



Winery cellar doors

Matakana wineries offering tastings by appointment or website/mail order options only are listed at the end of the cellar-door profiles. Wineries offering vineyard accommodation only are also noted.

Ascension Wine Estate

480 Matakana Rd, Matakana, ph: 09-422 9601, www.ascensionwine.co.nz

Cellar door 7 days 10am-5pm

Oak Grill Bistro 7 days 11am-4pm and
Fri-Sat dinner (Easter to Labour
Weekend closed Tues-Wed)

Ascension, dominant on its prime site just north of Warkworth on the main road to Omaha and Leigh, boldly announces that you have arrived in Matakana wine country. With its substantial Spanish mission-style buildings, nestled below north-facing

vineyards, Ascension is a popular destination for diners and wine lovers alike. The bistro menu, built around locally sourced ingredients, celebrates the connection between wine and food to the extent that even the wood chips used in the grill come from wine casks.

Allow plenty of time for the staff to lead you through a tasting of wines from an extensive range that includes Sauvignon Blanc, Viognier, Chardonnay and Riesling, before introducing the selection of Bordeaux-style reds, paramount

among which is the Epiphany Matakana Pressings, a Merlot-based blend made only in the best years.

The wines are very approachable and consistent, but the great revelation of an Ascension encounter is the level of innovation that owners Darryl and Bridget Soljan strive to achieve. Their mantra, applied to all aspects of the Ascension experience, is "Daring to Be Different". To this end they host regular wine and food dinners, and harvest festivals, as well as music and poetry events, taking every opportunity to bring wine into the lives of as many people as possible.

In addition to the tasting facilities and the Oak Grill Bistro, Ascension has a well-appointed function centre, The Belfry. Ample parking, child-friendly facilities and the wonderfully hospitable atmosphere make this an essential stop.

Brick Bay Wines & Sculpture Trail

Arabella Lane (off Mahurangi East Rd), Snells Beach, ph: 09-425 4690,

www.brickbay.co.nz,

www.brickbaysculpture.co.nz

Cellar door 7 days 10am-5pm



No one who has experienced the Brick Bay cellar door and Sculpture Trail would argue that it is a New Zealand cultural showpiece. Christine and Richard Didsbury have created a unique experience that combines their two great loves - wine and art - and does full justice to both.

The start point is The Glass House, a sensational glass pavilion set over a lake, where you can taste Brick Bay wines, enjoy made-on-the-premises platters and take advantage of the hospitality dished out by the friendly staff, who will share their passion for the wines or give you information about the Sculpture Trail.

The Brick Bay range, by winemaker Anthony Ivicevich, is modest in size but exceptional in quality. The Pinot Gris is a wonderful rendition, the Cabernet Merlot Franc a complex and sophisticated blend and the Pharos, made in exceptional vintages, is a great example of the winemaking art.

In The Glass House you are surrounded by the family's commitment to quality and an intriguing sculpture floating in the lake might catch the eye and tempt you to walk the trail. You may see viticulturist daughter Anna hand-

tending the growth in the vineyard, and if you're lucky, Jazz, her gorgeous Hungarian vizsla, will be your guide dog around the property.

Brick Bay is a drawcard for travellers, art lovers, wine devotees and the simply curious, which means you will hear accents, languages and opinions from all around the world.

To fully experience Brick Bay, and at the same time appreciate the work of some of New Zealand's greatest artists set among beautiful native bush, take a couple of hours to sip, savour and stroll.

Contour Estate Vineyards

139 Takatu Rd, Matakana, ph: 09-423 0002, www.contourestate.co.nz
Cellar door Nov-Mar Sat-Sun
 & public holidays 11am-4.30pm

Contour Estate is a small, family owned vineyard and winery run by owners Bruce and Linsey-Ann Taylor. It is perched impressively on the northern slopes of the Takatu Peninsula on the main road to the Tawharanui Peninsula, about three kilometres from Matakana. The first vines were planted in 2004 after 10 years of research into the country's best areas (soil and climate) for a premium Syrah vineyard/winery.

Matakana was chosen as an up-and-coming wine region, for its close proximity to Auckland, its red, iron-rich clay loams and its temperate maritime climate, and today Contour Estate is an established specialist producer of quality Syrah.

The tasting room is set up in the heart of the winery among the tanks. Here, Bruce and Linsey-Ann – who are also the winemakers – will talk to you about the winemaking processes, and show you the traditional winemaking equipment imported from Italy and the barrel room where the next vintage is stored.

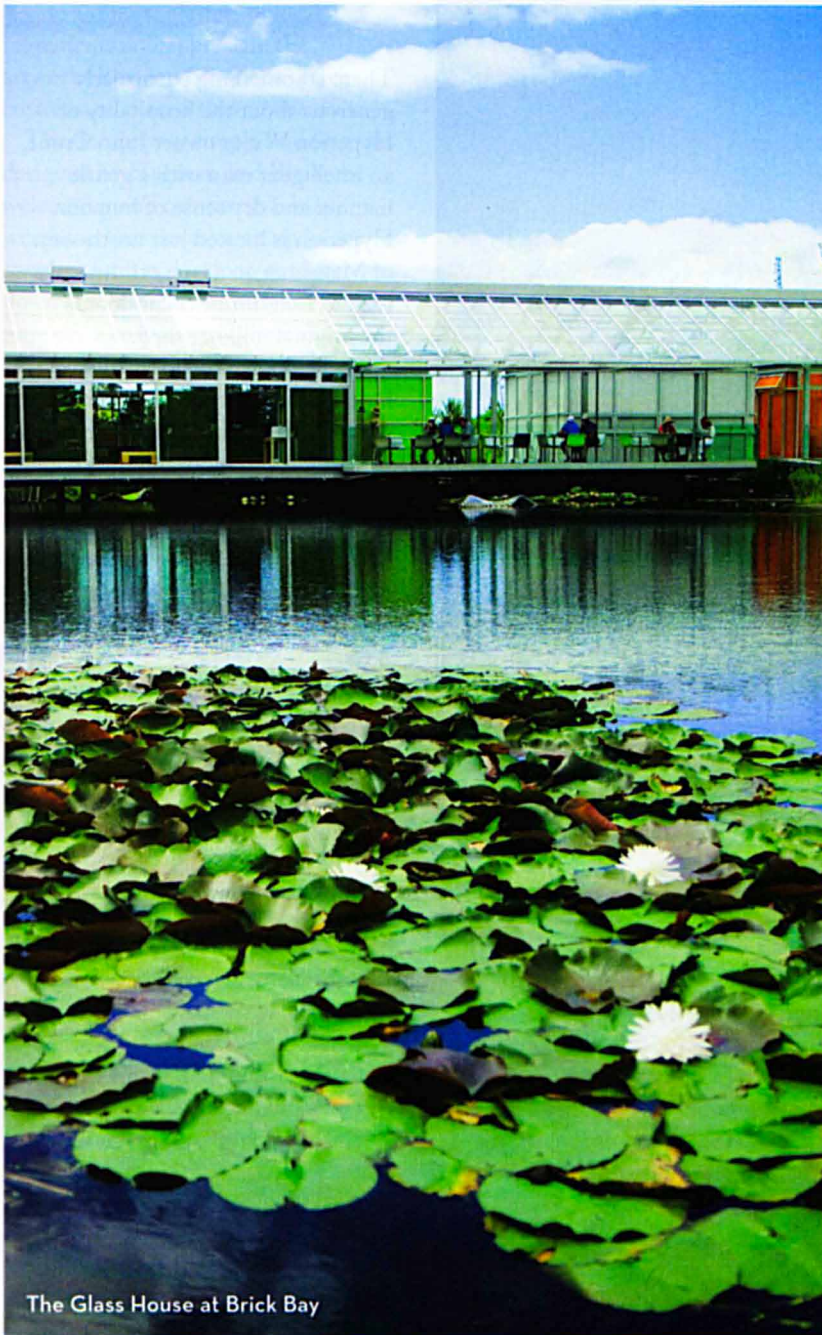
Heron's Flight Vineyard

49 Sharp Rd, Matakana, ph: 09-422 7915, www.heronflight.co.nz
Cellar door 7 days 10am-5pm
Heron's Flight Vineyard Restaurant
 7 days 10am-11pm; winter Sun-Wed
 10am-4pm, Thu-Sat 10am-11pm

Even if you have visited Heron's Flight on previous journeys to Matakana, plan to stop there again. More recent developments mean there is now a large and impressive restaurant, well-appointed tasting facilities and a truly wonderful wine library, housing a collection of old and rare New Zealand wines.

Situated high on a hill, overlooking an impressive culinary garden in the foreground and rural heartland in the distance, Heron's Flight is a bright, spacious, eclectic space that closely

KIERAN SCOTT



The Glass House at Brick Bay