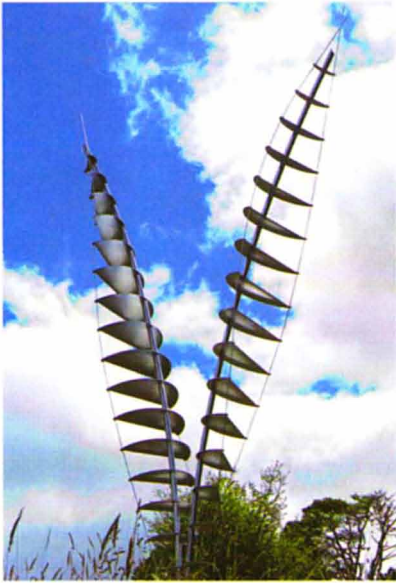


PHOTOGRAPHY BY KEN DOWNIE

Polyhedron Dwelling 2 by Gregor Kregar

LAURINE JACOBS finds wine meets art in a classy winery venture

GLASS ACT



At the blessing of the newly installed Brick Bay Sculpture Trail in Matakana, Christine, Richard and Anna Didsbury were delighted to hear the view of exhibiting sculptor John Edgar that “farmers should farm art”. That phrase epitomised exactly what they’re doing on their Brick Bay vineyard and farm.

The Glass House, a striking new tasting room for Brick Bay wines, designed by Auckland architect Noel Lane, is also the hub for a sculpture trail that winds around water-lily-dotted lakes, vines, native bush and farmland. In this dramatic setting, selected New Zealand sculptors, such as Virginia King and Gretchen Albrecht, are showcasing new works.

The trail starts and finishes at the Glass House, passing through a series of outdoor “rooms” designed by Anna, before tracking off around the farm.

Inspired by the horticultural setting, Lane’s contemporary take on a glasshouse includes three distinctive Perspex-clad cube rooms in different colours – orange for utilities and wine storage, white for administration and lime green for the winery kitchen. The airy space, with adjustable fabric blinds to keep out excess light and heat, offers visitors a chance to sample Brick Bay wines, perhaps with a small platter of

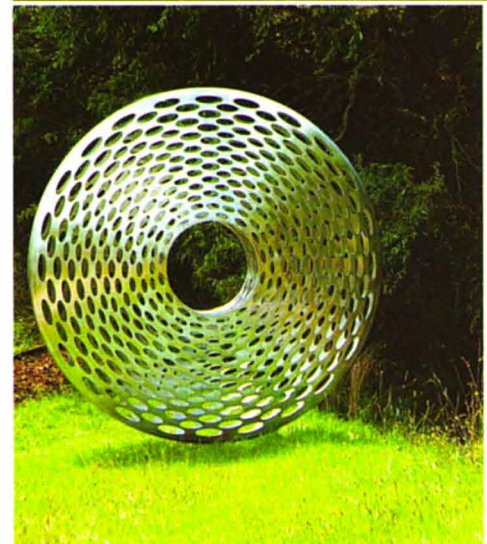


Brick Bay Sculpture Trail, from top left: Seek by Graham Bennett; right: Meteorol by Mary-Louise Brown; below right: Sliver by Virginia King

complementary tastes, but has not been designed as a café or restaurant.

Reminiscent of old French bars, the zinc-topped counter tops are also backlit in green like the kitchen cube. Latticed wooden light shades by David Trubridge, stainless steel and polished concrete tables, and light Tasmanian oak floors complete the picture.

Longtime wine and art enthusiasts, the Didsburys bought their farm with its coastal cliffs, views over Kawau Bay and stands of native bush more than 20 years ago. Wanting to do more than run cattle and sheep on the pasture, they put in hundreds of trees (natives,





Above: The Brick Bay Sculpture Trail starts from this entrance to the Glass House; above right: visitors can try the wines in the airy space of the Glass House; right: Christine Didsbury and daughter Anna



fruit and rare species), created several lakes and planted the vineyard.

Christine enrolled in winemaking and viticulture at EIT in Hawke's Bay and carefully researched what to plant, choosing Bordeaux-blend grapes and Pinot Gris long before the latter became the fashionable wine it is today. And she was prepared to wait a year for her preferred rootstock.

"We truly believe we are the guardians of this land and are managing it sustainably for future generations," Richard says. "It's a place where wine and art will coexist." And in typical Didsbury style (the pair are also the motivation and vision behind the innovative cinemas, farmers' market and other developments at Matakana Village) every detail has been carefully planned, in collaboration with arts manager Lisa Hannan.

A bonus with this latest project has been the return home of elder daughter Anna, who, after studying sculpture at Auckland University's

Elam Art School headed for Central Otago, where she fell in love with the landscape and Pinot Noir. After completing the three-year diploma in viticulture at Otago Polytech in Cromwell, her passion for all things organic led her to France, where she worked the 2004 vintage at Domaine de l'Arlet, a biodynamic estate in Nuits-St-Georges, Burgundy.

Anna returned to become Brick Bay's viticulturist and sculpture trail site manager, and has relished the challenge. Brick Bay has now achieved sustainable growing certification and she is particularly proud of a recently imported under-vine cultivator, which attaches to the vineyard tractor and eliminates the need for herbicides. She has also introduced companion planting and cover crops to assist naturally with best-practice vine cultivation.

Released in 1998, Brick Bay's first Pinot Gris (by winemaker Anthony Ivicevich) earned gold at the 1999

NZ Wine Society Royal Easter Wine Show. The first blended red wine was released in 2001.

Currently available at the Glass House, the 2006 Pinot Gris is a fresh, delicious, fruit-concentrated wine that bursts with flavour in the mouth – very much in the style for which Brick Bay has become known, with more weight than Italy's Pinot Grigio wines, and a balanced acidity.

The Bordeaux-style reds are blended from Cabernet Sauvignon, Cabernet Franc, Malbec and Merlot grapes grown within sight of the Glass House and aged in French oak barrels.

Brick Bay Pharos, a wine to keep and savour, is produced in years of exceptional fruit quality, and the 2004 is richly flavoured with a velvety finish and a tight structure that will open up in years to come. The Matakana Cabernet Sauvignon-Franc is blended each year to present an easy-drinking, affordable (under \$20) wine with soft fruit flavours. The 2004 vintage is drinking well now.

An easy hour-long walk, the sculpture trail has timber boardwalks, handrails and steps, which took more than 18 months to complete. Says Anna, "It's been a real team effort by a great group of dedicated people."

Brick Bay Wines and Sculpture Trail
Arabella Lane (off Mahurangi East Rd, RD2, Warkworth). Open 7 days 10am-5pm. \$10 Sculpture Trail charge per person. All works on the trail are for sale.
www.brickbay.co.nz
www.brickbaysculpture.co.nz