

A LASTING LEGACY

Kelli Brett takes a deep look behind one of New Zealand's most iconic wineries.



It's hard to imagine the logistics involved in pulling off an intimate and relaxed affair for a group of more than 1,600 zealous wine-obsessed – and by association food-obsessed – merrymakers without a single hitch, but that's exactly what unfolded on 9 November at the Craggy Range Deep Purple Day 2024. It's an annual event that is highly anticipated by the brand's Prestige Wine Club members and one that made me wonder why I had never taken a close look at the story behind this iconic New Zealand winery that holds sense of place, family ties and custodianship firmly in focus every step of the way.

Masterclasses, live music, superb wine tastings and a herculean snack menu – which dished up more than 24,000 individual tastes of Hawke's Bay

and surrounds – were showcased across the magnificent sprawling estate set beneath the majestic lines of Te Mata Peak, just south of Havelock North.

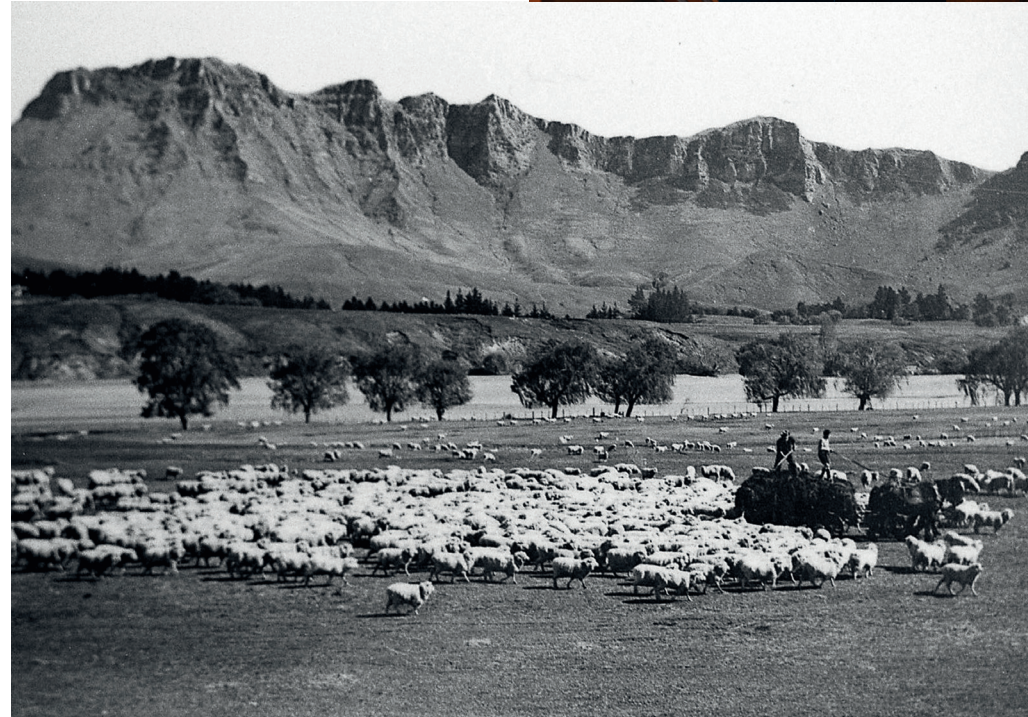
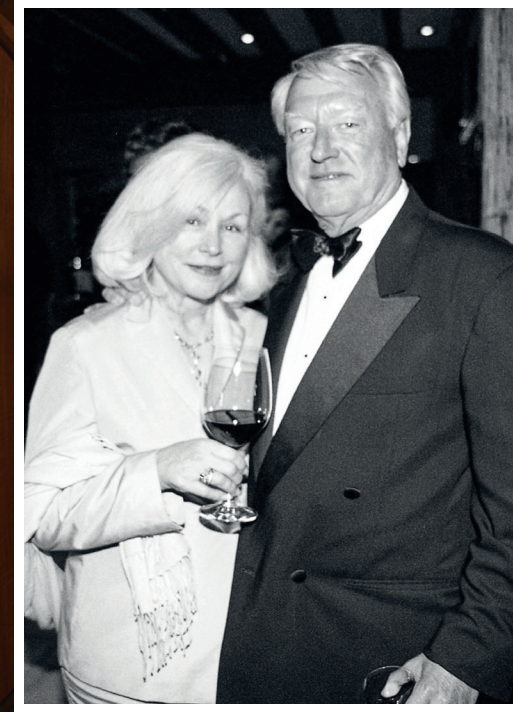
After an afternoon of sophisticated revelry, I settled in for a Q&A presented by Craggy Range board member Aaron Drummond who, with Director Mary-Jeanne Hutchinson (MJ) and Executive Director David T. Peabody, looked back from this, their 25th vintage.

Now 25 years may not sound like a huge milestone when you think about the age of many vineyards around the world, but with four generations of their family now walking and working their land in Hawke's Bay and Martinborough, it is a tribute to Terry and Mary Peabody to see that their desire from day one – to create an estate that would proudly sit alongside the world's greatest – has been realised within their lifetime.

In fact, it was a privilege to watch Mary and Terry get into the thick of this retrospective discussion; it almost felt like taking a seat at the Peabody family table as Mary and Terry (known in the family as Gyn and Poppy) dispensed informative gems and nuggets throughout.

After Mary and Terry Peabody eloped from the USA to Australia in 1965, they looked toward a future built within the world of cement, trucks and waste management as Terry built business interests that extended back to the USA and through Canada, Europe, Asia, New Zealand and Australia. But it was Mary and 22-year-old Mary-Jeanne who later began a family conversation that shifted the business focus to something that they could all love and be involved in. As a result, and after a search for the perfect location across top winegrowing regions of the world, Craggy Range was founded in 1998.

OPPOSITE PAGE TOP Mary-Jeanne Hutchinson (MJ), David T. Peabody & Aaron Drummond at the Craggy Range Deep Purple Day 2024; the winery's official opening 25 January 2003
CENTRE Craggy Range Deep Purple Day 2024; chief winemaker Ben Tombs; owners Mary & Terry Peabody at the winery opening in 2003
BOTTOM The Craggy Range winery site in the early 20th century; Lady June Hillary & Sir Edmund Hillary at the 2003 opening



“The wine business needs a great deal of patience. Many large vineyards think in five year cycles; we budgeted for the first ten years to lose money and we did a great job of it!” Terry says. In their eleventh year they started to turn a profit and picking the right distributor in the US premium wine market was key. “It was a long road to get there, but you won’t now meet many restaurant owners or serious wine lovers in the US that don’t recognise our brand.” He attributes this impressive chunk of their global sales to making an early decision that turned out to be a good one: the strong relationship built with a leading fine-wine importer based in New York. There is a takeaway here for all of us in the business of developing and maintaining a brand: we can produce the most magnificent product, service or (in our case) content in the world, but if we don’t have the right logistics in place to get it in front of the people who will value it most, we are not going to stay in the business for long.

In the early days, their Martinborough sauvignon blanc was king and with the recent announcement that their 2023 Te Muna Sauvignon Blanc has been named number 11 in *Wine Spectator’s*

prestigious ‘Top 100 Wines of 2024’, it is safe to say that their SB will still hold a place in many hearts. But the Craggy Range brand now draws the eyes of international buyers towards New Zealand in search of world-class pinot noirs, chardonnays, syrahs and Bordeaux varieties, collectively building an enthusiastic palate for our premium-wine story. David T. Peabody notes that despite New Zealand delivering some of the best value in the world the price of our fine wine remains stagnant, saying “New Zealand offers unparalleled price-to-quality wine and deserves recognition alongside the renowned regions of the Old World.” Looking back, he says that building a family legacy was one of the driving factors for choosing the wine industry and New Zealand. “We believe that the future is here and it all stays firmly within this land.” The formation of a 1000-year trust cements a legacy where no assets can be sold or disposed of outside of the family, which fosters a determination to get it right and avoid problems being handed on to future generations.

When talking about their two-hatted winery restaurant – originally conceived by Mary Peabody who wanted to create a beautiful setting

in which to share a memorable meal with friends and family – she admits that Terry used to write the original menu and include a lot of pork chops. Mary-Jeanne says that although these days Terry has no influence when it comes to the menu, the restaurant is at the heart of their business of connecting people to place. Under the outstanding direction of executive chef Casey McDonald, the restaurant was awarded 2024 Winery Restaurant of the Year at the Cuisine Good Food Awards and also picked up Best Restaurant and the Supreme Award at the 2024 Hospitality New Zealand Awards, further solidifying its status as one of New Zealand’s top dining and hospitality destinations.

Combine all of these accolades with the exciting news that Craggy Range Winery is the first New Zealand winery to be named a global winner for Food and Wine Country Hawke’s Bay in the prestigious 2025 Best Of Wine Tourism Awards – part of the Great Wine Capitals global network – and is recognised as an exceptional experience at an international level for its contributions to wine tourism, and I’d say the legacy is in super-safe hands for many generations of this visionary family. ■

“WE BELIEVE THAT THE FUTURE IS HERE AND
IT ALL STAYS FIRMLY WITHIN THIS LAND.”

