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Why winery design matters

DR ALISTAIR NESBITT OF UK-BASED CONSULTANCY VINESCAPES ON THE IMPORTANCE OF WINERY DESIGN AND THE PROCESSES INVOLVED

A winery can be so much more than an industrial production centre – it's part of your brand and it can be as sophisticated as your wine. Wineries can also offer a unique and memorable visitor experience. All this presents a complicated challenge for the designer, who needs to fulfil the practical and technical requirements of a wine production facility, create a stunning and artistic building with the 'wow' factor, and also respect the landscape and environment.

In the UK we are increasingly seeing aspirational winery projects as found in other wine regions around the world. Bespoke designed wineries that offer exciting tourist 'destinations' with tasting rooms, cellar door sales, accommodation and restaurants – these are all aspects of the business that drive sales, create brand loyalty and increase profit margins.

Currently, consultancy firm Vinescapes is the only company in the UK providing a complete end-to-end winery scoping, design, planning and construction service. With a combination of skills, the team, which comprises oenologists, architects and viticulturists, understand winemaking, winemaking strategies and winery equipment, as well as architecture, project management, building design, engineering, planning, highways, landscapes, and construction.

■ What is involved: scoping, design, and budget

As an example, Vinescapes has partnered with architect Designcubed, led by Stephen Blowers. Using combined expertise, the team scope the project with the client to form a detailed brief along with the business plan. A realistic budget is set, which could be for a basic but functional winery, or it could also be for an impressive centre with spectacular spaces to host clients and tourists – with the numbers to reflect this.

The initial brief establishes the technical and functional requirements of the winery, such as winemaking strategy, tank capacity, production equipment, operating areas, and production flow. However, in parallel to the production considerations are the tourist activities; including wine tastings, point of sale, tours, events, restaurants, and accommodation. If any of these activities are sharing space with the winery, then careful design needs to ensure safety.

Early in the scoping stage all aspects of sustainability and energy use are considered – it may be that greater longer-term investment is favoured to reduce running costs in the future. As the building concept develops, there are many critical project considerations which are discussed below.

■ Planning and planning policy

Most construction projects need to obtain planning approval. It may be relatively simple, if an existing building can be converted under Permitted Development Rights, but often wineries are more complicated in terms of planning, especially if they are in Areas of Outstanding National Beauty (ANOB), Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) or National Parks (see a helpful article on this by Paris Smith on page 34).

Designcubed has been designing wineries since 2011, and is aware that planning authorities can vary in their experience of wineries. Having an experienced planning consultant and a planning strategy is key. The planning consultant can meet with the local authority, local interest groups and any stakeholders in advance of a formal planning application.

The South Downs National Park (SDNP) recently carried out a detailed study in conjunction with Vinescapes, on the impact of vineyards and wineries in the National Park, and the general findings were positive for the local economy as well as for ecological and sustainable tourism.

The study found a total of 51 vineyards located in the SDNP, 11 of which had

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<< wineries, covering 436ha of land. These vineyards were found to employ 358 people, including seasonal labour, attracting approximately 33,000 visitors a year and contributing around £24.5 million to the local economy. This contribution increases to £54 million when the impact on the wider economy is considered. Vineyards were found to employ 17 times more people per hectare than traditional farming.

SDNP has produced technical reports and policies accordingly, which provide useful guides and help inform planning authorities who are less familiar with wineries. The Viticulture Technical Advice Note (TAN) can be read via this link: www.southdowns.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/SDNPA-Viticulture-Technical-Advice-Note-TAN.pdf

It is important to consider the client's vision and come up with a solution that considers site location, topography and ecology, as well as addressing national and local planning policy. Pre-planning meetings need to show that all the required planning policies have been met and surveys will be conducted fully, as planning objections are often based on failure to meet these legal requirements. They also need to show an understanding of vehicular access, traffic capacity and a respect for neighbours.

The right design team can be inspirational, working with the vision of the client for the winery, along with an understanding of national and local planning policy. Try and have an open mind on where the building is sited, as when considering topography and ecology, the best place is not always the obvious place.

The technical fit out

Aside from the aesthetics, a winery's main purpose is to produce and possibly age wine, so the most critical part of winery design is having a well-planned layout. The aim is to create a seamless winery design for efficient production flow – a space where winery staff can get their tasks done.

Some of the more mundane, but vital elements, need to be considered such as a durable, hygienic, winery floor, with efficient integrated drainage, and the disposal of wastewater. There needs to be adequate space for forklift operations and even areas to wash picking crates. Disgorging, packaging, and bottling areas need to be considered and are usually separate to the main winemaking area. A spectacular barrel hall is always a hit with visitors.

Staff need to be able to work safely in the winery. There must be efficient extraction and monitoring of CO₂, facilities to safely store and handle chemicals, and practical solutions to avoid a spaghetti-network of pipes, hoses, or power cables.

Storage capacity is frequently far greater than 'spreadsheet' calculations suggest, and palletised dry goods, including empty bottles should not be forgotten.

Maintaining specific temperatures within the facility is critical, and a good civil and structural engineer can save

money and provide key solutions. They will be able to consider the soil type and topography, with a view to excavating cellars and the basement area, which provide naturally stable temperatures and reduce cooling costs. In addition, technical fit-outs may also include refrigeration, controlled temperature storage and insulation solutions.

Utilities, services, and wastewater

Winemaking uses a lot of water, particularly during harvest, so a reliable supply and efficient removal of wastewater is an inevitable part of winery operation.

Your team should consider the best solutions for the power requirements of the winery, which can be substantial, and this may include solar and renewables, along with charging points for electric vehicles.

Good design does not have to be expensive. Often, when the design is right it looks simple, but still retains the visual drama and impact required – especially when surrounded by vines.

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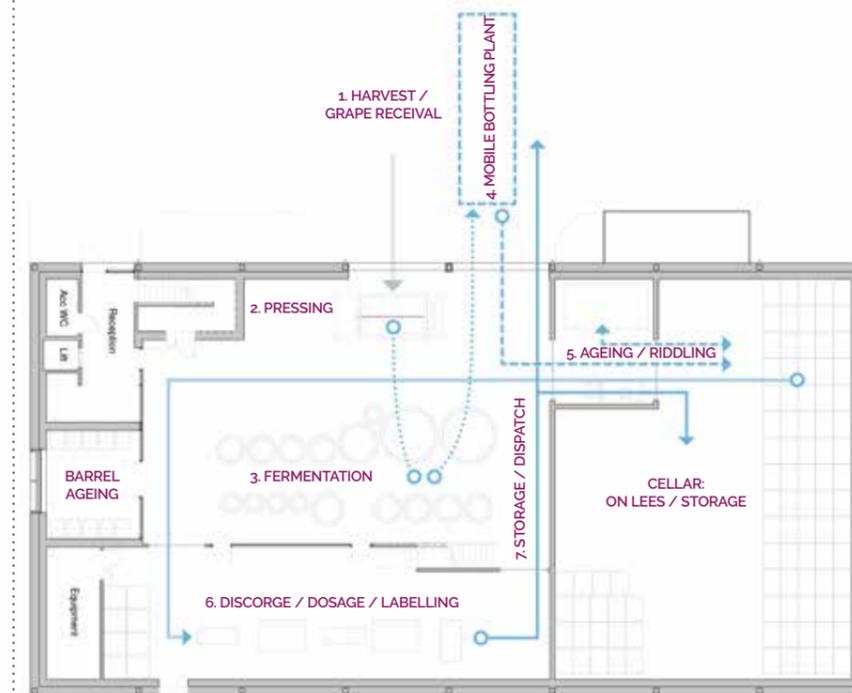
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