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— EXCLUSIVE

Hunter Valley set for five-star resort after \$25m winery deal

The wine region's tourism scene will get an overdue shake-up following the deal involving industry veterans Brian McGuigan and Col Peterson.



Bonnie Campbell — *Luxury property reporter*

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A new luxury hotel group has paid \$25 million for two landmark Hunter Valley wineries, Ben Ean and one of the Drayton family estates, with plans to build a \$120 million five-star hotel and tourism complex in some of Australia's oldest vineyards.

The HVL Hotels group is planning the luxury complex for a consolidated 68-hectare site in tourist hotspot Pokolbin, about a two-hour drive north of Sydney.



Artist's impression of the new five-star hotel facilities to be built at the Ben Ean winery.

The two wineries were sold by industry veterans Brian McGuigan and Col Peterson. The duo have long planned a top-shelf tourism venture for the site after purchasing Ben Ean — formerly known as Lindeman's — from Treasury Wines in 2017, along with the adjoining property previously owned by the late Max Drayton of the Drayton winemaking family.

Mr McGuigan said it was his dream to create a luxury destination among the 180-year-old vines.

"It's a fantastic old vineyard that we've maintained, and we've done a tremendous amount of work on the old winery itself. They [the vines] are old and gnarled — a bit like me."

— Brian McGuigan

Luxury among working wineries

Winemaking will continue on the site on McDonalds Road and the adjoining property on de Beyers Road, which produces Shiraz, Sémillon and Chardonnay grapes.

With expansive views across the region's vineyards, the five-star hotel will have 65 rooms, a wedding and function centre, a 25-metre swimming pool, rejuvenation spa and gym.



Architectural renders of the proposed luxury accommodation venue in the Hunter Valley. **EJE Architecture**

"As a crowning glory to the winemaking, we have a unique bit of land on the property, which is a pretty sharp ridge, and it gives beautiful views both ways over Pokolbin and over Broken Back Ridge," Mr McGuigan said.

The area was overdue for a new destination offering, he said.

"The Hunter Valley has not had a large new hotel built here for about 17 years and that's simply too long," Mr McGuigan said.

Existing local offerings include Rydges Resort — formerly Crowne Plaza Hunter Valley and operating since 2006 — Château Elan, completed in 2010, and boutique hotel The Convent, which opened in 1991.



McGuigan Wines founder and director Brian McGuigan. **Natalie Grono**

The incoming luxury group's managing director, Dominic Lambrinos — former CEO of private lending group Chifley Securities — hopes to tap the Hunter Valley's proximity to large population bases in Newcastle, the Central Coast and Sydney.

"We believe there is a strong demand for a five-star plus hotel in the region," Mr Lambrinos said.

"We have received approval for the development of the hotel and some commercial facilities and expect them to open in the summer of 2026."

Top team

The chairman of HVL Hotels, former Liberal Party leader John Hewson, said the project would be run by a "first-class team" including wine experts such as Mr McGuigan, Mr Peterson and Jon Osbeiston.

Former Spicers Retreats managing director David Assef will be head of hotel operations and restaurateur Justin North — of Becasse fame — will run the food and beverage offering.

The resort will feature bespoke artworks by Gillie and Marc Schattner, known for the quirky bronze rabbit and dog sculptures dotted around Sydney's east.

The hotel announcement comes after another well-known winemaking family, the McWilliams, revealed plans to rebuild their legacy nearby. David McWilliam has acquired 95 hectares in Pokolbin for \$4.23 million and launched David McWilliam Wine to focus on premium bottles.

The original company collapsed and was sold three years ago to Calabria Family Wines and the Rich List Medich family.

ORIGINAL SOURCE

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