Winery Breathes Easy Thanks to Backup Power

Rolling hills, sprawling vines and a legacy that took decades to solidify. An idyllic, 171 acre property is now home to a 121,000 square foot, 13th century Tuscan castle with 107 rooms, four underground levels and four above-ground levels in Calistoga, California. It took more than 8,000 tons of hand-chiseled local stone and nearly one million antique bricks imported from Europe to complete the winery that is marveled by visitors today. It took 15 years to complete this masterpiece, and Dario Sattui was not about to let his dreams lose power.

Castello di Amorosa is the realization of Sattui, a fourth generation winemaker. His goal is to produce superior quality wines with the same love and attention to detail that went into building his castle. In April 2007 the doors were open to guests and in 2019, powers beyond Sattui’s control, threatened to shutter those same doors.

“We needed the generator to keep the doors open and to serve our guests,” said Jim Sullivan, vice president of public relations and marketing, Castello di Amorosa. “Without generator power, we would have no lights and our wine production processes would cease.”

In October 2019, nearly 800,000 Pacific Gas & Electric (PG&E) customers in 30 California counties lost power for several days. PG&E has implanted a Public Safety Power Shutoff, where the agency said, it may be necessary for them to turn off electricity when gusty winds and dry conditions, combined with a heightened fire risk, are forecasted. The safety measure comes after PG&E was held accountable for the deadly wildfire that hit Northern California in 2017 and the fire that destroyed the town of Paradise, California the following year.

Every person and business in the impacted area lost utility power. A number of wineries in Napa Valley had signs posted or blocked driveways, indicating they were closed to the public. Not only were tasting rooms closed, but also several facilities were feverishly trying to keep their fruits and wines from spoiling. With harvest and tastings in full swing, it was a time where facilities couldn’t afford to lose power.

“We needed the generator to keep the doors open and to serve our guests,” said Sullivan. “This process is on a critical timeline and any delays in power would not benefit our wine making process.”

While some facilities scrambled to make anything work, to keep part of their business up and running, Castello di Amorosa didn’t sweat while guests continued to sip wine. Thanks to a Generac generator, guests were taken care of and winery operations ran as normal.

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“We knew with PG&E shutting off the power we were going to need something really reliable and something really robust because we have so much at stake at the winery,” Tim Dexter, maintenance manager, Castello di Amorosa. “With guests making reservations months in advance and the wines in the tank that are all controlled electronically, we needed protection and power.”

Before construction was complete on the castle, the building was equipped for a backup power generator. When the shutoffs were mentioned in 2018, Castello di Amorosa decided they needed to update their system. They reached out to Energy Systems, a Generac Industrial Power dealer for help. “PG&E shutoffs can happen at any time and with very little warning,” said Vivian Hoang, service engineer, Energy Systems. “Castello di Amorosa knew they might be at risk and mentioned they were interested in a new generator system. Their previous unit didn’t meet current codes and with Napa Valley being prone to power shutdowns, they needed something that was reliable.” Hoang said they recommended Generac for that reason. “Generac has great products that you can rely on,” she said. “And at Energy Systems, our top priority is our customers. We try our best to serve the customer and make sure they are always up and running.”

When specifying a generator for the castle, there were several things to consider, including what needed to be supported. It was decided that the unit needed to be able to provide backup power to most of the building, so operations could continue without worry. Energy Systems recommended a Generac 250 kW 277/480V diesel generator. “This new system met all of the local, state and national codes that the previous system didn’t meet,” said Hoang. “It was the perfect system for them as it provided enough backup power to keep their facility open during the busy harvest season.”

Dexter said there are many benefits to having a generator, but for him, the main advantage is their facility can continue to serve guests. “We can stay open and serve customers and keep our operations running while others, who don’t have a generator, have to shut down business,” he said. “We don’t have to put anything on hold, we can just keep going.”

If Castello di Amorosa didn’t have a reliable generator, they could have lost thousands of dollars. However, Sullivan said the generator, so far, has been perfect. “We lost power for three days,” he said. “We had no issues with the generator. It performed flawlessly and didn’t miss a beat.” With the generator running for several days, during the outage, Castello di Amorosa’s unit was running out of fuel. “Napa Valley Petroleum was running all over Napa Valley to keep business’ generators fueled,” Sullivan said. “Refueling was an extremely easy process.”

With their entire business relying on power, it was important to find a reliable partner, and Castello di Amorosa said Generac more than delivered on their promise. “Energy Systems was very responsive all throughout the process,” said Sullivan. “Being able to have that open line of communication is critical when trying to determine generator needs and having someone who you can ask question to in a pinch. The service we have received has been great and we would definitely recommend a Generac generator. It has the dependability and quiet operation that we need. We couldn’t be happier with it.”