



hidden valley wine estate

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– Jane Visser, architect









There are a few routes around Stellenbosch with a particularly intense concentration of wineries. The Annandale Road (T10) is one of them. Towards the end of this road, at the base of the Helderberg mountain, lie the low-slung buildings of the eponymously named Hidden Valley, the brainchild of Dave Hidden, whose attention had been drawn to the area a couple of decades ago. A common thread among a number of wineries including this one is a desire for the buildings to reflect both the ethos of the wines and an attitude to food and the estate's general experience.

Architect Jane Visser of Visser Thomas Architects, speaking of her fascination with wall architecture, explains, 'The opportunity of making giant heavy walls is always seized – especially as it's the traditional architecture of the Cape.' Inspired by the work of the esteemed American architect Frank Lloyd Wright, who built a complex for himself at Taliesin West in Phoenix, she continues, 'We worked through a variety of options, including cast concrete with massive aggregate, recycled building materials and boulders, to arrive at the Cyclopean stone walls.'

The approach to the winery can be seen through a grove of olive trees, and the building nestles low in the landscape almost as an incision between the vines, with gabion walls holding back the landscape.

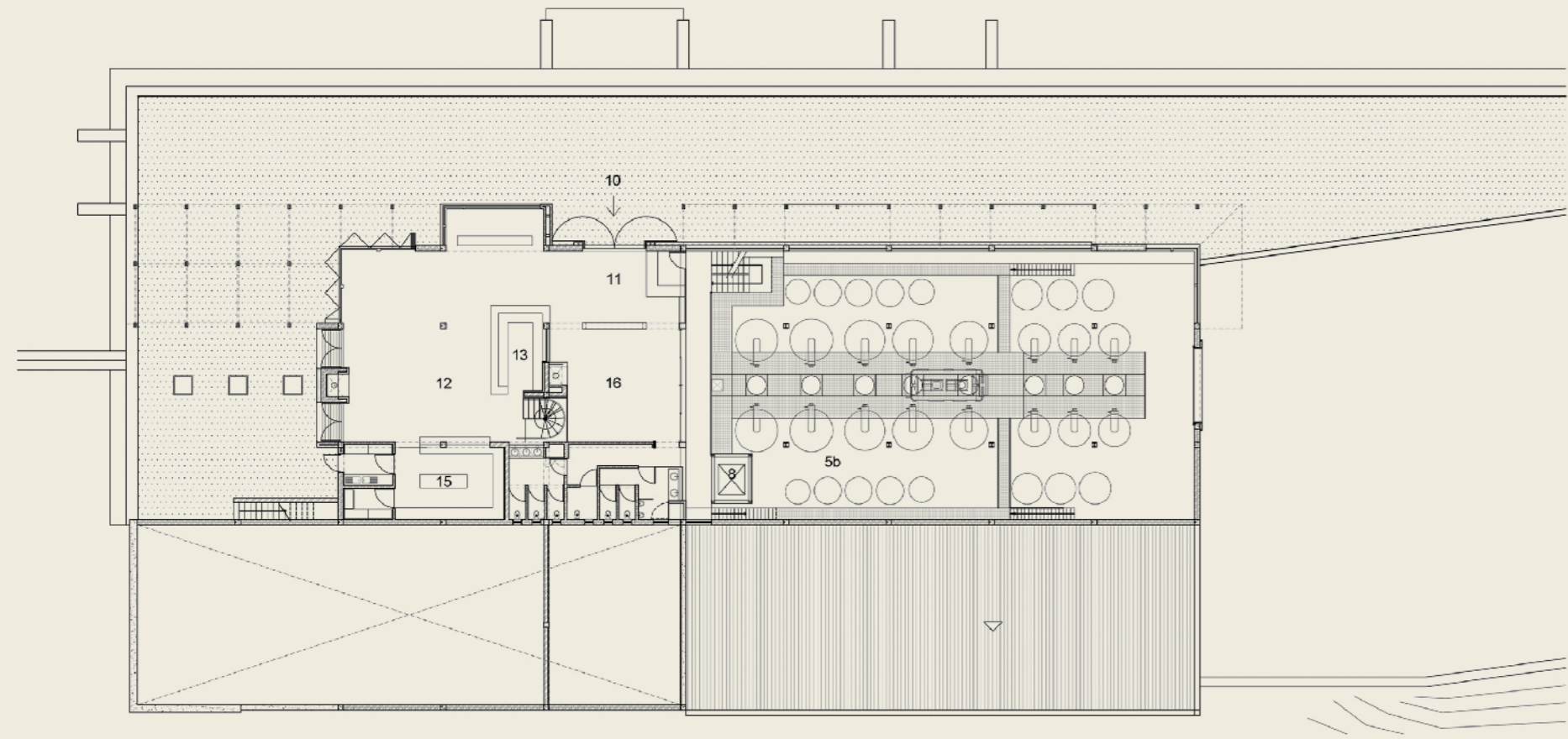
There is a strong intent to combine landscape, building and vegetation, and in time the vines will cover the timber carapace that encloses the structure. The entrance is made via a wide ramp that conceals the existing farm barn. Once inside, the flow of activity from fermentation tanks to wine sales to restaurant is seamless. The production areas are viewed through glass walls that allow the visitor to view the three-storey volume, carefully modulated by the structure to reduce the sense of scale and including the fermentation tanks and the administration block above.

The maturation area is handled slightly differently. The brick vaulting reflects the heaviness of the cellar but is articulated more finely. The narrow openings are buttressed, which allows a small amount of light to accentuate the warmth of the brickwork, although the temperature is strictly controlled. Outside, under the pergola, a small number of glass openings pierce the floor, allowing the visitor to peer down into the cellar.

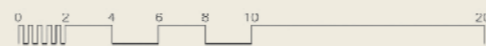
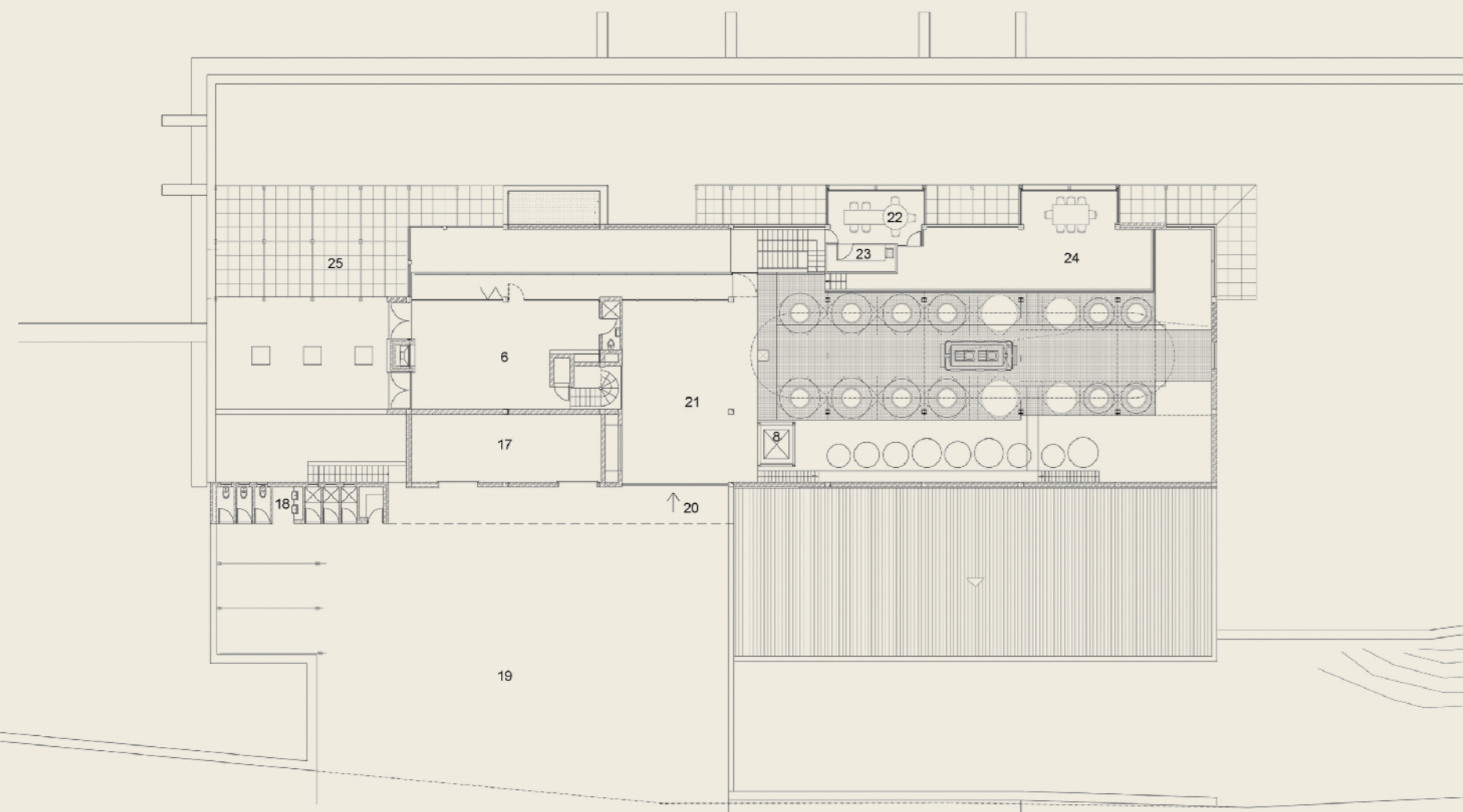
In keeping with Visser's intention, much of the public accommodation is restricted to a single level, allowing the visitor to engage with the lightness of the structure atop a heavy production base and view once again the spectacular vista from False Bay to Table Bay on a clear day.







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