultural use and to limit development. This anti-development land use policy has inhibited market mechanisms that might have increased housing construction in response to an increasing demand.

A consensus has developed in Napa Valley among wine makers, community groups, housing advocates and business interests that a solution needs to be found for the migrant farm worker housing crisis. Fundraisers are being held to raise money for community groups that can provide housing for the farm workers and funds are being raised for a long-term solution. The winery owners association is trying to pass a voluntary tax on acres of land in order to raise money for farm worker housing.

The Farm Worker Housing Oversight Committee was formed in July of 2000. It brings together members from all of the influential groups in Napa, including government leaders, housing advocates, the wine industry and community leaders to formulate policy on farm worker housing. Any solution that is found for the migrant housing problem will most likely need to have the backing and active support of this group.
The housing situation for migrant farm workers is so desperate because they are poor. Farm workers consistently are at the bottom of most socio-economic indicators.

Two of the most comprehensive studies on farm workers have been carried out by the U.S. Department of Labor and the Housing Assistance Council. Both of these studies confirm that farm workers are increasingly living in poverty, male, young, Hispanic, and Mexican born, with Spanish as their primary language. According to the Department of Labor study, “Over three-fifths (61%) of the population lived below the poverty line. This level was higher than reported for the NAWS population in the 1990 when only half were reported living in poverty.”

A Profile of US Farm Workers—Demographics, Household Composition, Income and Use of Services, Department of Labor, April, 1997, Chp. 3, p.6. Their average age is 31. Most tend not to use social services. Two out of five married farm workers are away from their spouse while doing farm work. While 44% of farm workers are settled in one location, 17% follow the crop, and 39% shuttle from job to job. Approximately half of all farm workers studied were married, unauthorized to work in the US, lived with family members, had children, considered the
US to be their home base, were unable to speak English and owned a vehicle. See Findings from the National Agricultural Workers Survey (NAWS) 1997-1998, Research Report No. 8, US Department of Labor, March, 2000. Their average age is 31. Their educational levels were extremely low, with most having completed studies only through the sixth grade, but with 22% being enrolled in some form of adult education.

The income levels of farm workers make it apparent why they have such a problem finding housing in the Napa Valley. Three-fourths of farm workers earn less that $10,000 per year. Individual median income from farm work was between $2,500 and $5,000. One-quarter of them had non-farm income. Median total family income was between $7,500 and $10,000. More of the foreign born farm workers lived in poverty than those born in the United States. They work an average of 38 hours per week. Farm workers work an average of 25 weeks on farms and 4 weeks doing non farm labor in the US. They tend not to have work for approximately 10 weeks of the year and spend 13 weeks of the year abroad. Ibid.

Most farm workers rent housing. 47% rent from non-employers, 1% rents from the government or other institutions, and 7% rent from their employer. 18% of farm workers own their own home. 21% of employers provide free housing to farm workers and 3% provide free housing for the worker and his/her family. Ibid.
The lack of farm worker housing in the Napa Valley must be examined in terms of its social, political and economic causes.

Many residents of the Napa Valley do not want farm workers living next to them. With homes in the valley selling for millions of dollars, some residents are afraid that having farm workers live next to them will lower their property values. For example a group of people living near a recently built farm worker dormitory in Sonoma tried to have its permit revoked, because they did not want 38 people who “have no ties to the community” living near them. Jeremy Hay, Under the Sun, San Jose State University.

The previously discussed cost of land in combination with this social constraint has made it impossible to find a permanent new site for a camp. The main economic constraint on finding land for a camp site is the high cost of land in the Napa Valley. With costs over $100,000 per acre, winery owners are not willing to donate land for a camp and non-profit organizations cannot afford enough land. The other major economic constraint for farm workers to find housing is the already discussed growing popularity of wine and the Napa Valley. Rents have increased in the area making it difficult and even impossible for farm workers to be able to afford the rents on their wages. Since farm workers are at the bottom of income measures in the US, they are not able to compete with people who can afford to the high rents of the region.
The three main political issues impeding new migrant farm worker camps are the strict building regulations imposed by inspectors, the policy of the Land Trust to limit development, and the law which mandates a minimum size for a migrant camp. Recently two Napa Valley winery owners have been fined and their farm worker camps have closed. While necessary for safety and code reasons, these fines have caused some winery owners to be more hesitant to allow migrant farm workers to stay on their land. The Napa Valley Land Trust has been successful in keeping land in Napa for agricultural rather than development. But this limit on development and opening up new land for housing construction has exacerbated the housing shortage.

Quite possibly the largest impediment to building new migrant farm worker camps is a state law that requires all camps for migrant farm workers to be built on a minimum of 20 acres. The high cost of land in combination with this minimum land requirement makes it virtually impossible for winery owners or non-profits to build new camps for farm workers. But there is an exception. If 4 or fewer migrant farm workers are housed, then no state permit is required and there is no acreage minimum. This clause in the law should encourage the proliferation of new small camps for migrant farm workers.

### State of California Land Requirements

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of Workers</th>
<th>Type of Housing</th>
<th>Minimum Number of Acres</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4 or Fewer</td>
<td>Seasonal/Migrant</td>
<td>No Minimum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 or More</td>
<td>Seasonal/Migrant</td>
<td>20 Acres</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 or Fewer</td>
<td>Year-Round</td>
<td>40 Acres</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 or More</td>
<td>Year Round</td>
<td>40 Acres</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

for Farm Worker Housing
The design requirements for farm worker housing include:

- sleeping areas for two people,
- easy maintenance and clean up, cooking facilities, a place to wash up outside and accessible storage facilities for tools and bikes.

Various interviews with farm workers show that their housing demands are quite modest. Their main priority is to save money for their families to buy land or to start a small business. To save the most money possible, they accept cramped, uncomfortable and sometimes inhumane conditions. When asked about their housing demands they often answer that all they need is a comfortable place to sleep, facilities to wash up, and a place to cook.

Migrant farm workers often need a safe place to store the few possessions with which they travel. Some camps provide indoors lockers for their personal things. But farm workers also need outdoors storage facilities to safely store larger tools and bicycles. These facilities will have to be hidden from the general view of the tourists. But they need to be accessible from the outside, so that the workers do not have to bring their things through their living quarters.
The farm workers are not only concerned about the safety of their possessions, but also the cleanliness of where they live. For this reason they do not want their tools or bicycles inside their sleeping quarters. When workers come in from the fields, they want to put their tools aside and quickly wash off the dirt accumulated from working all day in the vineyards. Hence a small outdoor sink and storage area need to be provided in the structure.

Cooking facilities need to be available for the use of the farm workers, because they prefer eating hot food but cannot afford to go to restaurants. A small outdoor cooking area or an inside kitchen should be included in the design. A separate eating area does not necessarily have to be provided, because meals can be eaten outside or in the sleeping/living area.

Most farm workers do not like dormitory style accommodations where larger numbers of usually men sleep in a big room. They prefer separate sleeping rooms for two people. So the dormitory style of building should be avoided and a suite style grouping of rooms is the preferable model.

Federal law mandates that a minimum of 50 sq. feet of living space, not including bathroom, storage or cooking facilities, needs to be provided for each farm worker. If the design incorporates a a two person sleeping room, then these rooms need to be a minimum of 100 sq. feet.
In speaking with managers of migrant farm worker housing facilities, it became clear that upkeep was one of their main concerns. Using durable materials and surface finishes is an important consideration in the design. Some winery owners mentioned the difficulty of being a landlord as one of the reasons why they closed their camp. Continued maintenance and clean up of their camps were some of their problems. In order to minimize the problems with clean up, drains should be inserted in the floors of the bathrooms so that they can simply be hosed down. In addition a moveable wall makes it very to clean the rooms. They too can simply be hosed down and the water will easily drain to the outside.
The design requirements for a tourist shelter include:

- protection from the sun or rain,
- open views to the fields,
- seating, a place to taste wine
- and an eating area.

Some 5 million tourists came to the Napa Valley in 1999 to taste and buy wine, tour the wineries, eat good food and see the vineyards. Some wineries provide picnic tables or outdoor seating. But few wineries have facilities where you can taste and buy wine, eat, sit, have access to a bathroom and view the vineyards.

With the growth of tourism to the Napa Valley many wineries are building or expanding their tasting room and wine sales facilities. Most of these rooms ignore views of the fields, but are enclosed and dark, often being located in what were previously cellars or next to the existing cellars. Other facilities are newly
built, but equally dark in an attempt to evoke the atmosphere of a wine cellar. But the natural beauty of Napa is one of the main attractions for tourists. A tourist facility should take advantage of the vineyards and incorporate windows or moveable walls that do not obstruct the view.

These tourists shelters do not have to be identical. Each winery can build one in its preferred style or layout, while incorporating these general suggestions.
The conceptual design of this particular farm working housing/tourist shelter structure is a manipulation of the growth patterns and colors of grape vines.

Tile mural at a winery
The vines of the Napa Valley have a beauty that is inherent to themselves, but that is also cultivated by the way in which they are pruned and grown in rows. In the past, vines were left to grow more naturally and the trunk and branches supported the grapes. This style of vine is generally called 'old growth'. Today most vines are pruned in so that wire arbors that are strung above them support the weight of the fruit. Almost all vines currently planted in the Napa Valley are pruned in this fashion. Within this category of pruning, there are 2 main categories— cordon and cane. Cordon vines have one or two main horizontal branches which come out of the trunk. The fruit bearing vines then are shoots from these horizontal stalks. In the cane style of pruning, the fruit bearing stalks all come out of the top of the main trunk.
The spacing of the rows of vines and the spacing between plants often depends upon the climate and variety of grape. In the Napa Valley rows are spaced 8 to 10 feet apart. The vines are spaced 5 or 6 feet apart. The shade canopy that the leaves and branches form protect the grapes from direct sun.

If one translates the structural system of the vines to a structural system for a building, one can divide the vine into three areas. The lower area which consists of the main trunk has the clearest structure. In the second zone the structure is somewhat apparent, but it is less clear. In the third and highest zone the branches are so confused with the leaves that there is no apparent clear structure. In fact this part of the vine is usually held up by an external wire structure, which indicates that the lack of a visible and clear structure needs to be compensated for with an external structure. This system of post, beam and roof is basically the building system that is used in most wooden construction.
The colors of the vines in Napa along with the repetitive patterns of the vine plantings are some of the most striking features of the region. California is somewhat barren of fall colors, and the burgundy color that the grape leaves turn is rarely seen. But only those people who visit the valley in the fall get to see these colors. I incorporate a canopy of these leaves into the farm worker housing/tourist shelter.
Le Corbusier's system of the Modulor creates a dimensional system of architecture that is based on the human body. Using a 6 foot person as his model, the Modulor specifies heights for most architectural elements including furniture. One can use this system to create an architecture that relates to the human body. The modulor helps one create an architecture that not only physically fits the needs of the occupants, but having been to many of Le Corbusier's buildings, I would argue that it also has a psychological effect as well. In many of his buildings one feels a strange level of comfort. It is difficult to know why. But I believe that one gets this sense in his buildings, in part because they fit us.
To Dream. The most undefinable aspect of this structure can perhaps be described as to dream. The farm workers who come to the Napa Valley come with a dream, whether hoping that their children will not have to live like they do or someday saving up enough money to own their own business or home. The tourists who come to Napa are usually trying to find some distraction from their mundane lives, something beautiful. Napa is really a place of dreams—both tourists and farm workers come there to attain something that is or will be an escape from their everyday lives. But how does one begin to incorporate dreams into architecture?
The Solution.

Dual Use.
House 4 or fewer farm workers.
Each winery should house 4 workers.

To actually get migrant farm worker housing built, one has to solve two main constraints—cost and period of use. Because of their political and economic status, farm workers have very little leverage on getting the government or farming interests to build them housing. Because funding for their housing is very limited, and their housing is only used for part of the year, it will have to be cheap. In areas where land is expensive, there is the additional objection of it occupying land for the whole year, but only being used for part of the year. The solution to the period of use is to create a portable structure that can be de-mounted or moved. Another possible solution is to find a different use for the building for the time when it is not being used by farm workers. I have opted for this last solution and have proposed a dual use structure of farm worker housing and tourist shelter.

In the Napa Valley, the main constraint is one of land. The land costs too much for anyone to be willing to use his or her land for migrant housing or for a non-profit to be able to afford land on which to build. The main constraint to building new camps is the state law which states that if 5 or more farm workers are housed in a migrant farm worker camp, then it needs to be located on a minimum of 20 acres. An exception to this law applies to migrant camps where 4 or
fewer farm workers are housed. One needs no permits to build this type of housing and more importantly, this housing has no minimum land requirement.

There are 285 wineries and additional grape growers in the Napa Valley. If each winery houses 4 farm workers, at least 1300 farm workers could be housed.

This structure would not only solve the problem of migrant farm worker housing to a great extent, but it would also increase profits of the winery owners from tourist spending. The additional benefit to winery owners is that farm workers will be more likely to work at a winery or farm where housing is provided. This housing will make it easier for winery owners and farmers to attract and maintain farm workers.
Located near the road and the existing buildings this structure can easily tie into the wineries electricity, sewage and water systems. It faces the vines to provide views.

There are often small strips of unused land near the wineries’ main buildings, this structure is designed to fit into those places.
The building is 10 feet wide, which is the same width at which some rows of vines are planted. This narrowness intentionally refers to the vines to create a building that fits in the fields.
When used as a tourist shelter, the front doors, which are corrugated steel garage doors, open outwards. The overhang that they create provides a shaded outdoor space for the tourists to sit. They are high enough to allow trucks to drive under them. There is also a table outside that is a continuation of the inside counter. The two side rooms are for sitting and drinking wine and the central area is where the wine is served. The two bathrooms are on the ends of the building.

When the farm workers are in residence, these doors can be closed on weekends to provide privacy. In the evenings there are almost never tourists at the wineries since they all close between 4 and 5 o'clock. So in the evenings the doors can be opened to let in breezes.

The structure is designed as two sleeping/living rooms that are divided by a kitchen area. The sleeping living rooms are the minimum size allowable by law. They feel less small, because of the large windows in the back and the moveable garage door wall. The central room is the kitchen.
As the plan indicates, there are lockers under the stairs where the farm workers can store their tools when they come home. There is also a place to store bicycles. These lockers are entered through the doorway under the stairs that is visible in the photo to the right.

While the entrance for the tourists is at the front, the farm workers enter from the back. This arrangement is similar to houses where family members use one entrance, while guests use another. Also at the back of the house, directly behind the kitchen area, is a sink for the farm workers to wash up before they enter the house and a drying closet where they can put their towels and dry their clothes out of view of the tourists. The vines that are planted at the back of the house provide a visual shade for the inhabitants while letting in sunlight.

The benches that can be seen in the photos are folded out into beds when the farm workers are in residence. Their closet/storage cabinets move from the vertical to the horizontal position to act as tables for the tourists. The small benches and TV stand remain, while the mattresses are stores below the bench.
The **steps** at the front of the structure are a place to sit and congregate. They act as a visual cue to attract tourists to the structure. Once they come over to the structure, they then walk over to the front and enter the tasting area. One climbs the steps to reach the top viewing platform. From the top, one has a view of the valley and its vineyards.
The roof umbrellas refer to the canopy of leaves on a grape vine in the fall. The function like the leaves do by providing shade. The pattern of the vines although somewhat confused becomes more visible when the leaves have fallen. This crossing over and twisting of branches is mimiced in the lattice work of the railing with the use of a natural cord.
At night when looking up out of bed you see the stars. These holes of light in the corrugated light also incorporate air holes that provide cross ventilation when the farm workers are in the structure, but want to keep the door down for privacy.
Conclusion

Decent shelter improves peoples’ lives. The fate of farm workers endures as a problem in all societies. If treatment of the least fortunate is a measure of how civilized our society is, then the treatment of agricultural workers signals something even more true about ourselves.

The struggle for the humane treatment of agricultural workers began with the strikes against grape growers in the early 1970's and the formation of the American Farm Workers Union (AFW). Most farm workers lack US citizenship and the concomitant rights that accompany it. Their desperation has created an historical pattern of exploitation by growers.

This shelter is a way to provide decent housing to the farm workers while increasing the profits of the winery owners. It is a win/win situation. But it will take a willingness on the part of winery owners to invest the initial funds.
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