Fantasy Architecture Within Winescapes: A Comparative Case Study of the Napa Valley and Rutherglen Wine Regions

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Keywords
winescape; architecture; New World; heritage; destination marketing; wine tourism; authenticity

Research Question
What is the contribution of fantasy architecture to New World winescapes and ultimately to destination image and the visitor experience?

Methods
A comparative case study of a North American and an Australian wine region was undertaken, using three sources of data: interviews, visitor interpretation and marketing collateral and site visits.

Results
Fantasy architecture appeared to provide a level of authenticity to a winescape, even when essentially a pastiche. It creates a more complex narrative, enhancing the visitor experience and destination appeal.

Abstract
FANTASY ARCHITECTURE WITHIN WINESCAPES: A COMPARATIVE CASE STUDY OF THE NAPA VALLEY AND RUTHERGLEN WINE REGIONS

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Wine regions can be conceptualized as incorporating the physical, social and cultural dimensions of the landscape, known as the winescapes (Peters, 1997), resulting in ‘a particular atmosphere, an appealing
Elements of a winescape can be highlighted in regional promotion (Hall, Johnson and Mitchell, 2000) and bestow distinctiveness upon a region, which may become a source of competitive advantage in a crowded market. Yet to date, little research has been conducted on the nature of winescapes or their role in destination marketing.

The social and cultural dimensions of the winescape are mostly intangible, and encompass multiple layers of meaning and memory connected to the role played by wine in local communities and wider society, the regional history of winemaking, and the personal histories of various winemaking families. Johnson and Bruwer (2007: 277) also suggest that the winescape includes heritage, along with ‘town(s) and buildings and their architecture and artefacts within’. These physical aspects of the winescape generally incorporate attractive vineyards and winery buildings, suggestive of idyllic rural lifestyle and highly appealing to predominantly urban tourists. In the case of the New World, buildings within a winescape may represent the adaptive use of heritage architecture such as farms, grand houses and vernacular buildings. Alternatively, the buildings may be purpose-built, often created in homage to or to highlight links and similarities to European wine regions, styles and practices. Thus, Telfer (2000) observes the practice of constructing ‘elaborate French chateau-like structures’ in Canadian wine regions, while Danielmeier (2014: 225) refers to Highfield Estate winery in the Marlborough region of New Zealand, which is reminiscent of ‘an eleventh century Tuscan country house with an Italianate tower and a portico’. It is a form of associative heritage, claiming similarities to other attractive places, but goes beyond that, appealing to visitor’s fantasies of what an illustrious or grand winery should look like. This trend has been criticised as creating architecture which ‘may appear Disney-esque in an antipodean setting’ (Danielmeier, 2014: 226), yet some of these buildings have subsequently gained heritage protection in their own right. There has been a paucity of studies on these fantasy buildings, despite their ubiquity in New World wine regions. This paper aims to fill this gap by exploring the contribution of fantasy architecture to winescapes and ultimately to destination image and the visitor experience.

A comparative case study has been undertaken of two New World wine regions, based on qualitative interviews, analysis of visitor interpretation and marketing collateral, and observations during site visits. The first case study region is the Napa Valley in the United States. It boasts Castello di Amorosa, a 21st century recreation of a Tuscan medieval castle with turrets, including frescos on the walls of its banquet room modelled on those in the Town Hall in Siena. Other examples of fantasy wine architecture are Beringer winery, its façade a cross between Victoriana and Tudor style, and the ivy-covered Inglenook winery, with its stained glass and grand staircase. Both came from the 19th century.

The second case study region we examined is Rutherglen, located in Victoria, Australia. It also has its share of 19th century architecture evoking visions of European magnificence and romanticism. These include styles as diverse as French Provincial (Mount Ophir), Italianate (Mount Prior, Olive Hills Estate) and Gothic Medieval Revival (All Saints).

Our findings suggest that fantasy architecture in these regions is often perceived to provide a level of authenticity to a winescape, even though it is essentially a pastiche. The existence of ‘high levels of heritage protection’ (Frost and Laing, 2014) gives these buildings a certain status in the eyes of destinations and visitors, as does their connection to family heritage in some instances, and links to the age of vines and the winery in question. This creates a nuanced view of authenticity and thus a more complex story to underpin the winescape of each region, adding to the visitor experience and the image and appeal of the destination. Future research could extend this study to other regions throughout the New World, including South Africa, New Zealand and Canada.

References


