

# A Vision of Perfection

Story and Images Marilyn Collins

Sited next door to the manicured green pastures of the legendary Coolmore and Darley thoroughbred stud is a thoroughbred winery which has had a long history and more recently an exciting new beginning showcasing the superb wines of the Upper Hunter Region. >



**H**ollydene Estate (the former Arrowfield Vineyard) is primely positioned on the hillside on the Golden Highway at Jerry's Plains, en route to Denman, Muswellbrook and further beyond to Dubbo. The estate is only one hour from Pokolbin and less than one and a half hours from Newcastle on the new expressway. It is well worth the drive up to experience a taste of difference.

The estate was once the largest producing vineyard in Australia and since the acquisition of Hollydene Wines, owned and operated by Karen Williams and family, the vineyard is now destined for a promising future.

Hollydene purchased the land and vineyard from Inagaki, one of Japan's foremost sake brewing groups. The Arrowfield brand name was not included in the sale, so Karen decided to carry on her 'Hollydene' and 'Hollydene-Wybong' names on the label.

At the time of purchase in 2011, the winery stood abandoned and stripped of all its wine production equipment and former restaurant equipment. While in Inagaki ownership, the vineyard was hit by a disastrous 1999 mid-vintage fire that destroyed the restaurant, cellar door outlet and 36,000 bottles of stored wine, and was completely shut down in 2010.

At a multi-million dollar cost, in the three years leading to the public rebranding of Hollydene Estate in February this year, Karen and her team have worked behind the scenes reviving the vines, some of which date back to 1969, and giving the building a major renovation and upgrading and creating extensive landscaping around the cellar door and restaurant building.

The existing Hollydene and Wybong Estate Vineyards are two of the oldest and most iconic vineyard estates in the Upper Hunter and combined with the Arrowfield acquisition provides Shiraz, Chardonnay, Semillon, Tempranillo, Sangiovese, Traminer and Verdelho grapes. Using grapes from all three vineyards and fruit brought in from the Mornington Peninsula and the Orange area, Karen Williams has assembled a portfolio of 19 table wines, with sparkling and liqueur varietals crafted together with her dynamic, young enthusiastic and new age, Pokolbin-based winemaker, Matt Burton.

"Although we live on the Central Coast, we have been firmly entrenched in the Hunter since 2005, starting out with two vineyards - Hollydene vineyard at Denman and Wybong Estate Vineyard, which are primarily grape producing vineyards complemented by commercial Angus cattle breeding. >





The range of premium wines sold under the Hollydene label is produced from low-yielding, very high-quality fruit originating from these three iconic vineyards. With the best environmental practices applied by the highly experienced viticulturists in producing grapes picked at optimum quality and flavour, the wines are traditionally produced and carefully cellared in Hollydene's world-class wine storage facilities.

The Williams have six children and eight grandchildren and their daughter Emma is Hollydene's business and administration manager. The couple lived in Muswellbrook before moving to the Central Coast, but retained a strong love of Hunter life, prompting Karen to begin the wine course at Kurri Kurri TAFE before acquiring the first vineyard in 2004.

Today, the complex boasts a modern and welcoming tasting room and cellar door with a separate spacious dining restaurant and function room called Vines, operated by Czech-born chef Pepa Hanus and his wife, Laura. The creation of a casual alfresco dining area and flowing lawns adds to the ambience of the entire vineyard.

Central Coast designer, Susan Simmons of The Essential Detail Australia, was engaged to firstly consult on the Hollydene Estate project with the Karen and Gary and saw the challenge as an exciting project. The couple's brief was to bring the property back to life and make it feel welcoming.

"On my first visit, I was overwhelmed with possibilities, as the view was breathtaking and the bones of the structure were there but there was no focus on the beautiful (and huge) timber beams, the height and size of the rooms and, most importantly, the view," Susan said.

After many meetings and visits to Hollydene, its true character began to be revealed. Susan's first job was to update the very tired bathrooms. Old black-and-white pictures of an elderly nonna (Italian grandmother) and nonno (Italian grandfather) workers picking in a vineyard hang in the female and male bathrooms respectively, to contrast with the modern design of the rooms.

When it came to the exterior, Susan sent Karen some bold choices of colours. The final selections were made to accentuate the existing exposed timber whilst adding warmth and interest, creating a great end result.

"I am a firm believer that the right lighting is critical, so a lot of care and thought was put into the lighting plan, with the aim to once again highlight the beautiful timber beams," said Susan.

Talented Medowie-based blacksmith, Renè Rassmussen of Cosy Iron Design, created beautiful, ornate vine chandeliers that grace both the Cellar Door and The Vines restaurant. These are oversize and took many weeks to build but the result is ample reward for his effort.

The landscaping was addressed, and on this project Hollydene is fortunate to have Tony Merta, property manager, and its team of farm employees and families working for them. Tony's natural artistry found ways to turn the vision into reality. One of those ideas was the horseshoe ball in the fountain. A great many hours were spent by Tony to produce not one, but two of these wonderful fountains, which are a standout feature of the alfresco dining space.

Susan said, "Sourcing the correct furnishings for both the Cellar Door and the Vines restaurant was a challenge, given the size of the area. I wanted to separate both areas into rooms so it could be used for a multitude of options, from board meetings to private functions, weddings or just a casual getaway.

The concept was designed so guests could feel that they could curl up on one of the lounges, share a glass of wine and enjoy the ambience of the place. This philosophy was high on the agenda for the owners. "We wanted to create a venue where anyone can come here wearing riding boots straight off the farm for a meal and business people could have a meeting place. We also planned for weddings and formal functions in which everyone could enjoy the ambience and relax," says Karen.

"I wanted a family-friendly atmosphere where parents could relax over a wine or meal and have their children safely play on the massive lawns or sit in the amphitheatre-style seating on the front lawn or in a comfy chair under the shady trees."

Wine tastings too are a leisurely affair. "As we are a destination vineyard for most people we welcome wine tasters to sit at the bar stools and relax and enjoy the wines," said cellar door manager Trudy Merta. "We have beer on tap for those patrons wanting to enjoy a cool ale when having a meal served in high-end pilsener glasses to match the wine glasses." >



A feature of the Vines Restaurant is a massive ornate mirror which was sourced from one of Susan's many unusual suppliers. It is over 200-years-old and originally came from Mexico.

"It was very nerve -wracking watching the Central Coast builders, Beachside Builders, who undertook most of the detailed internal and exterior works, install this large and heavy mirror," she recalled.

The detail was in the design of both the Vines Restaurant, bar area and cellar door display. Central Coast joiner, Tim Corlett of TCDC Wise, was able to build with the natural timbers an extremely practical design which had to be a showcase for the Estate's beautiful wines. Tony Merta, along with his brother, created a superb timber roof feature above the cellar door bar using historic turpentine from Goat Island in Sydney Harbour, hardwood timber which he then hand milled, creating a point of difference.

The polished concrete floors throughout the cellar door and restaurant were created by Diagrind, a concrete and polishing company. The name 'Hollydene' was embossed into the floor of the cellar door and the Vine logo into the entrance of the restaurant.

Even the counter tops have embossed filigree designs of grapevines and an intricate lace pattern reminiscent of a crocheted doily from yesteryear. It is such attention to detail that takes time to discover and really makes a point of difference.

Every trade that worked on this project says it will always be one of which they are extremely proud to be part of.

The outside landscaping was the work of Nature's Vision, with Hollydene's gardener Louise Moore, and again Tony's work with solid timbers originating from the historic Bowman's Bridge at Jerry's Plains and some from Goat Island, Sydney to create that country air of authenticity when mixed with corrugated iron.

The casual tables are solid-concrete topped, mixed with casual-style cane chairs. It is here that patrons can sit under umbrellas and enjoy an alfresco coffee, breakfast or lunch especially on a weekend when it is so popular.

The ambience of the vineyard is superb; from the moment you enter the front gate, along the white iceberg standard rose-lined driveway into the car park you can appreciate the peaceful ambience of green lawns and stunning gardens.

The cellar door is open seven days between 10am and 4pm. The Vines Restaurant is open seven days (Monday to Sunday) for morning coffees, lunch, afternoon teas, and tapas and dinner on Friday and Saturday. Weekend breakfasts are very popular, so bookings are recommended. Private functions and weddings can be arranged by appointment, catering for upwards of 150 guests. 📞

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*Hollydene Estate - 3483 Golden Highway, Jerry's Plains.  
Phone: 1300 855 061, or visit: [www.hollydene.com.au](http://www.hollydene.com.au).*

*Interior Designer: Susan Simmons,  
The Essential Detail Australia.*

*Chandeliers: Cosy Iron Design*

*Polished Floors: Diagrind*

*Accommodation: Retreat Homestead*