



MATAHIWI WINERY, WAIRARAPA

Moving along the wine building spectrum – from architectural statement towards statement of fact – we come to Matahiwi, a Wairarapa winery that is not located in Martinborough. Matahiwi occupies a former sheep farm outside Masterton, which might have some natural characteristics – such as climate and silt loam soil – in common with Martinborough, but hardly compares as an appellation, or as a bijou tourist destination. I think there’s a ‘wine trail’ – does every rural or semi-rural district in New Zealand now have one? – but there doesn’t appear to be many stops along the way. Matahiwi’s buildings, designed by the Wellington practice Bevin+Slessor Architects, loom abruptly on the side of a country road a few kilometres from the edge of town.

In its form, the main structure at Matahiwi is far closer to a familiar Kiwi rural building idiom than Paritua, and in its material gestures it’s far closer than Elephant Hill. Ric Slessor acknowledges that in its structure – the building has a simple steel frame – and in its articulation Matahiwi is in the lineage of his practice’s design for Spy Valley winery in Marlborough (see *Architecture NZ*, Sept / Oct 2004). The poly-panel insulation cladding – “a foam and metal sandwich” – is enlivened by some colour variety, and by the deployment of sections of cedar slats that look like upturned pallets. The main building is separated by the differently-scaled ply-clad office / lab building by an arrival and processing area that, Slessor says, is “the real hub of the winery”. A curved roof over this working space was designed to “break up what could be a very long building”.

Matahiwi’s architecture which, Slessor says, was subject to “aggressive cost management” – the project manager also worked on Spy Valley winery – is not overtly linked to a marketing strategy. (The main building is banded,

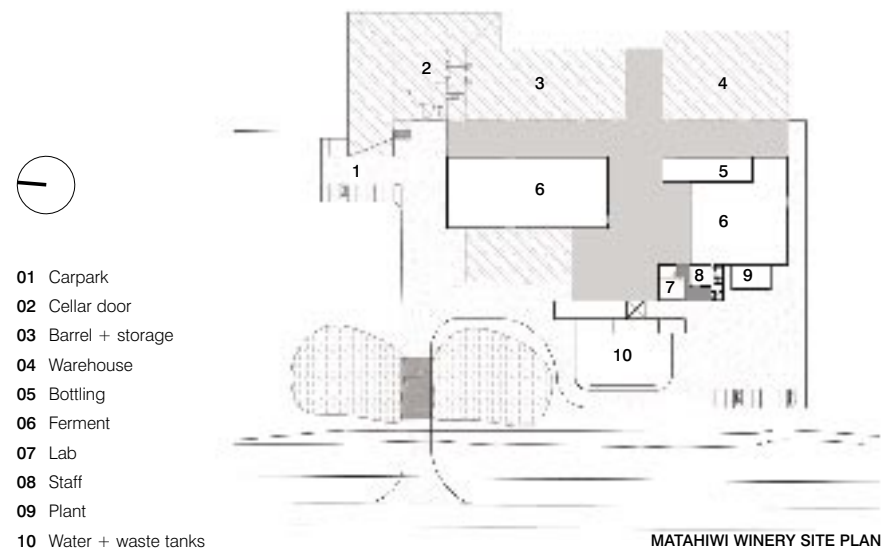
not branded.) At Matahiwi, the architecture facilitates a process; it declares its purpose, without going out of its way to celebrate it. To an extent, the design of the winery’s buildings is an exercise in mitigation. Having designed several new wineries Slessor is well aware of the impact of this typology in the landscape. Buildings that necessarily are high – in a country context – can seem even bigger because the vines around them are low, and the trees and hedges planted as farm windbreaks have been removed to keep birds from the grapes. “There are plenty of big, dumb sheds out there,” Slessor says. “That’s one reason we sued horizontal banding – to keep the size down, visually”.

Not that Slessor wants to diminish the building. Sited where it is – right by the road – it could hardly be shy and retiring. The location of the winery buildings, Slessor says, was in large measure dictated by necessity: vines had already been planted, and vehicles required easy access. Bevin+Slessor’s design for the winery envisaged another building to accommodate processing functions and a tasting room and restaurant, both looking out over Matahiwi’s 75 hectares of vines. This twin Stage 2 building, says Matahiwi’s wine-maker Jane Cooper, may not be needed, even if the winery doubles its present 650-tonne capacity. There were plans, too, for a bottling hall but, Ms Cooper says, if you have that then you also need a warehouse – better to truck the wine to a bottling plant in Hawkes Bay.

As it is, Ms Cooper says, “the building is good to use – I haven’t found anything that hasn’t worked efficiently.” Ms Cooper of course has a vocational concern with the design of wineries; she’d be interested in an architectural answer to a particular challenge: “What I’d like to see is a low-budget sustainable winery.”



11 Matahiwi winery, from the road (west). 12 Office / lab / services building. 13 The winery, from the north. A twin building was designed to sit alongside the production building.



MATAHIWI WINERY

Client Alastair Scott **Architect** Bevin+Slessor Architects (Ric Slessor; Nick Bevin; Fiona Christie) **Project & construction manager** Cedco **Mechanical & winery services & waste treatment** CEDCO **Cost** Confidential