

SOME TASTING ROOMS WILL THRIVE

THE NEXT EVOLUTION OF THE CELLAR DOOR

Strategic Insights White Paper

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INTRODUCTION

Fifteen years ago, Wirra Wirra noticed a subtle shift in visitor behaviour: tourists on cellar door tours were seeking coffee. In response, they added a café—a practical addition, intended to meet a need and perhaps offer another reason to be on a must-visit list. What no one anticipated was the almost immediate effect it would have. The café quickly became somewhere people chose to inhabit, linger, and return—a space that subtly reshaped how the winery was experienced. Only now, in a time when no-obligation, drop-in spaces are increasingly rare, are we beginning to fully recognise the principle at work: environments that encourage presence and dwell foster engagement, attachment, and loyalty.

This is the essence of the next evolution of the cellar door. It is not a lesson in layout or design technique, but a reflection on the qualities that make certain places endure: comfort, curiosity, familiarity, and a quiet sense of welcome. In these spaces, visitors are free to explore, pause, or simply be—without being guided, prompted, or hurried. The loyalty that follows is a natural outcome of that freedom.



WHY SOME PLACES ENDURE

The environments that endure in memory are rarely the most polished or expensive. They combine comfort, sensory richness, and opportunities for repeated engagement. People are drawn to places where they can orient themselves quickly, engage at their own pace, and return repeatedly. Over time, these places become more than locations—they become part of how we experience a region and, sometimes, ourselves within it.

Ray Oldenburg's work on "third places" offers a compelling lens for understanding this phenomenon. Third places—neutral, accessible social environments outside home and work—provide freedom, connection, and repeated interaction. Their absence in urban life has been widely discussed, but the lessons apply equally to wineries: a cellar door that functions as a third place is one people return to not out of obligation, but because it feels naturally part of their day.

Other research reinforces this idea. Rebecca Madgin at the University of Glasgow highlights how people form attachments to places through repetition, ease of engagement, and the layering of experience over time. Alain de Botton, in *The Architecture of Happiness*, similarly observes that the qualities of space—its light, proportion, and materiality—shape how people feel, behave, and remember experiences. For wineries, this suggests that loyalty and engagement often emerge not from salesmanship, but from spaces that visitors choose to inhabit repeatedly.

REFRAMING TASTINGS

Structured tastings remain important—they provide narrative, education, and brand expression—but they are just one layer of a richer, fully immersive environment. A successful cellar door now combines opportunities to taste with spaces where visitors can pause, converse, or simply enjoy a moment on their own terms.

The shift that is emerging is subtle but powerful: tastings are no longer the sole anchor for engagement. Instead, wineries are beginning to recognise that spaces which allow people to linger, explore, and inhabit the brand environment naturally foster attachment and return visits. A visitor may enjoy a guided tasting, then drift to a quiet corner, observe the vineyard view, or share a casual glass with friends. Each of these moments contributes to a cumulative sense of connection.

In this context, the cellar door is evolving from a point of transaction to a place of presence. The distinction matters: it is not about orchestrating a better tasting, but about creating freedom and flexibility, so the visitor experience becomes personalised and self-directed. The loyalty that follows is a natural consequence of being welcomed to just be there.



ENGAGING THE NEXT GENERATION

Younger wine consumers—Millennials and Gen Z—approach wine differently from previous generations. Many are new to wine, and they are looking for experiences that feel approachable, social, and personal. They do not want to feel judged for their knowledge or inexperience; instead, they seek opportunities to explore, taste, and share without pressure.

For many wineries, this represents an untapped opportunity. While some have begun experimenting with informal tastings or casual spaces, the potential to engage younger visitors in ways that allow them to linger, personalise their journey, and connect authentically with the brand remains largely unrealised.

For these visitors, the cellar door is no longer just a place to taste wine—it is a space to connect with friends, discover at their own pace, and experience the winery as a narrative. Environments that allow for choice, social interaction, and personalised exploration resonate far more than rigid, transactional tastings. By creating spaces where visitors can linger and engage with the brand story on their own terms, wineries can cultivate loyalty and connection from first visits.

In this context, loyalty is earned through experience, not persuasion. It emerges when visitors feel welcome, free to explore, and empowered to shape their own journey—whether that is a casual glass of wine with friends, a shared tasting, or returning to discover more.

LESSONS FROM OTHER SECTORS

Across luxury retail, cultural institutions, and experiential sectors, the most enduring examples are not merely visually impressive—they are fully immersive environments that reward dwell and exploration. These spaces offer lessons for wineries because they show how presence, choice, and narrative integration drive loyalty and repeated engagement.

Audemars Piguet AP Houses combine exhibition, lounge, and social space. Visitors do not arrive to purchase; they arrive to inhabit the brand world. In New York, the AP House occupies a 7,900-square-foot second floor in a 19th-century building, with a lounge, dining table, bar, baby grand piano, and terrace. The space functions as part museum, part social club—immersive yet flexible, encouraging repeated visits.

Ralph Lauren's Ralph's Coffee transforms cafés within flagship stores into spaces for pause, socialising, and casual engagement. Across continents, the cafés, kiosks, and trikes provide multiple touchpoints for visitors to inhabit the brand without pressure to transact, fostering deeper loyalty.

Gucci Garden in Florence blends museum, bookstore, and Michelin-starred restaurant, showing that retail, culture, and leisure can co-exist as an integrated, immersive experience. Visitors linger because every element contributes to a coherent brand story.

Tiffany & Co.'s Blue Box Café at the Landmark in New York creates a standalone destination with its own reservations, menus, and atmosphere, not merely a retail add-on.

MONA in Hobart demonstrates similar principles locally. The museum's layered spaces—hidden corridors, immersive installations, and informal cafés—invite exploration at visitors' own pace. People return not only for exhibitions but to inhabit the environment itself, which becomes a platform for engagement and social interaction.

The common thread is that these spaces prioritise dwell and choice over transaction. They allow visitors to linger, explore, and experience the environment on their own terms, creating attachment through repeated engagement. For wineries, the lesson is clear: cellar doors that provide freedom to inhabit the space and engage with the brand story are the ones that cultivate loyalty over time.

WE CAN CUT + WRAP
Meats
Cheese
and
Panini

TO GO

WE ARE A DELI AFTER ALL...

Q. WHO IS HARRY?
A. CHECK THE MENU TO DISCOVER HIS STORY.

HARRY'S DELI



PLEASE RECYCLE
HERE

THE ARCHITECTURE OF PRESENCE

Architecture in the cellar door is strategic, experiential, and brand-centric. Its role is to enable engagement, encourage dwell, and reinforce identity, creating a space where presence is effortless, exploration is natural, and repeat visits follow organically.

Thoughtful spatial decisions can subtly guide how people inhabit the environment:

- Flow and circulation create organic movement, allowing visitors to discover new corners or pause in moments of interest.
- Zoning and scale offer a mix of active and quiet areas: communal tables, lounge nooks, and outdoor terraces give visitors choice in how they engage, whether socially or individually.
- Light, materiality, and texture establish mood and atmosphere, signalling comfort and subtly reinforcing brand identity. Warm, tactile surfaces, natural light, and layered textures encourage lingering.
- Visual storytelling and display allow the environment itself to communicate the brand narrative, inviting curiosity and exploration without rigid sequencing.
- Connection to landscape—views to the vineyard, gardens, or terraces—enhances freedom, relaxation, and a sense of immersion.

Crucially, architecture can make the cellar door fully brand-immersive. Every element—furniture, finishes, circulation, lighting, and even acoustic qualities—can be curated to reflect the winery’s story, values, and personality. Visitors are not only inhabiting a functional tasting space; they are immersed in the identity of the brand, experiencing its heritage, vision, and ethos through subtle, spatial cues.

The result is a space that encourages linger, exploration, and repeat visitation, while deepening the visitor’s relationship with both wine and place. Architecture here is a tool to orchestrate presence and experience, reinforcing brand identity and enabling the natural emergence of loyalty, rather than prescribing specific actions or experiences.

THE NEXT EVOLUTION

The cellar door is at a turning point. The traditional model—transactional, structured, and bounded—is giving way to an approach that prioritises presence, dwell, and repeated engagement. Wirra Wirra’s café, MONA, and lessons from luxury retail demonstrate that the most enduring spaces are those that offer freedom, curiosity, and a quiet sense of welcome, while simultaneously immersing visitors in the identity of the brand.

This evolution is subtle but significant. It is not about menus, circulation, or sales technique—it is about recognising the power of place to foster connection, loyalty, and return. Wineries that embrace this perspective are not merely keeping pace; they are shaping the next generation of cellar doors—places where visitors linger, return, and form enduring relationships with both wine and place.

As wine regions consider the future of tourism, these insights carry wider implications. The cellar door is not an isolated point of sale; it is a cultural and spatial anchor. By prioritising presence, dwell, and immersive, brand-centred experiences, wineries can cultivate loyalty, encourage longer stays, and strengthen both winery and regional identity. In a landscape of increasing choice and fleeting attention, these qualities may well define the cellar doors—and regions—that thrive over the next decade.

FURTHER READING

S2 ARCHITECTS RESOURCES

Cellar Door & Brand Immersion E Book – Practical guidance on creating immersive cellar door experiences that encourage dwell, connection, and repeat visitation.

Available at: <https://www.s2architects.com.au/resources/>

ACADEMIC & INDUSTRY RESEARCH

Tourism & Place Attachment – Explores how attachment to place shapes visitor satisfaction and loyalty in tourism contexts.

Available at: <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0261517708000344>

Sensory Experience and Wine Tourism – Investigates how sensory engagement and authentic experiences contribute to memorable wine tourism visits and emotional connection.

Available at: <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0950329322001100>

Wine Tourism Motivations – Examines what drives wine tourists' behaviour, highlighting differences between first-time and repeat visits.

Available at: <https://digital.library.adelaide.edu.au/items/f9bee1e4-3402-482f-93de-3f6bf8662819>

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