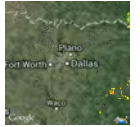


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Craig and Kathryn Hall pull a huge rabbit out of their hat for California winery



By Cheryl Hall
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ST. HELENA, Calif — If there ever was a misnamed piece of artwork, it's the newly installed 35-foot, 7,000-pound gleaming stainless steel rabbit, "Little Bunny Foo Foo," that now serves as Hall Wines' entry "sign."

Its creator, Colorado artist Lawrence Argent, has returned for his first visit since his enormous creature was installed in March. Argent is delighted to see that the grapevines have grown so that the bunny of sing-song nursery fame appears to be magically hopping through the field.

"I really wanted the rabbit to be leaping from across Highway 29 and into the vineyards," says Argent, 57, a professor of sculpture at the University of Denver. "With the assistance of my engineering team, the idea is now a reality."

Craig and Kathryn Hall, owners of Hall Wines and world-class art collectors, commissioned Little Bunny Foo Foo after being smitten with Argent's "Leap," a 57-foot red rabbit hanging in the Sacramento International Airport. Argent initially declined, saying he didn't want to become known as an animal artist.

"So I had to tell him my sob story," Craig begins. "My wife used to sing Little Bunny Foo Foo' ..." and he begins to sing with fingers hopping like rabbit ears, followed by scooping-up-the-field-mice and bopping-on-the-head motions.

Who could resist?

Apparently not Argent. And he's glad he didn't. "How magical it is to see this now with the vines at the height just below the left foot," he says, "and it looking like it is a moment in time captured as this jewel glistens in the light."

Made by artisans in China, Foo Foo came to Oakland by boat and by flatbeds to St. Helena in the Napa Valley.

"I remember being two or three miles away," says Craig, "and seeing this rabbit in two parts — head and body — hanging from these two huge cranes. There is no post. The thing that holds him up is a welding. It's amazing. That's the sole support."

Little Bunny Foo Foo is the talk of the town.

"The giant jackrabbit was a little controversial," says Paul Franson, a freelance writer for wine trade magazines and a columnist for The Napa Valley Register. "Some people find it a bit too much. I'm not a critic of modern art. I think it's kind of whimsical.

"This is a valley where people do a lot of interesting things with their money. One man built a something that looks like a Medieval castle. Another has a Persian palace. So a large bunny rabbit is hardly anything to get that excited about."

Read how Dallas' Craig and Kathryn Hall have become a powerhouse couple of winemaking in Napa in my Sunday column in the Business section.

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