

# A New Chapter for Iconic Winery





# A World Class

## Experience at Brokenwood

**WORDS** Michelle Meehan

Once upon a time, the land on which **Brokenwood Wines** now stands was destined to become a cricket pitch. Thankfully for generations of wine lovers, a trio of Sydney-based solicitors had a different vision for the site.

In 1970, self-professed hobby winemakers Tony Albert, John Beeston and James Halliday paid a then-record price of \$970 per acre for the Pokolbin lot, with dreams of creating a weekend wine label.

Almost half a century later, that dream has evolved into one of Australia's most reputable premium wine labels – with a new \$8 million cellar door complex worthy of the company's world-class reputation.

Brokenwood Wines officially opened its grand new cellar door on December 7, 2018, marking the start of an exciting new era for the winemaker.

The 1400sqm building – the largest cellar door in the Hunter Valley – replaces the original winery and cellar door, which were built on the site in 1975, just two years after the vineyard's first vintage, to accommodate growing production needs.

The new building includes a large tasting room, an expansive outdoor terrace, two private tasting rooms, two private dining rooms, a wine museum overlooking the working barrel hall and a lounge area. The complex also houses two dining venues – a casual eatery, Cru Bar + Pantry, and modern dining room, The Wood Restaurant.

Managing Director, Chief Winemaker and part owner Iain Riggs said the development had been a long time coming and was a “monumental step” in the history of the company, allowing even more visitors to enjoy a taste of Brokenwood's award-winning wines.

“The first discussion on a new building was at the end of 2013 and earthworks commenced at the end of September 2017,” he said.

“With the Hunter being the most visited wine region in Australia, and having had visitors walk away from our, at times overflowing cellar door, it wasn't a hard decision to make.

“We also have very strong membership in our four Wine Clubs, and they weren't being looked after as best we should.

“I think Brokenwood has always been renowned for its relaxed but very professional cellar door. The new building just allows us to take wine tourism to the next level.”

The cellar door is certainly next level, not only in its various offerings but in the beauty of the design itself.

Created by Sydney-based architects Villa+Villa, it was the result of a targeted brief designed to incorporate as many of the winery activities as possible into a functional and aesthetically pleasing space.

“The original four-hectare block was cleared and planted at the end of 1970 into 1971. The problem was it was the worst soil in Pokolbin, so over the years the vineyard gave way to winery buildings,” Iain said.

“With no surrounding vineyards, the brief to the half a dozen architects was to incorporate the winery activities (into the cellar door). Only two of the six actually got it.

“Overall we had the 6000sqm of land to use, and the two finalists utilised it very well. Sydney-based Villa+Villa won the contract with an initial design that, while impractical, started us all on a direction for the final design.”

What was created in the end was a grand yet inviting building, with a rich and textural Spotted Gum façade that helps it connect with the surrounding rural landscapes.

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“All the timber throughout is Spotted Gum, which is the main eucalypt of this area, and the outside cladding has it as natural and also in a burnt finish,” Iain said.

“The Lower Hunter Valley has vast areas of native woodland (scrub), and the timber finish fits in well.

“The interior timber continues the theme, right through to the restaurant being called The Wood, which is the localised version of Brokenwood.

“In terms of adding to the overall design, winemaking is basically a primary industry; we’re really just farmers. The natural timber finishes reinforce that and certainly add a warm and natural feeling.”

Aside from the extensive use of timber, the design also features a bold and earthy mix of corten steel, stone and glass, with a modern yet relaxed ambience that seems to almost imbibe the Brokenwood Wines philosophy to “make great wine and have fun”.

Three features in particular help it connect with the working winery as per the original brief – viewing windows into the barrel hall, floor-to-

ceiling windows that look out to the wine tanks and an open mezzanine space that gives clear viewing of the crush/press area.

In a nod to Brokenwood’s heritage, this viewing area has been combined with an education space, with photographs of all of the company’s vineyards and soil samples on display. The area is named “KB’s Lookout” in honour of one of the company’s true legends.

“Keith Barry was our Vineyard Manager for nearly 25 years and sadly passed away in 2016. His daughter Katrina is now in charge of our vineyards,” Iain said.

“He is a local, and actually helped plant the Graveyard Vineyard (next door to the original vineyard site) as a young lad in 1968. There wasn’t much KB didn’t know about vineyards, and he was one the Hunter Valley’s great characters.”

The stairs leading up to the mezzanine continue the historic theme, with each step’s riser containing a line of script to create a timeline of Brokenwood’s history that can be read as you ascend.

With such an extensive footprint – large enough to accommodate more than 250,000 visitors annually – the cellar door offers multiple options for visitors to enjoy the Brokenwood experience and Iain said the feedback so far had been wonderful.

“It’s been extremely positive. Visitors are greeted by a concierge, the property layout is explained, with the option of tastings, sitting with a glass of wine, casual dining in the café or the restaurant. Or people just have a wander and look at the barrel hall in operation,” he said.

“All research points to wine tourism being an ‘experience’ and we have tried to tick every box. The availability of food, seated tastings, winery tours and wine and food packages all help guide the visitor.”

Aiding this plan is the inclusion of four circular tasting pods in the main cellar door area, with a further two pods on the terrace outside.

Injecting an international influence into the space, the pods are a step away from the traditional long service bar found in most cellar doors in Australia, with a design focussed on personalising the tasting experience for visitors. ▶



# BROKENWOOD

AUSTRALIAN CRAFT AT ITS FINEST



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"The Chair of our Board returned from a trip to South Africa and was most impressed with the circular tasting bars used at Fairview Winery," Iain said.

"Rather than one long service bar, our pod system allows up to 20 people per pod to stand and be served. It provides much-improved interaction with the staff.

"We have four inside, and one on the terrace and each pod has its own fridge, glasswasher, till, glassware etc.

"As we charge for tastings, and have for three years, visitors can choose from two levels - Varietal and Single Vineyard. Three pods are set up for the former and one for the latter. If visitors don't want to pay for a tasting, they can instead purchase a glass of wine or a bottle to enjoy."

Of course, visitors can also opt to savour their drop while enjoying a bite to eat at either of the site's two dining venues: casual eatery, Cru Bar + Pantry and modern dining room, The Wood Restaurant.

Premium and iconic Brokenwood wines are available at both venues, including an Enomatic self-service dispenser at the Cru Bar + Pantry, which serves rare wines not ordinarily available for tasting at the Cellar Door.

The restaurants are being overseen by renowned Hunter Valley chef Andrew Wright and his wife Janet, who spent the past 18 years running The Cellar Restaurant at the Hunter Valley Gardens.

The Wood offers a contemporary fine dining experience with a strong focus on seafood. The 90-seat restaurant features a large display of fresh seafood from the Sydney Fish Markets, all of which are available for retail along with condiments, Normandy fish stew, oyster knives and verjuice made by Brokenwood.



It is open for lunch seven days from 11.30am and dinner on Friday and Saturday from 6pm. Located in the lounge area, Cru Bar + Pantry is open for breakfast, lunch and snacks every day, serving homemade pies, toasties, wood-fired pizzas and cheese and charcuterie platters, with wine by the glass or bottle. You can also opt to grab a picnic pack and relax on the front lawn while the children play.

With so much on offer at the new cellar door and still more changes to come, including the creation of an orchard and large farm vegetable garden on-site, Brokenwood Wines is a must visit for anyone taking a trip to the region. For more information visit [www.brokenwood.com.au](http://www.brokenwood.com.au) ■

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