

Brick Bay – Artistry in Wine



Art and wine seem to be natural partners. Some of the best examples of 18th and 19th century French architecture can be seen in the striking facades of Bordeaux Chateaux. Peter Lehman's Barossa winery is an enthusiastic sponsor of music and painting in Australia and California's Copia, the Napa Valley's American Centre for Wine, Food and Art brings painting, ceramics, sculpture, film and music into the same arena as wine and food.

So whether your favourite winery destination is in Burgundy, Bordeaux, Australia's Hunter Valley or the heart of Chianti, art in one form or another is likely to be part of the mix.

This is just as true in New Zealand as it is in other parts of the world. There would be few of our established cellar doors that don't pay at least some homage to local artists, craftspeople and artisans.

But there are some wineries where their passion for wine is more than matched by their love of art and both become intertwined. Art almost becomes part of the terroir!

In New Zealand this is nowhere more apparent than at the 'Glasshouse' tasting and reception area of Brick Bay wines on the Matakana Coast. Not only does it look out over the waters of the Hauraki Gulf to Kawau Island in the distance, but it also overlooks an artificial lake that features the stunning Robert Jahnke sculpture, the first exhibit along the Sculpture Trail that has become an integral part of Brick Bay's visitor experience.

Christine and Richard Didsbury have owned the 68ha coastal property for more than 20 years but it was only in 1994 that Christine decided to match her passion for art with love of wine and plant a vineyard on the property.

"We've only got 4.5ha in vines," says Christine. "The rest of the property remains in native bush and pasture. But when we decided to make wine we looked for the right part of the property to suit the varieties I wanted to grow and with advice from Alan Clarke we found two slopes with good aspect to the sun and efficient drainage. Mind you we made sure of the drainage by mole ploughing and planting on low vigour rootstock. As a result excessive growth has not been too much of a problem."

Christine originally planted Cabernet, Merlot, Malbec and Cabernet Franc to make a Bordeaux style red wine and Pinot Gris as the white variety on which she would hang her hat. "Only recently we've planted some Petit Verdot on a small block close to the original plantings and we're really excited about its potential. We've also planted some more Pinot Gris on the same block and it's amazing that although it is only a stone's throw from the early vines it's displaying some distinct flavour differences. Maybe it's the young vines or perhaps a slightly different aspect to the sun that makes the variation. In any case we're looking forward to introducing it to the blend."

Christine says that her aim is to produce medium bodied reds that have elegance and structure – much in the style of the

French wines that she enjoys - as well as a distinctive Pinot Gris. The reds come in two forms.

In keeping with the winery's lighthouse theme Brick Bay produce 'Pharos' in the best vintages, the current release being from the 2004 harvest that provided some excellent fruit in the Matakana region. Cabernet Franc takes over the leading role with Cabernet Sauvignon and Merlot in good support. "All the fruit is from our own estate and in the French tradition we hold the wines for a full year after bottling." The Pharos 2004 is now available at \$29.

The second red that Brick Bay produces is a Cabernet Sauvignon / Cabernet Franc blend that is medium bodied and more fruit driven in style. It too has received 12 months in French oak and a year in bottle prior to release. The 2004 vintage is available for \$20.

In terms of Pinot Gris, Christine aims for a wine with some textural weight from fruit concentration rather than high alcohols or excessive residual sugar and this variety has been a big success for Brick Bay since the first vintage in 1998. The 2006 Pinot Gris is priced at \$27.

At the beginning of this year Brick Bay opened its new 'Glasshouse' tasting room and visitor centre and it was then that Christine's love of art and wine really came together. For not only does the 'Glasshouse' overlooking a man-made lake provide a place for visitors to sample and buy the wines or take a platter of food with a glass of wine of their choice, but it also gives an opportunity to look out over the water to the vineyard on the opposite slopes. It is also the starting point for the Brick Bay Sculpture Trail.

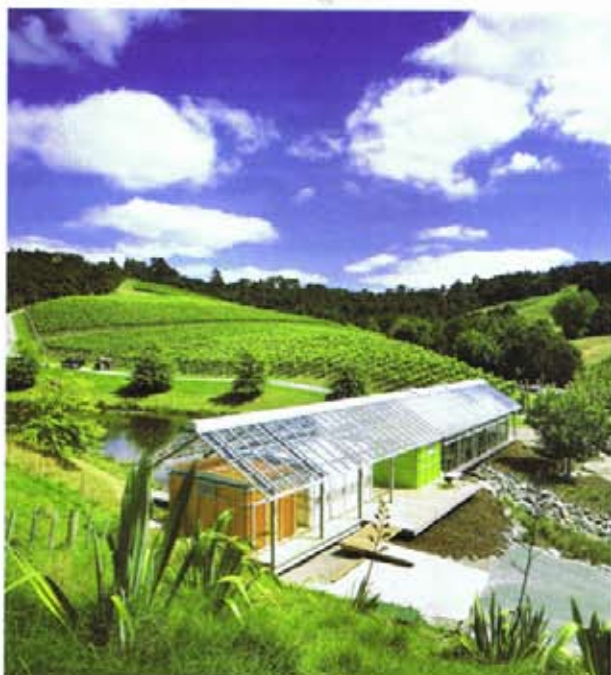
The Brick Bay Sculpture Trail begins at the edge of the lake and meanders through about 2 km of walkway leading to more than 30 striking pieces of sculpture by some of the country's leading artists. Each has been carefully sited to interact with the natural surroundings in which it is placed and currently artists such as Gretchen Albrecht, Peter Lange, Terry Stringer and Regan Gentry all have works on display. But perhaps the biggest difference between this sculpture garden and others overseas that Christine has visited, is that all the works are for sale. "I have always been interested in sculpture and often visit sculpture gardens around the world. But not many are galleries in this way where artists can actually sell their work. It is a good experience for those interested in sculptural art and it's great for potential buyers to see the works in a genuine outdoor location rather than in an enclosed gallery. We use the \$10 that we charge for people to take the trail to establish a pool of not for temporary funding for accepted sculptural projects. The artists pay back the loans when their pieces are sold."

The mix of art and sculpture with wine and viticulture has continued with Christine's daughter Anna who, with experience at Elam School of Fine Arts, has not only taken over the management of the vines, but also supervises the organisation of the Sculpture Trail and the pieces displayed there.

Art and wine certainly do mix and Brick Bay with its Sculpture Trail seems to have found the perfect blend!

More information on www.brickbay.co.nz or www.brickbaysculpture.co.nz.

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The 'Glasshouse' at Brick Bay.



Silver by Virginia King.