

# Second Annual Vineyard of the Year

## Australia's Top 50 Vineyards

The pursuit of  
Wine quality  
Vine health  
Innovation  
Sustainability

**YOUNG  
GUN  
OF  
WINE**





## Brokenwood – Graveyard Vineyard, Hunter Valley Katrina Barry

The Graveyard Vineyard is one of this country's most significant. It's mature enough, at a little over 50 years, though that's not particularly old in this country's oldest winegrowing region, the Hunter Valley. It's significant for its history, with James Halliday prominent among the three solicitors that first planted it, with the first harvest ferried by Len Evans' Bentley to the makeshift winery. And it's significant for what followed, with the Brokenwood 'Graveyard Vineyard' Shiraz becoming one of the towering icons of Australian wine. Today, the vineyard has become solely focused on shiraz, with viticulturist Katrina Barry taking the baton of vineyard manager from her father, managing the site with sustainability as a core value.

"The Graveyard Vineyard is just south of the winery on McDonalds Rd, Pokolbin," says Barry. "The climate is subtropical with dominant summer rainfall. There are 10 hectares under vine on a gentle east-facing slope, varying in age from the original old vine plantings from 1968 to the most recent plantings in 2009. It is planted entirely to shiraz, with the last chardonnay and cabernet being removed in 2005."

Barry all but grew up at Brokenwood, with her first serious forays amongst the vines beginning at the age of 12. Her late father, Keith or KB,

helped to plant the site in 1968, then going on to be the vineyard manager, a role he held for over two decades. Barry worked vintage alongside her father for 18 consecutive vintages, and in 2013 they shared the Viticulturist of the Year award at the Hunter Valley Legends and Wine Industry Awards.

"The Graveyard Vineyard is a unique site with a history of consistently producing highly acclaimed shiraz, and it's our duty to ensure it continues to produce wines of exceptional quality for generations to come," says Barry. "Wherever



possible, we incorporate sustainable management practices in the vineyard, including using minimal inputs. Being the next custodian of vines that my father spent the majority of his working life tending certainly keeps me focused on building on his legacy."

The Brokenwood winery and the Graveyard Vineyard are both registered as certified members of Sustainable Winegrowing Australia, and Barry has spent much of the last decade evolving vineyard practices to align with a sustainable ethos. That includes mulching and under-vine cultivation, along with midrow cover crops to improve soil life and organic matter, increase water-holding capacity and reduce soil temperature in the warm Hunter growing season.

"We're constantly looking at ways to do things better in the vineyard. I have had a strong focus on building soil and vine health," says Barry. "By installing moisture probes in the vineyard, we are able to much more accurately manage our water use. We only water the vines as required, and root zone porosity data enables us to plan around rain events and manage water more efficiently."

Wallaby grasses and other native plantings have also been established to enhance biodiversity and encourage beneficial insects. Microbat boxes are also soon to be established in these corridors, which will enhance the natural integrated pest management plan. Barry is also in the process of replanting vine material that never made the top grade, with the last block of lesser clonal material making way for massal selections (propagating cuttings from the best performing vines).

"The old vine blocks, which make up the heart of 'Graveyard Vineyard' Shiraz, are planted on top of the ridge of a gentle east-facing slope," says Barry. "The original vines, planted in 1968, were taken from cuttings from one of the original Mt Pleasant vineyards. Additional plantings were made though the mid 90s to PT23 and 1654 clones, which never made the grade in regard to quality. All subsequent planting during the 2000s were cuttings taken from the original old vines."

That last block to be replanted has also seen Barry change the row orientation to manage hotter seasons. It's an experiment that works in with other adaptive measures. "The biggest

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Annual plantings include oats and buster radishes as cover crops, with the radishes having large and deeply penetrating taproots that open up the soil for water and air penetration, while also helping to reduce compaction from machinery passes. "As the Graveyard Vineyard is planted on very heavy red clay, soil, compaction is an ongoing issue," says Barry. "Over the last few years, we have adjusted our midrow seed blend to include beneficial plants that naturally add nitrogen to the soil, build soil carbon and help to break up the clay and build organic matter in the soil."

challenge is planning ahead for a changing climate, which in the Hunter Valley can be challenging at the best of times," she says. "Adaptation and mitigation strategies are in place, such as the use of sunscreens to protect leaf vigour, enhancing biodiversity to promote vine health and resilience and managing our water usage. We also ensure that the vines have plenty of sub-soil moisture at the start of the season to ensure we are not needing to play catch up later in the season, when the weather is hotter and evaporation loss is greater."



And those strategies are paying off, and even in the most challenging seasons, with Barry working closely with the winemakers to produce the best fruit possible "I have great relationship with the winemaking team, and we work very closely throughout the year. My late father and I have long worked with Iain Riggs, and I carry this relationship on with Stuart Hordern and Kate Sturgess.

"While it is difficult to pinpoint one thing that I do that contributes to the final bottled product, I am particularly proud of the way we managed the vineyard during the drought. Through the use of mulch, compost, sunscreen and judicious irrigation, we are able to ensure we had sufficient canopy to both ripen and protect our fruit during hot spells. The result of this was there to be seen when the 2018 'Graveyard' Shiraz was named as James Halliday's Wine of the Year in 2020."

