



The Napa Valley Wine Estate

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**NAPA VALLEY’S FAR NIENTE WINERY
INTRODUCES FIRST-EVER
“FLOATOVOLTAIC” SOLAR ARRAY**

Floating Panel Innovation Saves Valuable Vineyard Acreage

OAKVILLE, Calif., – Napa Valley wine producer Far Niente has gone live with its “Floatovoltaic™” solar array, the first-ever system and technology of its kind in the solar industry. The Floatovoltaic installation creatively couples solar power with water, saving valuable vineyard acreage from being sacrificed for land-mounted arrays.

Far Niente’s Floatovoltaic system involves securing nearly 1,000 solar panels on pontoons, then floating the pontoons on the winery’s vineyard irrigation pond. Combined with a section of about 1,300 panels located on land adjacent to the pond, the array will generate 400 kilowatts at peak output, enough to offset the winery’s annual power usage and provide a net-zero energy bill.

The Far Niente array is located in the 100-acre Martin Stelling Vineyard, which is the cornerstone of the winery’s Cabernet Sauvignon program and is located directly behind the winery. About one acre of vineyard was removed to accommodate the land-mounted portion of the system, but the floating array’s positioning on the pond saved another three-quarters of an acre of valuable Cabernet vines that would have been ripped out for a total land-mounted system. This is equivalent to about \$150,000 dollars’ worth of bottled Far Niente Cabernet annually.

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FAR NIENTE FLOATOVOLTAIC
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“We made the move to solar, not because it made business or financial sense, but because my partners and I felt it was the right thing to do from a social perspective,” said Far Niente President and CEO, Larry Maguire.

While conventional wisdom holds that utility rebates and federal tax credits make solar a viable option, there is still a huge financial commitment involved.

“We have made a \$7 million dollar up-front investment in the solar systems at Far Niente and our sister winery, Nickel & Nickel. It will take about 12 years for the rebates and tax credits, combined with the savings from producing our own energy, for the costs to be offset,” said Maguire.

Sister winery Nickel & Nickel installed a land-mounted system, which went live in October 2007, and brought in much of the harvest with solar power. Located in the Sullenger Vineyard on the Oakville winery’s estate, the array’s 1,904 panels generate 330 kilowatts at peak output, offsetting the winery’s annual power usage and providing a net-zero energy bill.

Far Niente and sister winery, Nickel & Nickel, join a small, but quickly growing contingent of Napa Valley wineries who are adopting solar power at a rate estimated to be more than 40 times faster than California businesses in general, according to Dan Thompson of Novato, CA-based SPG Solar, the system integrator who developed and installed the wineries’ solar systems.

The Floatovoltaic solution came about as a meeting of the minds between Far Niente and SPG Solar. “We looked at several configurations for our solar array, but they all involved taking out a significant amount of our vineyard, which was not an attractive idea. Finally my partner, Dirk Hampson, suggested we find a way to put the panels on our irrigation pond. After interviewing several companies, it turned out that SPG’s sister company, Thompson Technology Industries, had developed, on paper, the technology to float an installation on water, and we provided them with the opportunity to try it,” said Maguire.

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Human Interest

While the partners who own the wineries, including Beth, Erik and Jeremy Nickel, Maguire and Hampson, have always had a healthy respect for the land and the environment, it was Maguire's college-aged son, Michael, who helped put the move to solar into action.

“Michael came home from college around the time I had just bought a new luxury performance car. I was so excited to show it to him,” said Maguire. “Instead of being impressed, Michael said to me, ‘Dad, you’re worse than the ignorant. You know better, yet you’ve chosen inaction.’ Those were tough words to hear and they led me to talk with my partners and move ahead on a long-simmering plan to power our wineries with solar.”

Conscientious Luxury

The conversion to solar is part of the wineries' collective movement toward “conscientious luxury,” an integrated program enabling the production of luxury wines through sustainable measures affecting vineyard, winery and day-to-day business practices. While solar is the centerpiece, complementary practices include sustainable and organic farming, powering farming vehicles with biodiesel fuels, recycling, the use of hybrid company vehicles and other environmentally responsible measures.

“We will always be committed first and foremost to producing great wines; it’s what we’ve been doing for over 25 years,” said Maguire. “Yet, we recognize that our environment is facing significant challenges, and as an agriculture-based business we have an obligation to do our part and take sustainable measures where possible.”

Far Niente was founded in Oakville, CA in 1885 and prospered until the onset of Prohibition in 1919, when the winery was abandoned. Oklahomans Gil and Beth Nickel revived the winery in 1979, restoring the estate to its original grandeur. Far Niente introduced sister wineries, Dolce, devoted to producing a single, late harvest wine, in 1989, and single-vineyard specialist Nickel & Nickel in 1997. Today the Nickel family, along with partners Larry Maguire and Dirk Hampson, remain keenly involved in the wineries, ensuring the businesses will remain independent and family owned for years to come.