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**Seeking a Competitive Advantage in Wine Tourism:**
**Heritage and Storytelling at the Cellar Door**

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**Abstract:**

The nature of the cellar-door experience varies between wineries and regions. While the literature has identified heritage, storytelling and authenticity as important concepts regarding interaction with tourists at the cellar-door, there is a need to understand how they are operationalised by winery staff, including their strategic objectives. This article aims to explore how New World wineries are using their heritage to engage with tourists at their cellar-doors. The approach is qualitative, based on long semi-structured phenomenological interviews with eleven representatives of south-eastern Australia wineries to understand their lived experience. Findings suggest that the cellar-door represents an important opportunity to reinforce heritage branding and differentiate the winery from its competitors. Different forms of heritage were emphasised by participants, including family and

ethnic heritage. Storytelling was seen as a useful strategy to engage with tourists and the importance of authenticity, both intrinsic and existential, was emphasised as a means of competitive advantage.

**Keywords: storytelling; wine tourism; heritage; cultural landscape; authenticity; cellar-door**

## 1. Introduction

Unlike most other agricultural products, wine is distinguished and valued for its provenance. It gains its consumer appeal from its geographic origin, individual stories and lineages. The different grapes, how they are blended, the winescape, the region, the methods used and the family and ethnic history of the winemakers and growers vary from winery to winery, providing individual nuances to the stories that may be told to consumers and visitors. This may add to their authenticity, both in an objective sense and in how visitors value how 'real' their experience was at the winery. Heritage and authenticity may therefore be vital ingredients in the marketing of wine and wine tourism, providing competitive advantages in a crowded global marketplace (Harvey, White and Frost, 2014; Peters, 1997).

A number of studies have argued that the heritage of wineries could be the basis for future tourism development. Dunstan (1990) presented a case for heritage protection for 19th century wineries of Australia, arguing that they had the potential for attracting tourists, while Getz and Brown (2006) interviewed wine industry professionals in the USA and Australia, who identified 'preserving local architecture and heritage sites' as a key feature of top wine regions (2006, p. 155). Similarly, a study of the sustainability of wine tourism in Canada's Okanagan Valley argued that 'there is great potential for development of heritage attractions, focussing on … agricultural history and settlement patterns, and creating interpretive sites' (Poitras and Getz, 2006, p. 440). There is however a paucity of research about how wineries seek to incorporate heritage into the visitor experience, from the

operator's perspective.

In particular, more research is needed to examine the *cellar-door* as the focal point for this strategic activity. Dodd (1995) argued that there were five advantages for wineries in developing a cellar-door for wine tourists. Consumers can try before they buy and loyalty is built through telling brand stories, which may include details of the winery's history. The winery is not paying a mark-up to a retailer and it becomes an additional sales outlet. It also assists in the gaining of marketing intelligence, through feedback from customers. This exploratory study, however, saw cellar-door interactions primarily in terms of their marketing potential.

Charters, Fountain and Fish (2009) went further, arguing that cellar-doors, which are typically in rural areas, should be aesthetically pleasing and have 'character'. Their interviews with visitors revealed that, 'the distinctive character, some suggested … should reflect the identity of the winery and the winemaker' (2009, p. 126). In terms of the experience, they considered how 'real' this was and, 'there was complete agreement that the type of experience offered at the smaller wineries was significantly different from that offered at the larger wineries and, in a large majority of cases, was a more enjoyable and memorable experience' (2009, p. 127). This was because the small wineries were seen as intimate, artisanal and unrushed, whereas participants at the larger wineries felt they were in a production line. This suggested that existential forms of authenticity (Wang, 1999) may be factors in the success of a cellar-door, associated with the personal stories that were being told, as well as the time that was taken to build relationships with visitors. Building on this work, Chen, Bruwer, Cohen and Goodman (2016) argued that the cellar-door is much more than a retail outlet. They noted that 'visitors expect an experience that transcends the simple purchase of a bottle of wine' and that 'wine purchasing decisions depend not only on the quality of the wine they purchase, but also on the service and environment of the cellar-door they are visiting' (p. 78). Both these studies by Charters et al. (2009) and Chen et al. (2016) focus on the tourist experience. They argue

that a strategic approach is needed in order to use cellar-doors more effectively; however, further research is needed to understand this process in more depth, from the operational side. The use of storytelling notably requires more exploration, as well as the role of authenticity in the way stories are presented to visitors.

Our aim in this article is therefore to explore how wineries are using their heritage to engage with tourists at their cellar-doors through storytelling. In doing so, we use a broad definition of heritage, following Timothy and Boyd (2003, p.4) – 'heritage is not simply the past, but the modern-day use of elements of the past'. This includes tangible and intangible heritage, as well as different forms of heritage such as industrial heritage, family heritage, ethnic heritage and place heritage (Timothy and Boyd, 2003). We similarly adopted a definition of authenticity following Wang (1999) that recognises both objective and existential forms of authenticity. Our approach is qualitative, based on a phenomenological study involving long semi-structured interviews with representatives of wineries in south east Australia. In examining how they seek to gain a competitive advantage through this strategy, we explore issues of how tourist-winery interaction is encouraged by staff, the construction of heritage, the use of storytelling when engaging with tourists and perceptions of authenticity, all from the perspective of the winery.

This research is important given the role of the cellar-door appears to differ in three ways between the Old World (Europe) and the New World (USA, Australia, South Africa etc). First, wine tourism experiences in the Old World typically occur in small towns and villages. In contrast, tourism with respect to New World wineries mainly takes place at a cellar-door that is in close proximity to the vineyards of the winery (Mitchell, Charters and Albrecht, 2012). Second, New World cellar-doors may provide a range of ancillary experiences involving food sales and consumption, crafts and wine-related promotional goods that function to attract visitors and provide additional revenue (Charters, 2009). Third, many New World wineries, while seeking to develop export markets, still

rely heavily on domestic consumers. The cellar-door is an effective way to reach them and build brand awareness and loyalty in a highly crowded marketplace (Quintal, Thomas and Phau, 2015). This suggests that research centred on cellar-doors may have particular resonance in a New World context.

## 2. Literature Review

### *2.1. Wineries and Place Heritage*

Heritage in a wine tourism setting is often understood as taking place within a landscape layered with culture and meaning. Peters (1997) coined the term *winescape* to describe: 'The winsome combination of vineyards, wineries, and supporting activities necessary for modern wine production, [which] yields regions that offer sojourners and dwellers alike a certain charm – a warm ambience, a memorable experience of place – not found in most other agricultural landscapes' (p. 124). This conceptualisation of place with respect to wine makes a subtle allusion to mythologies of rurality (Williams, 2001; Getz and Brown, 2006). Interestingly, Peters' definition does not overtly mention the connection with heritage or the importance of stories for the winescape. Mitchell, Charters and Albrecht (2012) extended the concept of winescapes, arguing for a *cultural systems approach* in order to 'uncover the complexities buried within the landscape and to look in detail at the dialogue between humans and the environment' (p. 332). They compared the wine regions of Champagne (France) and Margaret River (Australia) and noted the importance of the village in France as the site of production and wine tourism, with the vineyard performing a similar function in Australia. While they discuss the myth of the rural idyll as a source of attraction for visitors to wine regions and refer to the connection between wine and community heritage, it is only a small element of their examination of the cultural systems at play. The link between place and stories is similarly not the central focus of their work. More recently, Quintal et al. (2015) framed their study of New World

winescapes in Australia and the United States using the theory of planned behaviour, in order to examine the behavioural intentions of wine tourists. They noted the importance of heritage artefacts and architecture for "winescape atmospherics" (p. 602) but did not consider in detail the nexus between place heritage and storytelling.

Several studies have explored the marketing of place heritage in connection with the Central Otago wine region of New Zealand. Fountain and Dawson (2014) conducted an analysis of marketing material and branding of the region, including winery labels and winery names, supplemented by interviews with winery stakeholders and participant observation. They highlighted the importance of place for winery branding, including topographical features, and argued that 'place and heritage are inexorably linked' (p. 54) in the brand stories presented to consumers and winery visitors. Aspects of *terroir* are also referred to, a French concept which 'refers not only to the unique combination of soils, climate and topography of wine producing regions, but also to the cultural resources and heritage of the region' (p. 45). It was noted that 'place-marketing efforts … often include information about the local winemakers and history of winemaking in the region – the *human* dimension of terroir' (p. 45), which can form the basis of narratives of place. Thus 'the past becomes a resource' (p. 45) for branding. While they noted the usage of pioneering stories as a form of heritage branding, they did not examine in depth the ways in which these stories were conveyed by cellar-door staff. Dawson, Fountain and Cohen (2011) also refer to place marketing based on heritage as a point of difference, where it involves unique stories: 'Such stories may serve as a source of building an emotional connection between the winery, the region, and the visitor, which may lead to brand loyalty' (p. 5). They interview winery owners and winery stakeholders, and identify the use of stories linked to place at the cellar-door. There is scope however for a more detailed analysis of the process of storytelling by cellar-door staff.

### *2.2.Storytelling*

Dodd (1995) saw that one of the advantages of hosting tourists at the cellar-door was that the winery was able to tell historical stories and thereby develop brand engagement and loyalty. This accords with the concept of 'heritage brands', where with careful 'brand stewardship', a company's heritage could 'be harnessed and employed as a strategic resource' making it 'a key component of its brand identity and positioning' and providing opportunities to communicate persuasive stories to potential customers (Urde, Greyser and Balmer, 2007, pp. 5-6). Going further, some wineries will seek to establish 'brand love', where 'the emotional bond that wine brands form with their customers is a key differentiator in defending against competitors'. This brand love can be encouraged through 'positive experiences at winery visits … and the sharing of history' as part of a 'strategy to imbue a sense of connectedness to the wine brand so that consumers feel that they are an extension of the brand itself' (Drennan *et al.*, 2015, p. 54). Reinforcing the commercial importance of heritage branding, Harvey, White and Frost (2014) argued that wine is linked with identity and that this arises from the inter-connections between branding, heritage and terroir.

Recent research has examined how tourism attractions and destinations are using *storytelling* to engage with tourists, create memorable experiences and emphasise authenticity. Chronis (2005) argued that this storytelling often involved *co-creation* between guides and tourists, for 'during the experience of following, listeners constantly fill narrative gaps, re-contextualize the narrative events in terms of their own experiences, and actively engage their imaginations' (p. 389). Considering a museum for Coca-Cola, Hollenbeck, Peters and Zinkhan (2008) observed that the staff were encouraged not only to tell stories, but to encourage visitors to share their personal stories and experiences. They found that at this museum 'employees help shape the meaning and significance of the brand in the same way docents shape the meaning and significance of art in a traditional museum' (p. 349). Other studies have examined how story-telling has been used effectively in terms of luxury hotels (Ryu, Lehto, Gordon and Fu, 2018) and restaurants (Mossberg and Eide, 2017;

Youn and Kim, 2017). While such ideas seem highly relevant to wineries and wine tourism, they have not yet been applied by researchers in this context.

### *2.3. Authenticity*

This use of authenticity by wineries may be tied into more general discussions in the broader tourism literature. Wang (1999) distinguishes between object-related authenticity and *existential authenticity*. The latter arises from activities and results in the tourist feeling more closely related to their *true* self. Of particular relevance to the cellar-door is Wang's concept of *inter-personal authenticity*, where positive internal feelings are developed through interaction with staff and other tourists.

Recent research has highlighted the importance of authenticity in rural tourism. Comparing agri-tourism ventures in Austria and Norway, Daugstad and Kirchengast (2013) distinguished between cafes and shops as *frontstage* tourism experiences and tours and informal access to on-farm production sites as *backstage* experiences that were perceived as more authentic in allowing tourists to slip into a normally off-limits environment. Whilst their cases were primarily of dairy production, such characterisation is easily applied to wine tourism, with cellar-doors as the frontstage. In a study of food tourism in England's Lake District, Sims found that many of her respondents sought to 'experience a more authentic sense of self' (2009, p. 325). This was based on the combination of a romanticised view of rurality and a rejection of food that came in plastic and was microwaveable. Examining Norwegian commercial farm tourism, Frisvoll considered 'to what extent do the producers see authenticity as the product' (2013, p. 279). He found differences depending on the nature of the tourism product. As such:

> at Heritage Farm ''real' was seen to reside in the buildings, their original location and the traditional food served, while at the Folk Museum 'real' was seen to dwell in the certified buildings and artefacts as well as the professional staging of the displays ... [whereas] Goat Farm's authentic ruralness was seen by its hosts to reside in their agricultural practices and

> in the integration of the host's own life as a farmer with the tourism product (Frisvoll, 2013, pp. 284-5).

In these agri-tourism examples, it is the backstage production area that is characterised as authentic, whereas the frontstage sales area is not considered as authentic. Such a view poses problems for wine tourism, where the emphasis is usually on the cellar-door as the setting for interactions with tourists. Furthermore, modern hygiene and safety regulations have reduced the availability of tours of production facilities. Frisvoll's (2013) study also suggests that the construction and experience of heritage and authenticity rests in part on the perceptions and practices of the producers and intermediaries. It would be useful to explore this finding in other tourism contexts.

In contrast to this broad interest in authenticity, there has only been a limited exploration of the concept within wine tourism. Beverland (2005) found that combining region, history and culture were important for creating the appropriate sense of authenticity. He argued that history was used differently in Australia and New Zealand in comparison to Europe, as the New World wineries:

> placed a greater emphasis on their pioneering history, focussing on how they were first to pioneer a regional style and/ or varietal of wine. Others often told 'rags to riches' stories of immigrant families, while others told stories of 'beating the odds', or 'taking on the world and winning', which were myths celebrated widely in both countries … Authenticity was communicated through heritage and links with past events (2005, p. 1022).

Furthermore, interviews with winemakers identified attributes of authenticity that were seen as influencing wine tourists. These included using place or terroir as a referent, emphasising tradition and providing sincere and passionate stories. Combining these elements was important in providing assurances to wine tourists about the reliability, value and quality of individual wineries and regions (Beverland, 2006). These findings were echoed by Brown and Getz (2005). They argued that some tourists were engaged in a 'search for authenticity, often manifested in seeing the actual grapes, physical plant, and personnel that produced favored wines' (Brown and Getz, 2005, p. 269). Importantly, these studies did not focus on the cellar-door as the place for authenticity. There appears to be potential to explore this issue further in that context.

## 3. Research Questions

While the literature has identified heritage, story-telling and authenticity as important concepts regarding interaction with tourists at the cellar-door, detailed research has been limited. Furthermore, research into the cellar-door has tended to take the form of studies focussed on motivations and service encounters (e.g. Charters *et al*., 2009; Chen *et al*., 2016). There is a need to extend this research further through the use of qualitative methods, drilling down deeper into some of the issues identified by these earlier studies. The perspective of the wineries remains under-researched at present.

Based on our review of the literature, the following research questions have been identified that form the basis of this study:

1. How is heritage incorporated by winery staff into the representations of the winery via the cellar-door experience?
2. What are the key features of the stories that are told to tourists?
3. Do wineries consider authenticity to be an important part of this heritage, story-telling and broader cellar-door experience?

## 4. Methodology

For this research, the paradigm adopted was *interpretivist*, which facilitates the exploratory search for *embedded meaning*, whereby the researchers aim to put themselves in the shoes of the interviewees in order to find out their experiences and opinions on the topic and allow their voices to be heard (Creswell, 2013; Miles and Huberman, 1994). Interpretivism is a worldview that looks for 'the complexity of views rather than narrow the meanings into a few categories or ideas'

(Creswell, 2013, p. 24) and privileges 'the participants' view of the situation' (ibid, p. 25).

Phenomenology was used to explore the *lived experiences* of the interviewees (Szarycz, 2009), who all held management roles within wineries. Phenomenological studies commonly involve long semi-structured interviews with small numbers of people with detailed experience and knowledge of the same subject or phenomenon (Szarycz, 2009). It is an approach that elucidates what the experience of the phenomenon was from the perspective of the participant so that its essence can be distilled (Creswell, 2013). Interviews are typically the main method used to collect phenomenological data. It was important for the researchers to set aside their own interests in and knowledge of the subject-matter of the research, following the Husserlian phenomenological tradition; a process known as *bracketing* in phenomenology (Creswell, 2013; Szarycz, 2009), in order to be open to what the participants were saying. This was relatively straightforward, in that none of the research team had worked in the wine industry or had preconceived ideas of the study findings. It also added to the trustworthiness of the findings (Tracy, 2010).

Two classes of winery were identified that were considered to be heritage wineries. The first were wineries that had commenced operations between 1840 and 1914, which corresponds to the first historical period of winery expansion in Australia. After 1914, winery expansion stalled in Australia until the 1960s. The second were wineries that emphasised a family history of winemaking dating back a number of generations in their marketing, even if that particular winery was only established in more recent times. The study was limited to selected wine regions in Victoria and South Australia. The use of these criteria led to the identification of 13 wineries, which represented about 10% of wineries with cellar-doors in the study area. These were approached and asked to provide an interviewee who was knowledgeable about the winery's cellar-door operations. These interviewees would, 'purposefully inform an understanding of the research problem and central phenomenon of the study' (Creswell, 2013, p. 156). Of the 13 approached, one declined and one did not respond.

Accordingly, 11 interviews were conducted, which is consistent with the methodological approach.

All participants were *elite interviewees*, being 'people who are especially knowledgeable … commonly in positions of authority or power by virtue of their experience and understanding' (Gilham, 2007, p. 55). The identities of the wineries and the participants have been de-identified, with each participant designated an anonymous code of P1, P2 etc. This approach encouraged participants to be open and honest with their responses and opinions. Anonymity is important in studies where a range of elite participants are involved as it avoids embarrassment, conflict within organisations and the tendency to simply follow an organisation or company's official position (Gillham, 2007). Table 1 contains a summary of background information about the participants such as their role/position within their organisation and the state in which they are based, which can be supplied without compromising anonymity.

Table 1: Participants

| Participant Number | Role/Position Within Winery | State |
|---|---|---|
| P1 | Marketing Manager | Victoria |
| P2 | Cellar-Door Manager | Victoria |
| P3 | Owner | Victoria |
| P4 | Cellar-Door Manager | Victoria |
| P5 | Marketing Manager | Victoria |
| P6 | Marketing Manager | Victoria |
| P7 | Winemaker | South Australia |
| P8 | Owner | South Australia |
| P9 | Owner | Victoria |

| P10 | Owner | Victoria |
| --- | --- | --- |
| P11 | Owner | Victoria |

Ten of the interviews were conducted face to face at the winery, which facilitated the establishment of a rapport with participants. Another advantage of face to face interviews is that the non-verbal cues can be noted and aid in the interaction between interviewers and interviewees (Neuman, 1997). A number of minor non-verbal gestures were noted and helped us to better understand the points being made by the interviewees. One interview took place by phone, as the participant was not available during a visit to the region. While this was not optimum, it still elicited useful data that could not have been gained otherwise (Creswell, 2013) and the researchers felt that they could still feel empathetic towards the participant despite the fact that they could not see their reactions and body language. Follow-up questions were asked to clarify meaning, as another way of ensuring that the researchers' understanding of what was being said was as complete as possible (Taylor and Bogdan, 1998).

Two researchers conducted each of the interviews and the average length of the interviews was one hour. The questions asked were flexible and tailored to each participant, differing across the interviews depending on responses and the particular circumstances and issues of each winery. The researchers began with general questions about the participant's perception of the cellar-door experience and then honed in on responses, asking participants to elaborate and provide more detail. This was consistent with the interpretivist paradigm adopted in the study, in that 'the more open-ended the questioning, the better, as the researcher listens carefully to what people say and do in their life setting' (Creswell, 2013, p. 25). Topics covered in the interviews included the purpose of the cellar-door for the individual winery, how it was managed and the way that heritage was used in this context. The use of two interviewers allowed one interviewer to ask a question, whilst the other listened to responses and formulated follow-up questions. All interviews were recorded and

participants later reflected on transcripts and provided clarification to improve the trustworthiness of the findings (Tracy, 2010).

Fieldwork was an important component of the research study plan, which conforms to the research paradigm and methodological approach. Two periods of field work were conducted for each region. The winery regions were initially visited over a period of 2-7 days each to aid in identifying potential participants and to understand local development patterns and issues. This included visiting each of the winery cellar-doors and spending time observing interactions between cellar-door staff and visitors, as well as examining the ambience and presentation of cellar-door material linked to heritage such as brochures, posters and artefacts. These functioned as valuable background for questions and discussions in the interviews, which were the primary source of data in this phenomenological study. These field trips took place across the calendar year and seasonality was not a factor. Face to face interviews were then conducted as part of a follow-up field trip for each region, which were scheduled at times when the participants were available. By undertaking this fieldwork and spending time in situ, the researchers were confident that they understood the dynamics of each region. This enabled the accumulation of tacit knowledge about the regions and business operations that locals and insiders take for granted; another hallmark of trustworthiness (Tracy, 2010). Tacit knowledge refers to the assumptions that are taken for granted in a society or culture or the hidden meanings that '[transcend] the immediate surface of speech, texts, or discursive materials' (Tracy, 2010, p. 843). Uncovering these takes time in the field but improves the quality of the interviews and the data gathered. Examples of tacit knowledge included observing broader changes in tourism that were occurring, such as the opening or closure of accommodation or attractions, and informal discussions with members of the community regarding their views of the appropriateness of destination marketing campaigns.

A thematic analysis of the interview data was conducted, commencing with the researchers reading

each transcript holistically (Lindseth and Norberg, 2004). This was followed by a more fine-grained reading, to uncover subtleties. Themes in the data were initially developed according to key issues identified in the literature review, but the researchers were open to uncovering additional themes (Lindseth and Norberg, 2004). As multiple readings of the transcripts were undertaken and analysis proceeded, broader codes were conflated as patterns and similarities emerged. Discussion between the researchers also influenced the construction and re-interpretation of the codes as the analysis continued over time. The writing up of the findings involved *thick description* based on use of quotes from the participants, which is another hallmark of rigorous qualitative research (Tracy, 2010). The key themes that emerged are highlighted below.

## 5. Findings

Wineries examined in this study all used heritage as a key component of their marketing. What they promoted as heritage varied and included family history, ethnicity and 19th century buildings and vineyards. This heritage was promoted through multiple media, but the focus of this article is on the interactions with tourists at cellar-doors and in particular, the use of storytelling.

### *5.1 Interactions at the Cellar-Door*

All wineries in this study offered cellar-door tastings on a daily basis. None charged for tastings, which is the common practice in the USA and is undertaken by some Australian wineries (McNamara and Cassidy, 2015). The cellar-door was the main tourist interaction, though three of the wineries also operated restaurants on-site and all were regularly involved in regional wine festivals. Participants felt that an important goal of cellar-door operations was to generate direct sales, which confirms Dodd's (1995) findings. Accordingly, they put a great deal of effort into making the cellar-door experience satisfying for visitors. As one participant summarised, 'our basic

philosophy is, the longer people stay, the more wine they buy' (P3).

Within the overall marketing mix, some cross-subsidisation was expected to occur. The cost of running a labour-intensive cellar-door was offset by perceived benefits such as brand reinforcement and the opportunity to conduct marketing experiments, also confirming the prior work of Dodd (1995). As P1 explained:

> The family are quite keen to keep the cellar-door going. Because the cellar-door probably generates maybe five per cent of the company's revenue, so it's only a small amount. But of that other 95 per cent of our revenue, it's being generated through the work that we've done through cellar-door … When they do visit us we can actually pass on the family feel and name. We can get them to try these new wines … having the luxury of a cellar-door, where we can actually do these trials, we are able to unleash new varieties on unwitting visitors to the cellar-door.

Regular changes in what was on offer at the cellar-door were seen as important to maintain visitation levels and potentially 'brand love' (Drennan *et al.*, 2015). One participant identified:

> The issue with being such a well-established brand is that people think they know you … we see it a lot at external shows [events], people wander by and say "I love XX – I haven't tried it for years, but great stuff". So, yeah, we need to spark some interest in the brand and give people a reason to revisit us (P2).

For smaller wineries, the cellar-door was their primary opportunity for engaging with potential customers. P3 noted that 'cellar-door is our main focus with sales, so we try and get the whole story and picture across the line there'. Interestingly, while P3 championed social media, they still identified the traditional cellar-door as the critical starting point. P4 felt that this interaction at the cellar-door provided an attractive and satisfying experience for wine tourists. Part of this was the contrast between the personal approach of wineries (Charters *et al.*, 2009) and the less satisfying modernity of large retail outlets, as P4 explained: 'People prefer buying wine direct from the cellar-door because they get that experience they can't get at Dan Murphy's or Vintage Cellars [retail chains]. Even if they know they are paying more, they know they're getting that experience'.

Furthermore, P4 saw this interaction as breaking down barriers based on lack of knowledge, with

stories as a way to provide education. This extends Dodd's (1995) study, by suggesting the importance of brand stories beyond their role in creating brand loyalty:

> You'd be surprised at how little a lot of people that actually drink wine know about wine. They generally drink what they like. But when they come to a winery, they're generally wanting to learn more. So we're always here to sort of impart our knowledge and we try and encourage them to ask questions rather than just sticking to the wines they normally drink. Also try and branch out and try something new (P4).

Similarly, P10 emphasised the vital role of their cellar-door staff:

> The key for our staff is with the training around the wines, so they really understand and can talk with authority about the wines … depending on who they're serving and it varies. Some [visitors] are knowledgeable and they expect quite a lot of knowledge in return. Others really are not very knowledgeable and they expect a bit of an education around wine.

This emphasis on carefully planned training suggests a level of organisational sophistication that goes well beyond just relying on the charisma and personality of staff. The wineries took a strategic approach, seeing the cellar-door interaction as an opportunity to impart both general education about wine and persuasive messages about their specific quality and differentiation from their competitors.

Family involvement at the cellar-door was seen as a strong advantage, particularly for smaller wineries. P4 noted:

> Because the wineries in this region are so small, you're normally getting the family members serve you. It's not like the Yarra Valley where they're big corporations and you've just got generic cellar-door staff that are basically talking like robots about their wines … people love being served by the owners … if [the owner] is working on the tasting counter people love spending time with her and if she tells them to join the wine club, they'll join the wine club because they feel that sense of belonging if they've spoken to one of the owners.

Describing staff at corporate cellar-doors as robots highlighted the benefits of providing an alternative to modernity and echoed the findings of Charters *et al.* (2009) regarding the contrast between intimate and friendly small cellar-doors as opposed to the impersonality of larger operations. This view about small family-owned wineries was repeated by another participant 'you

go to other wineries and you get the family members serving at the cellar-door, but here you get the owners … the winemaker and the wife' (P5). Similarly, P6 saw competitive advantage through family involvement: 'People will always comment how they've met so and so at the cellar-door. They love it. I think people feel they have a real personable relationship when you can meet someone from the family'. They saw virtue in the region being small, so that the family feeling was not lost: 'We want to be careful about not being perceived as too big. We really want to keep that personable family Italian heritage orientated image. Because I do think it is a big point of difference to most other wine regions' (P6). This again reflects the findings of Charters *et al*. (2009) in terms of the importance of maintaining an atmosphere of intimacy at the cellar-door.

While cellar-doors were seen as places for engaging with visitors, a number of problematic issues were noted. P3 characterised cellar-door visitors as 'an older market, a more traditional market', whereas he was aiming at younger market segments. P2 was concerned about a lack of expertise to run cellar-doors as a viable tourism venture, with 'winemakers expected to have a really sound understanding of the tourism industry … [yet] it's difficult to have that necessary skill set; not just here, but right throughout the wine industry'. A focus on heritage at the cellar-door might even be off-putting for some visitors, rather than enticing them to step inside or to linger longer:

> It can be really intimidating ... a lot of people they'd come down this 300 metre elm tree drive and then there's the big old grand castle that was 140 years old and they'd sort of walk in the cellar-door and it's big and daunting and professional looking staff behind the counter in aprons … they'd take 10 minutes to get to the counter because they felt scared that they shouldn't have been there (P4).

### *5.2 Storytelling*

Going further than the age of their wineries and material practices, some participants couched their interactions with tourists at the cellar-door in terms of an intangible heritage delivered through 'storytelling'. P8 saw the ability to tell stories as integral to their brand and providing a competitive advantage, stating, 'to be frank, if you're in the market and all you're talking about is the wine

itself, people probably get a bit bored of that pretty quickly. It's the stories around it you can tell that help'.

In discussing this concept, participants advanced their ideas that this was an effective way of engaging with visitors and ultimately increasing sales. P10 emphasised how important it was that their cellar-door staff were experienced and well-trained in this area, 'they know the products well and they know the stories well. We don't want a scripted story … We want them to be alert to all the stories and they're aware of all the history'. High levels of staff training were associated with a lack of staging – well-trained staff did not need the crutch of a script. This finding is in line with previous research on service work (e.g. Lai, Lui and Hon, 2014; Slåtten and Mehmetoglu, 2011), which suggests that frontline service workers with greater expertise and degrees of autonomy are more likely to interact in a spontaneous way and rely less on scripts in service encounters. The nature of the stories told differed according to the groups present at the cellar-door. As P7 explained, 'for Australians we want to talk about our heritage and we've been here for over 100 years, but for Europeans we want to talk about how we have old soils and old vines, which many of the European regions haven't got'.

Some of these stories were presented in the negative – being constructed to counter undesirable perceptions and to emphasise authenticity (Beverland, 2005, 2006; Brown and Getz, 2005). For example, P1 stressed that there was a need to 'alleviate the perception, especially in Europe, … [of] Australia as a country of mass produced, homogenised wines made in factories and churned out without passion or soul'. P2 similarly commented on 'a negative mind set in much of the world media, in that we're industrialised and Australia is sort of production line winemaking'. P10 explained his strategy as a reaction to, 'international competitors who were making allegations that Australia can only make industrial wine'. P1 recounted that it was, 'mentioned in our last CEO address how important the stories are. That's what makes us different from the big multinational

companies. There's a story behind us. We're not just a make believe label'. Later in the interview they returned to this theme, commenting that:

> I see a lot of these different labels and a lot of them are just some clever marketing person has made up the name and there's nothing behind it … we're not created, this is what we are … this is not a manufactured thing, it's something that's real (P1).

#### *5.2.1 Storytelling about Family Heritage*

For wineries dating back to the 19th century, stories were often about the multiple generations of winemakers in the family. As P2 put it: 'I suppose the beauty of 140, 141 years of family winemaking is that you don't need to contrive a history or to create stories. They're all there to use'. P3 was of a similar opinion, noting that their region 'talks about third, fourth, fifth generation wine making. There are not many areas in Australia that can offer that'. P8 proudly recounted that 'my great, great grandfather planted the first vines and founded the district'. Strategically, P8 saw 'the stories and the histories that we talk about now as a brand'; a reference to brand stories (Dodd, 1995; Drennan et al., 2015).

Family heritage created a point of differentiation from competitors. P1 reflected of family, that 'it's an edge … you need to create something that people will actually latch on to, we feel the family connection is the biggest thing'. P2 made a similar statement that 'family permeates everything you do … it's a key point of difference ... we talk about being a fifth generation family wine-making concern which we use to differentiate ourselves from the majority of the 2900 other wineries in the country'. Furthermore, they were aware of others following that path: 'what we have noticed in the last four to five years is there are a few in the local region twigging that family is just that, a competitive advantage and using that more purposefully in their marketing'. P3 similarly noted that family history gave them an advantage, 'that plays into our hands sometimes with cellar-door discussions, some people look for that who are visiting [us] and almost need that'. P8 also provided a similar rationale for emphasising family history 'when we look to differentiate ourselves, it's

based on the story, the family history. We talk [to visitors] a lot about that. That's the bit that gets them in the door'. For P11, 'family is our point of difference … the family history seems to be what fascinates people'.

Family connections came with certain expectations, particularly that family members would be serving at the cellar-door. P2 noted that, 'when I'm at the cellar-door, they ask "are you with the family?" I say I'm <u>with</u> the family … But you can almost sense that little bit of disappointment sometimes that they're not getting a family member at the counter'. P1 recounted similar experiences, 'people want to hear directly from the family, people often ask me on the counter are you an X [family name]? I say, I'm not technically an X, but I'm sort of an X'. The authenticity of the brand story (Brown and Getz, 2005) was therefore perceived as potentially negatively affecting the visitor experience.

### *5.2.2 Storytelling about Ethnic Heritage*

Italian heritage was important in Victoria's King Valley, as the basis for authentic storytelling about winery origins (Beverland, 2005; 2006). Tourists were viewed as being curious about this ethnic heritage, 'they come in and ask about the tobacco sheds or they ask why there're all these Italian varietals being planted. You start to explain that they [the Italians] were tobacco growers originally' (P4). New varietals were intriguing for visitors as, 'you'll find people are now looking for something that's not mainstream. People are sick of Chardonnay and Sav-Blanc. They like things like Pinot Grigio or Arneis or Sangiovese or Nebbiolo or Barbera, varieties that you don't find everywhere, but grow really well up here' (P4). P6 noted that their heritage came from environmental similarities to Europe:

> We're quite lucky our soil – which is key to growing vines – is very similar to that of Piedmonte, which is north-west Italy. So we grow a lot of Italian varieties in the area because they actually grow very well so you get true varietal character and flavour from the wine. Which does tie in nicely with the Italian heritage.

This Italian ethnic heritage was considered as both a source of objective and inter-personal authenticity (Wang, 1999). P5 recounted that they had surveyed visitors at a winery and, 'they all say about how wonderful the atmosphere is and how authentic it is … I'm really proud of this because it really has that culture, Like I keep saying, this truly is authentic'. P6 reflected that, 'wine regions need to find their identity – whether it be something that's cultural – I don't think you can just make it up'. Apart from the different varieties, Italian heritage was manifested in terms of atmosphere based on family and food, 'you literally see Nonna – you know the grandma and grandpa all there, kids running around … it's quite literally walking into Little Italy' (P5).

### *5.2.3 Storytelling about Physical Longevity of Place or Vines*

Heritage-listing of buildings gave both a sense of external validation and a focal point to the visitor experience. P7 saw their heritage building as actualising their brand:

> At least one survey has found that it is the most recognised Australian wine brand because of the building that's on the label. And therefore the sense of place aspect is inter-linked with the brand … heritage is important. We get a lot of feedback that they drive down the drive and see the building and it's just like they are driving up on to the label.

The survival of blocks of older grapevines was another effective storytelling opportunity. Not only were these rare and old, but they were used to make intense wines which could be sold at higher prices. P2 enthused that, 'old vines are a little bit of a romance story, us sales and marketing types tend to take it and run with it on labels'. P7 mentioned their old vines and explained, 'we have 60 years of a particular wine [variety] which we can line up'. P10 commented of their wine made from old vines, 'I really couldn't care if we only sold a dozen a year of it, provided it's at $300 or $400 a bottle, because it provides a halo over the rest of the brands'. Old vines, however, had potential limitations. P9 noted that, 'vines are like people, after they get to a certain age, their usefulness and productivity declines'. Accordingly, while their vineyard dated back well into the 19$^{th}$ century, their

oldest vines were only 60 years old.

## 6. Discussion

The winery representatives interviewed all saw their cellar-doors as an important component of their marketing mix. While some research has focussed on the cellar-door in terms of service encounters (Charters *et al*., 2009; Chen *et al*., 2016), our study suggests that at smaller wineries in particular, a very different type of interaction is occurring. Whilst in tourism there is a tendency to use terms such as ‘visitor interpretation’, the interviewees instead used ‘story-telling’ to describe what they were providing. As they emphasised it, this was highly personal, with their cellar-door staff talking to small groups of visitors. This was not just to sell wine on the spot, but to engage with tourists and provide them with satisfactory experiences and insights. A number of participants commented that this allowed for brand reinforcement, ongoing sales and the continued sustainability of these wineries as businesses. These findings however take the usage of cellar-doors beyond what was envisaged by Dodd (1995). In addition to being a place to engage in commercial transactions, they are also the setting for authentic and engaging interactions between the wine tourist and the winery staff as hosts. Some participants contrasted what they saw as their more intimate relationships with their wine tourists to a less satisfactory experience at larger wineries, similar to the findings of Charters *et al.* (2009).

All wineries in this study used heritage, both in their overall marketing and at the cellar-door experience. The participants all saw it as a point of difference to distinguish themselves from competitors. Heritage was a marketing hook to draw tourists in and encourage repeat visitation (Beverland, 2005; Harvey *et al.*, 2014; Urde *et al.*, 2007). Different strategies were developed depending on the type of heritage that the wineries saw as their comparative advantage, whether that be family heritage, ethnic heritage, place heritage, or a combination thereof. Most of the winery

representatives emphasised family history and in the King Valley, this was mixed with Italian ethnicity. This emphasis was seen as engendering feelings of authenticity, with some interviewees commenting that visitors favoured intimate cellar-doors where they could meet family members. Conversely, it was noted that the absence of family members at wineries promoting their family heritage could be viewed negatively by some visitors. Surprisingly, the age of the vineyards and their built heritage was not given a great deal of prominence in the cellar-door interactions with visitors, with wineries with these attributes often laying greater stress on the family and its longevity.

Authenticity was a term used by many of the participants to summarise their approach to heritage, brand and storytelling. In our questioning, this was a term that we did not explicitly use, as we did not want to lead participants. Instead, it was a term many of them advanced with much pride. They saw their competitive advantage as linked to this authenticity, as they observed that they had real stories to tell and they felt that visitors valued this authenticity highly. For some, authenticity arose where tourists had a positive experience through interacting with cellar-door staff and engaging with the stories and this made them feel real and revitalised. This accords with the ideas of Wang (1999) regarding existential authenticity, particularly of *inter-personal authenticity*, where tourists develop positive internal feelings through personal and informal interactions with their hosts. In the instances covered by this study, tourist interactions were often with winemakers, family members and experienced staff, who provided an encounter that was unscripted and personalised. This led to a strong sense that tourists were gaining real insights into the personal stories and lived experiences of those who worked at the wineries. Interestingly, training focussed on making these stories come alive and seem spontaneous. Some of those interviewed felt that high levels of training meant that their staff did not need the crutch of a script, but instead could be more autonomous and personally engaged with visitors.

Authenticity is increasingly linked with rural tourism as mainly urban tourists seek out experiences in rural environments and with the people that live and work in them. With wine tourism, cellar-doors acted as constructed *frontstage* settings. Such frontstage settings are often criticised as limited in what they offer and are contrasted with deeper experiences available at *backstage* settings (Daugstad and Kirchengast, 2013; Frisvoll, 2013). However, unlike other rural tourism ventures that take tourists behind the scenes, wineries in this study offered no tours of their production facilities. This was partly due to strict Australian hygiene and safety regulations that prevented visitor access to both production facilities and vineyards. Instead, their core interaction with tourists had to be at the cellar-door. Those interviewed did not see this as diminishing their authenticity, for they argued that their cellar-doors were meaningful and authentic spaces for tourists to actively meet with staff, operators and family members and gain insight into their stories and the workings of wineries. For those interviewed, these unscripted encounters gave them a powerful point of difference in a crowded marketplace. Similarly, those with ethnic heritage found that this attracted tourists, but observed that this appeal was broad and did not just appeal to those of the particular ethnicity.

## 7. Conclusion

Wine tourism is often viewed as 'a relatively young and evolving tourism research field' (Chen *et.al.* 2016, p. 78) with many areas requiring research. This study has made several important contributions to this body of literature, as well as tourism research more generally. First, it provides a greater understanding of the purpose of the cellar-door for wineries, especially those with a heritage narrative to impart. Rather than focusing on the mechanics of tastings and sales, it was seen as important to initiate storytelling and more engaging interaction with visitors, in line with the growing literature on storytelling in tourism (Chronis, 2005; Hollenbeck *et al.*, 2008; Mossberg, 2008; Mossberg and Eide, 2017; Ryu *et al.*, 2018; Youn and Kim, 2017).

Second, this research extends our knowledge of the type of storytelling delivered by winery staff at the cellar-door. In contrast to those studies highlighted above, participants placed high value on this storytelling and these encounters being *unscripted* and flexible. This offers the advantage of being able to be tailored to an individual visitor and their needs and wants, as well as potentially appearing more natural and spontaneous. This finding accords with prior research on the importance of front line service staff in shaping consumers' experiences of consumption entities and spaces (e.g. Ocejo, 2012). The riskiness of this strategy is mitigated to an extent through training. The focus of the stories was on heritage, in this case family heritage, ethnic heritage and place heritage, or a combination of these forms of heritage, dependent on the individual winery, its location and history. It was seen to differentiate the winery from its competitors and could not easily be imitated, given the personal nature of the narrative. It suggests that some of the literature on the importance of scripting and staging in the tourist experience might need to be revisited. This finding might also indicate that these individuals act as cultural intermediaries in their interactions with tourists, akin to the bartender in Ocejo (2012), adding value through their storytelling and guiding potential purchases.

Third, in line with the findings of Beverland (2005, 2006) and Brown and Getz (2005), participants generally used authenticity as a concept to tie together many of their comments about heritage and storytelling at wineries. Both intrinsic and existential forms of authenticity were perceived by participants to be present in their interactions with tourists. Our findings suggest that the *front-stage* in this context can offer highly authentic experiences, which runs counter to the situation generally identified in the literature with respect to tourism and rural tourism in particular (e.g. Daugstad and Kirchengast, 2013; Frisvoll, 2013), where back-stage tours are perceived to allow the tourist a glimpse of the real business or culture. This finding highlights the complexity of authenticity as a concept in tourism and shows that more work is required to understand its fine distinctions in different contexts.

Fourth, as most of the wineries that met the criteria for the study were small to medium sized and family operated, this research has important implications for how such operators meet the challenges of functioning in a crowded marketplace. A number of those interviewed stressed that their smaller size provided them with the advantage of fashioning a more intimate and personal, and therefore highly authentic interaction with visitors at the cellar-door. This included the opportunity to share heritage stories and interact in an unscripted way with knowledgeable and friendly staff. In contrast, those interviewed felt that better resourced larger wineries sometimes had a disadvantage in being impersonal and even intimidating. These findings are in line with previous research on the strategic use of smallness in service encounters at wineries and other rural tourism operations (Charters *et al*, 2009; Daugstad and Kirchengast, 2013; Frisvoll, 2013).

There are also a number of practical implications. Meeting tourists at the cellar-door allowed the wineries to engage in persuasive *storytelling*, and this technique might be applied in other tourist contexts. Visitor centres, for example, tend to be thought of as pedestrian places for dissemination of information. However, with changes in design and training, they might have the potential to offer richer experiences for tourists. Wineries that do not fall within the definition of a heritage winery might seek to adopt some of the strategies that the current study has identified, presenting stories based on their own history, as well as narratives linked to the history of their region.

A number of areas for further research have been identified, linked in some instances to the limitations of the current study. Follow-up work could examine the relationship between staff training and the delivery of unscripted stories. Is this something that can always be taught and how does this training work in practice? The current study concentrated on the importance of the cellar-door for wineries, while other forms of marketing were beyond its scope. An analysis of marketing collateral, including websites and social media feed of the various wineries, may be valuable to

explore references to heritage and storytelling.

We focused here on the supply side of the industry, but acknowledge this is only one part of the winery-tourist interaction at the cellar-door. Wine tourists could be interviewed to ascertain their attitudes towards heritage and authenticity and how that affects their experience at the cellar-door, as well as their response to stories told by cellar-door staff, particularly comparing stories told by owners or family members to those told by outsiders. A number of studies (e.g. Getz and Brown, 2006) have identified that heritage is one factor affecting wine tourists' motivations and it would be valuable to explore that further. A visitor focused study might build on the work of Mossberg (2008), who argued that while staff could facilitate storytelling and experiences, the consumer was at the heart of the immersive process. Such a study could examine how consumers react to storytelling about real historical people and places and to what extent they might feel themselves immersed in the story in a cellar-door context and perceive them as authentic experiences. It could also compare the relative effectiveness of unscripted interactions against the use of a highly scripted narrative.

A strategic reliance on heritage for wineries provides value in marketing, but also generates paradoxes. Two are worth noting and merit further study. The first is the potential for conflict between tradition and innovation. Heritage may provide a point of marketing difference, but may also encourage technical stagnation. The ongoing debate over the use of corks versus modern screw tops is an illustration of the heat that may be generated by such contests (Reynolds, Rahman, Bernard and Holbrook, 2018). A second paradox is that a thin layer of heritage may disguise modernity. The New World winescapes of Rutherglen alia and the Barossa Valley in Australia are dotted with faux French chateaux and Scottish castles, while marketing campaigns focussed on families and the foundation stories of visionary individuals may mask the true nature of corporate ownership. These paradoxes, while they did not emerge as part of the current study, may affect how

some wineries present their heritage to visitors at the cellar-door, and its perceived authenticity in the eyes of visitors, and merit further study.

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