

turning  
**REFRAME**  
into **VIEW**

A BRIEF TO BUILD  
A WINERY IN THE  
PICTURESQUE YARRA  
VALLEY LED FOLK  
ARCHITECTS TO CREATE  
A WORKING SPACE THAT  
PROVIDES A STRIKING  
FOCAL POINT FOR THE  
PROPERTY, PROVING  
THAT FUNCTION AND  
FORM NEED NOT BE  
OPPOSING FORCES

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**CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE:** At its heart the building is a factory, so Folk Architects left the interior to its functional basics; A polycarbonate wall, when illuminated from within, creates silhouettes of the machinery inside; The barrel room keeps the wine at a constant 15°C; A sculpture welcomes visitors to the wine tasting room.

When regular visitors to Medhurst Winery in Victoria's Yarra Valley suddenly notice a brand spanking new winery just down the slope from the cellar door, the owners Ross and Robyn Wilson and Folk Architects' Christie Petsinis and Tim Wilson, are actually quite pleased. "Basically the idea was to slide the building into the landscape. The site is effectively a ridge of the Warramate Hill, which rises just to the east of the property," says Tim Wilson.

The winery, which received a commercial architecture award at this year's Victorian Architecture Awards, sits on a former paddock too uneven to grow grapes; it was long home to Henry the bull, who is now parked in a field behind the cellar door. With other buildings on the property there was a reluctance to build something else, so integration into the landscape was vital. An initial idea was to build in a paddock across the road, "but we realised we had to have a connection between the winery and the cellar door," says Tim, the son of Ross and Robyn.

For Ross Wilson, the decision to build a winery was a pragmatic one. The former

Southcorp CEO understood it was key for a boutique winery to make premium estate-grown wines on site. "We were making our wines elsewhere, but we decided we had to do it ourselves to achieve the quality that we were looking for. Our brief to Christie and Tim was to design a winery that worked. It is essentially a factory, but it also had to be compatible with other buildings on the property. Image is also important; if people come here and think this looks fantastic they then have a story to tell."

The basic brief was for a 250-tonne winery designed for small-batch production techniques. The project took 18 months and was completed in stages, with the basic shell – roof and walls – with required equipment and services installed so the 2011 vintage could be produced on site. The interior and landscape were finished later.

The first ground was broken in the very wet winter of 2010. Ironically, one of the many discussions that took place in the rain was water conservation. It takes around seven litres of water to create just a litre of wine, and when the Wilsons decided to build the winery Victoria was in the grip of one of the worst droughts on record. "As well as being commercially viable we wanted to be environmentally sustainable, so we had to catch the water, minimise temperature and maximise light so we didn't have to use much artificial lighting," says Ross Wilson.

The winery's roof is effectively a 660sqm catchment area, and 500,000 litres on average is harvested each year. This is then filtered, sterilised and used in the winery as well as elsewhere on the property. All solid organic grape and wine waste is composted with other organic matter and re-used, after setting aside for a year, in the vineyard and on garden beds.

When the winery is viewed from the cellar door cafe, all visitors glimpse is a gracefully contoured concrete wall, pigmented in ghost-gum grey, that opens onto an expanse of paddock grass roof, concealing a subterranean room that stores the barrels at a fairly constant 15°C. A statue, *My Totem* by Mike Nicholls, guards the entrance to the wine tasting room and offices. Just inside, a stair descends to the

winemaking area, lab, barrel room and cool storage. A delivery area is concealed at the rear.

Approaching from the road, visitors may notice the double-height, north-facing polycarbonate wall that allows natural light to penetrate, reducing energy consumption and eliminating chances of black mould developing in the winery. At night the wall becomes translucent, exposing the profile of the winemaking equipment.

For Folk Architects, the highlights are not what they put in, but what was omitted. "Tim and I just embraced the industrial nature of the building. We started to celebrate it for what it is. Stripping back the detail was the best thing we did," Petsinis says. And so a finely detailed balustrade planned for the stair to the winemaking area was abandoned in favour of a standard ball-and-tube industrial balustrade, the same material used on the catwalks that access the equipment. A window set into the paddock roof was considered but was rejected, says Ross Wilson, because "we didn't want light or heat to penetrate the barrel room, and I wasn't keen because I didn't want to have to mow around a glass roof and clean it. We mow 55 acres of lawn here every week, so that's a lot of mowing. And I guess we were saying the whole time: 'Don't forget it's a factory!'"

### Architect statement

*Inspiration came from the inherent beauty of the site – a north-facing slope flanked by the Warramate Hill to the east, with established vines to the north and views to the Yarra Valley Ranges beyond.*

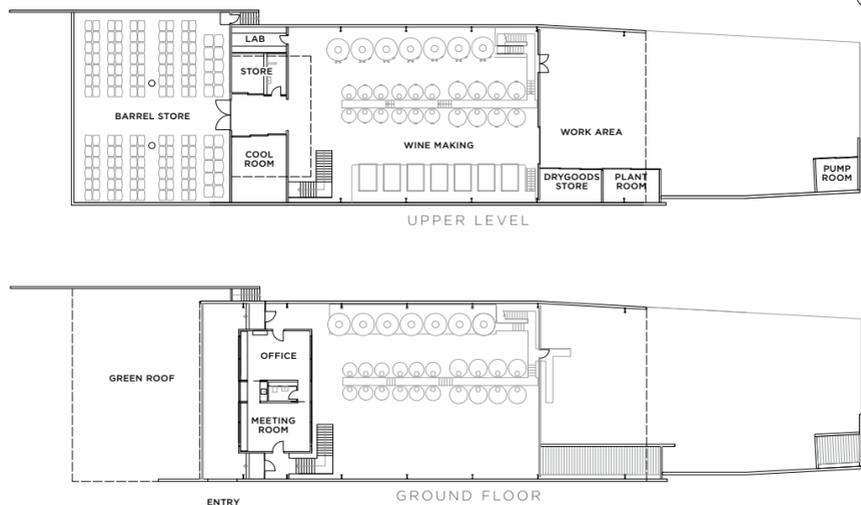
*We spent long days considering how best to sensitively insert a significantly scaled building into the landscape. Our approach was to nestle the building into the hill. It appears as a series of blades in the landscape rather than solid built form. The roof is disguised by the extended blade wall and frames the views of the Warramate Hill and ranges beyond.*

*Ongoing conversations with the winemaker and client, and developing an interest in the scientific nature of the winemaking process influenced the decision to create a clean, lab-like environment with a restrained palette of materials.*

*Our aim was to create a connection to the colours and textures of the Warramate forest, which continues through the property, with its native flowering wattle and rich autumnal changing colours of the vines – grey tones and rich mustards and yellows.*

*We were pleased by a regular visitor's recent remark: "When did you build that?" They initially had not noticed the new building embedded into the hill upon their arrival to the winery.*

FOLK ARCHITECTS



### PROJECT DETAILS

- ARCHITECT:** Folk Architects
- CONTRACTOR:** Skate Constructions
- STRUCTURAL ENGINEER:** Coulthard Shim
- WINERY CONSULTANT:** Linney Engineering Services
- BUILDING SURVEYOR:** Protek Building Surveyors
- GREEN ROOF CONSULTANT:** Fytogreen
- LANDSCAPE AND EARTHWORKS:** Frank Wood
- LANDSCAPE:** Taylor Cullity Lethlean
- DESIGN AND DOCUMENTATION:** 6 months
- CONSTRUCTION:** 15 months
- FLOOR AREA:** 1100m<sup>2</sup>
- COLUMNS AND STEELWORK:** Grey painted steel by International Paints
- BOX CLADDING:** Smooth finish lightweight cladding with concealed fixings by Knauf
- FACADE:** Heat reflective grey polycarbonate by Danpolan
- FINISHES:** Pigmented Ghost Gum Grey concrete by Concrete Colour Systems
- ROOF:** Iron grey insulated panels from Kingspan
- WINDOWS AND DOORS:** Galvanised steel by ADS Design