

blending in at spy valley

New buildings by Tennent Bevin Slessor Architects express the character of a Marlborough winery and respond to the region's dramatic landscape. Comment by Tommy Honey; photographs by Simon Devitt.



ARCHITECTS' STATEMENT

Following a limited design competition, Tennent Bevin Slessor Architects, a collaboration between Bevin + Slessor Architects and Hugh Tennent Architects, were awarded the design of Spy Valley's new winery by project manager Cedco. The brief was for a 1500 tonne winery (expandable to 2000 tonnes), with administration, tasting and event-hosting capabilities.

The winery was to have a sense of scale appropriate to the requisite large buildings, use natural materials where possible and express qualities of New Zealand rural architecture. Megan Wright Landscape Architects was engaged to prepare the landscape design; working closely with the architects Ms Wright produced a scheme responding to the drama of the site and the rhythm and scale of the building.

Neither client nor architect wanted to use traditional European-inspired forms in the complex. Rather, the project was seen as an opportunity to provide a contemporary, efficient and thoroughly-worked through collection of buildings which would express the character of the winery.

In the dry, often windy environment, the need for sheltered outdoor working areas led to the concept of the working 'street'. Building forms are grouped by function. On either side of the 'street' are two relatively long thin buildings running east-west: receival, white fermenting and warehouse in one building, and the red ferment and barrel hall building in the other. A curved canopy forms a cover over part of the working 'street'.

The administration and tasting building 'saddle backs' on the larger white ferment and warehouse building and extends out close to the river terrace. Visitors arrive looking towards the tasting building and first see the view into the vineyard on entering the tasting room. Cars are kept back from public buildings to allow use of the landscaped areas around the building, and to enhance the experience of the

site. The landscape design incorporates a rainwater collection and reflection pool, hard against the building, which floods the landscaped depressions (swales) – an echo of Marlborough's waterways.

A fundamental design challenge was to modulate and minimise the height and length of the large industrial forms in the landscape. Folded roof forms keep the building as low as possible, and break up the expanse of the building into clear visual forms and structurally simple, repeatable frames. The folded roof form also allows in natural light through vertical faces.

Where possible, materials are natural and self colouring. Corrugated zincalume has a rural New Zealand connotation; insulated panel overlaid with gapped cedar boards provide scale and texture to otherwise blank insulating panels. The panels are alternately exposed or covered in a rhythm of dark panel and gapped timber. Horizontal zincalume fixed over the panel flares out to suggest over-scaled weatherboards.

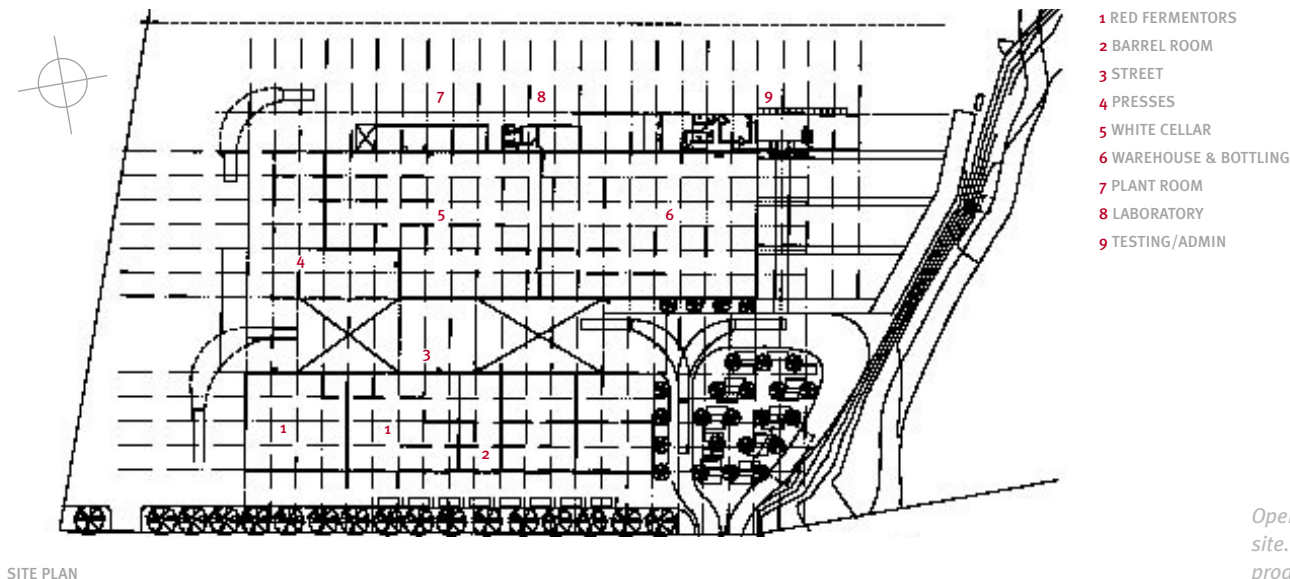
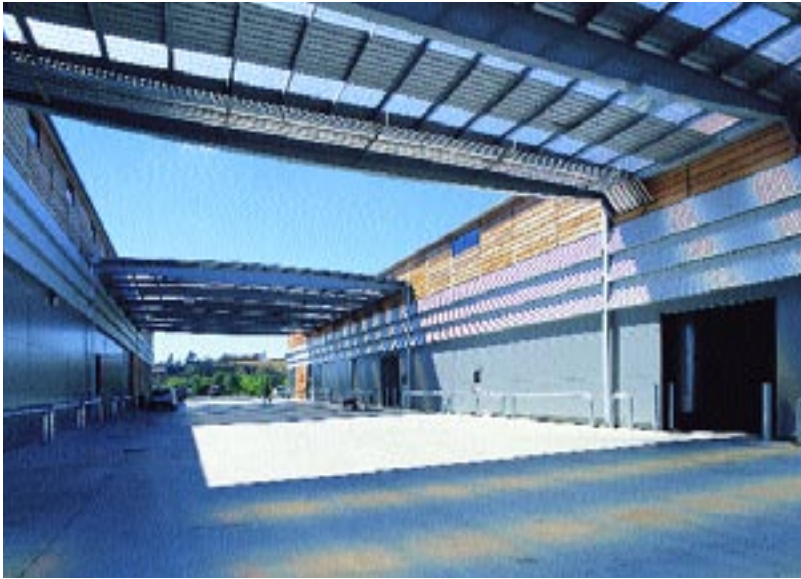
The building was delivered in time for the 2003 vintage; tasting and function spaces opened in December 2003.

Ric Slessor, for Tennent Bevin Slessor Architects

COMMENT

The dramatic growth of the wine industry has delivered a significant increase in winery buildings – both production buildings and their retail adjuncts. As building types they are important to the development of New Zealand architecture for a number of reasons. Until, perhaps, 25 years ago the production and distribution of wine was all but invisible. An increase in production has been matched by the cultural activity of visiting vineyards on wine trails. Wineries are now the physical representation of their product, and their architecture its manifestation.

With few precedents to work with – or even honour – winery architecture is almost as varied as the wineries' products. This is



Opening pages: The winery, on its valley site. Left: The internal “street” between production areas. Below: East elevation.

both a good and a bad thing. Some wineries understand the value of architecture and its ability to reflect their product; others build imitation Tuscan villas to house their operations. In an industry that is built on producing a distinct regional product that can be identified as such globally, it is a mystery why some producers attempt to fake their architecture with ersatz Europe.

In addition, there are few models for the high-tech industrial character of the buildings in a rural setting. Wineries are essentially factories in the country; this is particularly true of the larger operations. Most farm buildings are, for reasons of economy, functional and rudimentary – the opposites of their sophisticated new companions in the landscape. Issues of scale also arise. Some of the larger wineries rival dairy factories in size, however no-one takes a Sunday drive to a dairy factory to taste its milk. The dairy factories can afford to be purely functional and industrial as there is no need for their architecture to reflect their product.

Many wineries take their cues from shearing sheds and other simple farm structures, with corrugated iron often the default material. Height can make it difficult to use these buildings as precedents; they are traditionally low-lying, single storey structures and the wineries that imitate them are often more vertical in nature, requiring at least two stories to house the vats.

It was with these issues in mind that Hugh Tennent, Nick Bevin and Rick Slessor approached the task of designing a new winery complex for Spy Valley Wines. Spy Valley has been growing grapes for other wineries since 1992. It started producing its own vintage in 2000 with all the stages of production outworked, that is, other operations produced, fermented, stored, bottled and distributed Spy Valley’s wines. Soon after, the company started planning to have its own operation. With 360 acres under vine it bought a neighbouring farm block of 40 acres to provide a building site.

Spy Valley’s plans were ambitious. The company wanted to become one of the largest privately-owned wineries in the country, one in which every stage of the production process would occur on site. New Zealand’s wine industry operates on three scales: the big producers – four companies that between them have more than 50% of the market; about 30 middle-sized companies that each produce between 200,000 and 2,000,000 litres annually; and 420 boutique wineries that make up the rest. Spy Valley opened its doors late last year and will produce 1,400 tonnes this year. Next year, it hopes to be up to capacity of 2,000 tonnes, producing approximately 1,400,000 litres of wine.

The site sits at the confluence of two valleys, the Wairau and the Waihopai (whose satellite interception station provides the valley’s “spy” nickname). To the north are the blue hills of the Richmond Range; to the south, the dry hills of the Waihopai Valley. It is a windy site and the architects had to consider sheltered storage for the grapes and the vintage.

The design was largely driven by the production requirements, which Hugh Tennent describes as being “like giant kitchens”. Early on, the decision was made to provide two buildings in linear forms, one bigger than the other. One is 120m long, 30m wide and 10m high; the other, 70m by 20m by 7m high. The buildings are separated by a partially sheltered service area.

Pre-cast concrete was investigated initially but it lacked the thermal control required for the production of wine. The principal architectural consideration became how to wrap these great sheds and accommodate their scale in a way that was sympathetic to the landscape. Down the road another winery is clad in glaring white coolstore panels – a factory come to the country, but one that hasn’t dressed for it.

Mindful of this problematic example, Tennent, Bevin and Slessor addressed two issues: as they were obliged to use coolstore





Left: Tasting and administration areas.
Below: Looking north to the tasting building. Below right: South elevation.

technology for its thermal qualities, how could it be used in an appropriate manner? and, how should they deal with rooves that were to span 20 and 30 metres? The architects addressed the first issue by using dark panels overlaid with horizontal timber, spaced slightly apart. Zincalume panels reinforce this horizontality like three giant weatherboards. Tennent describes this approach as “re-imaging giant chilly bins”.

Turning to the second issue, in order to avoid putting on a gable roof (which would have made the buildings ridiculously high) the architects have brought the factory

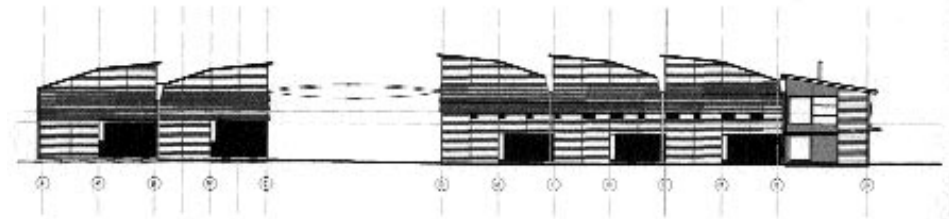
to the country with a series of sawtooth rooves. These allow light in and reduce scale. In their transition to the country the rooves have lost some of their directness (and, perhaps, their elegance) with a slightly chamfered shape – a modified sawtooth for the rural setting. In this aspect the building tries a little too hard to not be a factory.

The interiors of the sheds are high-tech clinical wonders, designed to celebrate the sophistication of the winemaking process. Water – essential for the production process – is reticulated through the stainless steel handrails of the gantries in an effort

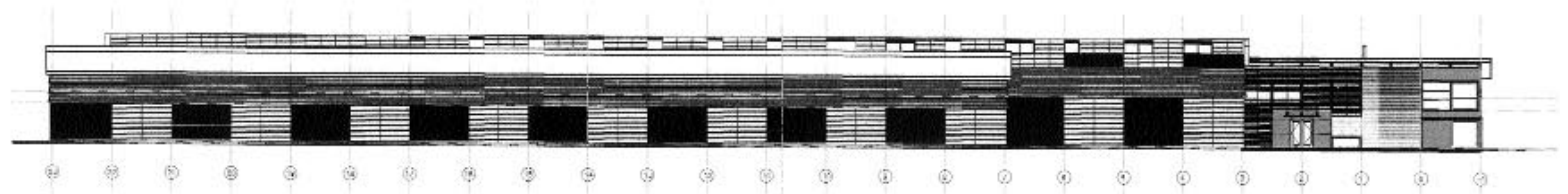
to reduce the number of pipes. Cedric Edwards, a Hawkes Bay winery builder and project manager, contributed much to the realisation of the winery’s technical requirements. The fruit is loaded directly from the hoppers that harvested them, into the wine press that extracts the juice, at one end of the building. The juice is piped into the large sheds where it is processed, barrel fermented (if necessary), bottled, crated, and stored on pallets, all under the same roof. The equipment is state-of-the-art and the monochromatic interiors feel like they are straight out of *Gattaca*.

The roofs are held up with simple trusses that cross the huge spans with ease. The space between the buildings is crossed lightly with elegant trusses that attach themselves to their supporting structures with giant cotter pins, like a giant porte cochere.

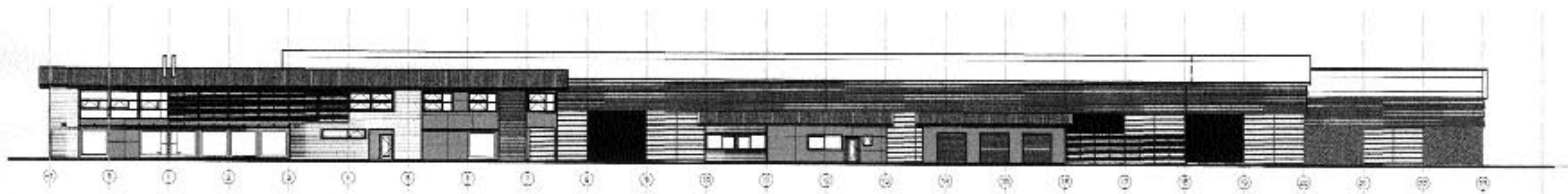
At the northern end of the larger shed is the winery’s retail area. Nick Bevin describes this as “saddlebagged off the main form”. The approach is adjacent to a pond (that collects the roof water), across a walkway that alternates between concrete and timber. The latter are bridges



EAST ELEVATION



SOUTH ELEVATION



NORTH ELEVATION





*Left: Production and bottling areas.
Below: The valley in high summer.*

across the outlets from the pond that drain water through gravel weirs feeding thirsty grasses, emulating creek beds that flood in the winter and run dry in the summer. This innovative integration of landscape and building is the achievement of Megan Wraight, whose approach to landscaping here is, once again, transcendent. Her design for the site grounds the architecture in a regional context that is both raw and lyrical.

The tasting space is a simple room, simply decorated, reflecting the intent and nature of the production sheds. A double

height volume containing a large granite bench opens out through large doors to a courtyard to the west. A cantilevered free-standing porch provides a sense of shelter, like a veranda that has come adrift from its house. Thick timber sunshades decorate the western façade whose fenestration is too busy and overworked. It lacks the composure and composition of the rest of the building, which is generally well-considered in its articulation.

Together, Tennent, Bevin and Slessor, and Wraight have designed a building, a landscape and an integration of the two

that investigates what it means to build large in the country. They have drawn inspiration from the saw-tooth rooves of urban industry and the gravel reaches of the braided rivers nearby. The building wrestles with scale and, for the most part, wins hands-down. At times it makes too much effort – in the Zincalume weatherboards that serve to confuse rather than diffuse scale, and in the shape of the roofline, which is more arbitrary than architectural. But the building's forms, and their place in the landscape, and its materials, and their placing on the buildings, are assured and

accomplished.

PROJECT CREDITS

CLIENT SPY VALLEY WINES

ARCHITECTS TENNENT BEVIN SLESSOR ARCHITECTS,
A COLLABORATION BETWEEN BEVIN + SLESSOR
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PROJECT ENGINEER LOUGHNAN HALL THOMPSON

PROJECT COST CONFIDENTIAL

