

# Tasting Landscape

*expressing sense of place through Idiot's Grace*



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# introduction



Top, entrance to Idiot's Grace; bottom, Celia at Idiot's Grace doing pruning, bottling, harvest, and field work



This project explores how landscape architecture can contribute to the sense of place that's already present in wine. It attempts to do so through a systematic approach in which terroir and sense of place are integrated. My goal for this project was to discover a set of design principles that can be applied to small, place-based wineries, as well a design that shows how these design principles have been translated to a particular winery: Idiot's Grace in Mosier, Oregon.

Why did I pick this project? Or, for that matter, this particular winery?

Since the summer of 2020, I've been working at a small, organic winery in the Columbia Gorge called Idiot's Grace. Idiot's Grace is owned and operated by the McCormick family – Brian McCormick is the winemaker as well as the farmer. Because Idiot's Grace is such a small winery, over the years I've had the opportunity to learn about the winemaking process in a hands-on way: participating in everything from pruning to harvest to bottling! Ultimately, my main job is to share the story of the wines with people who visit our tasting room to help them understand why Idiot's Grace wine is so special.



Above: images of winemaking at Idiot's Grace

grapes + yeast + time = wine

Below: images of winemaking at Idiot's Grace



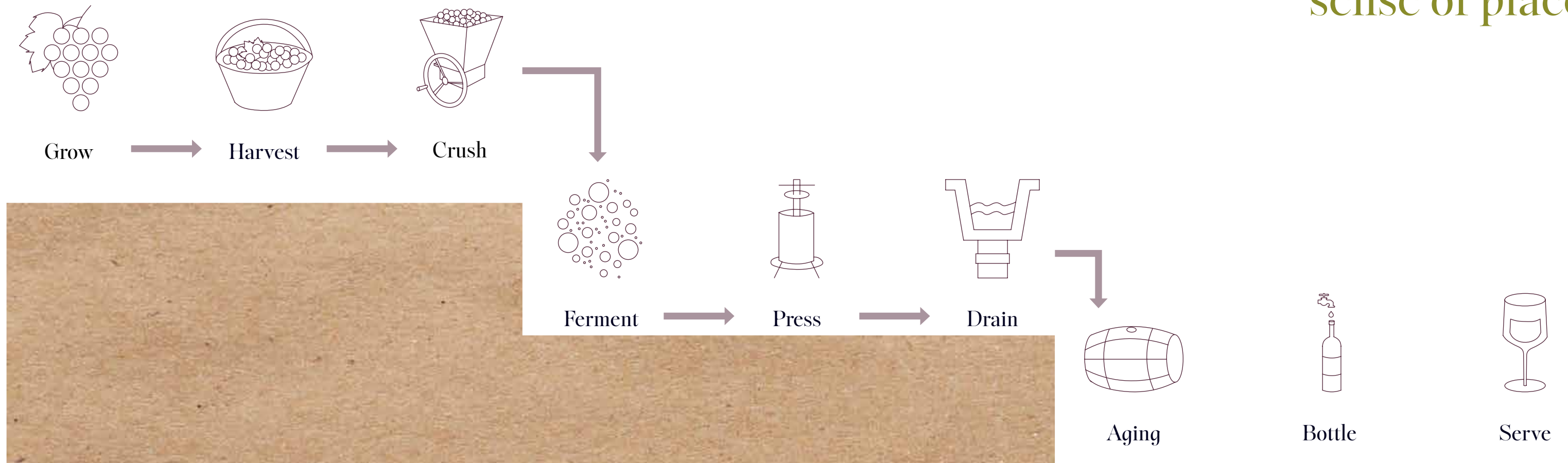
To tell you the story of Idiot's Grace wine, first I want to give you some context for how our approach differs from other wineries. At its most essential, the winemaking requires grapes, yeast, and time.

However, there are a number of decision points in the winemaking process where a winemaker can intervene to affect the outcome.

Different approaches to winemaking result in different wines as a result of these choices!

So...how does Idiot's Grace make wine?

## sense of place



## the Idiot's Grace winemaking process

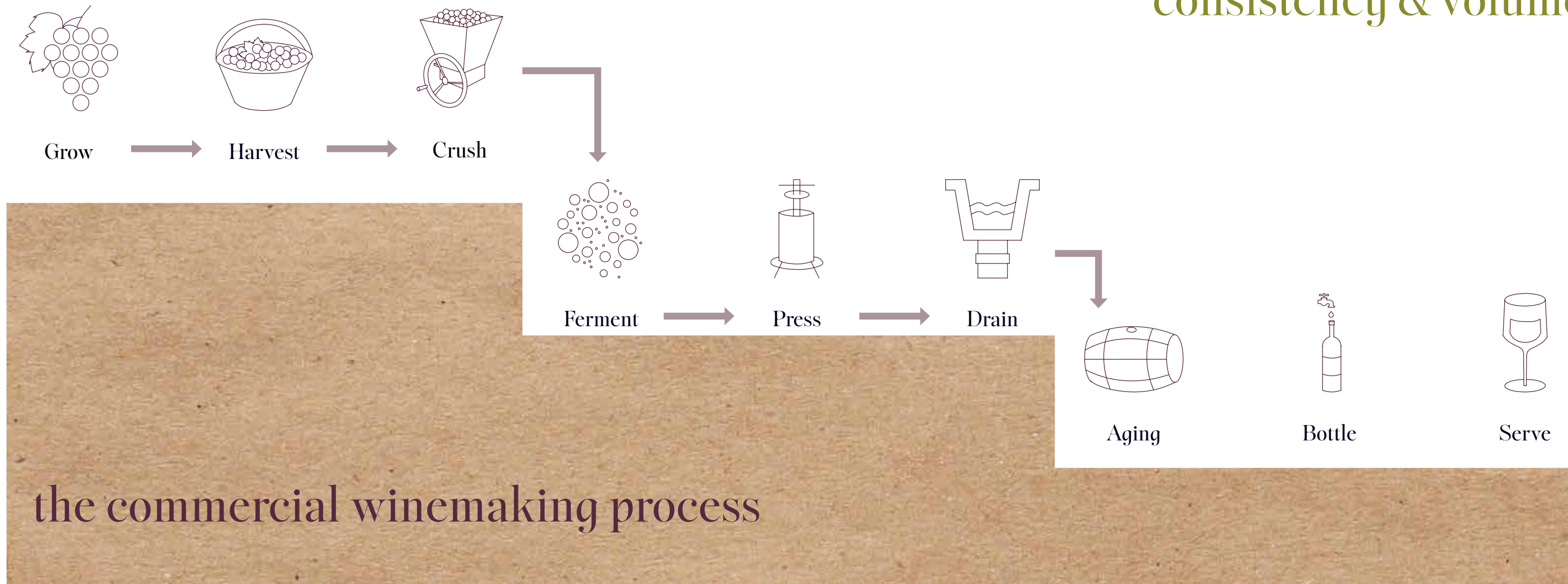
The winemaking style at Idiot's Grace emphasizes how sense of place is expressed through the wine. This is a smaller-scale approach - and it also means that as much as possible, the winemaker does not intervene in the process. At Idiot's Grace, all wines are made with grapes from estate vineyards. This means that the winemaking process starts long before harvest, as the grapes experience the unique conditions of the vineyard over the course of the year. These grapes are farmed organically by Brian and harvested by hand.

Grapes naturally have yeasts living on their skins. Because the grapes are farmed organically, unique yeast communities from the vineyard microclimate are present in the harvested grapes and these indigenous yeasts drive the fermentation in a unique way.

After fermentation, the wine may be filtered, and then it is bottled. This style of winemaking means that the end product can vary significantly year to year. And that's very much the point! It's meant to express sense of place.

In this approach, the sensory experience of the wine is a product of the unique microclimate of the vineyard, the tending of the farmer, and the conditions the grapes experienced throughout the year. Even for wines from the same block of grapes, no two vintages (or growing years) are ever the same.

## consistency & volume



Why is this approach to winemaking unique? Let's compare it to a commercial winery, which emphasizes consistency and volume. Here, the process starts with purchasing large quantities of grapes, which are usually industrially farmed and mechanically harvested. These grapes come from different places and may vary in quality, so in order to produce a consistent product a large degree of intervention is necessary.

This can involve choices like...

- Inoculating the grapes with a specific strain of yeast
- Introducing additives to force or halt fermentation
- Using fining agents like gelatin, bone char, and isinglass
- Adding preservatives like sulfur dioxide

Ultimately, the wine that ends up in the bottle is not a reflection of the grapes that started the process; instead, it's a reflection of the winery's brand. Remember: the goal is to make a large volume of wine, from several different harvests of grapes, that has a consistent sensory experience.



Above: Guiding principles of Idiot's Grace in the wine cellar

“If everything is in its proper place, a drinker would remark first at the ‘Gorge-iness’ of the wine, then at the mark of the vintage, and after that the verisimilitude of the grape.”

–*Brian McCormick*

At Idiot's Grace, Brian strives to express sense of place through wine. He has articulated this through a principle which he calls “Site, then Vintage, then Variety.” He has even painted it on the door of the wine cellar (see above).

When you taste a glass of Idiot's Grace wine the first thing Brian wants you to sense is the **site** – the sense of the place where the grapes were grown.

The next thing you will sense is **vintage** – the unique, site-specific, and ephemeral conditions of that place during the year. Finally, you'll sense the grape **variety** – perceiving the wine to be expressive of a Cabernet Franc or a Sangiovese.

Sense of place is the intention that underlies everything that Brian does, from farming to winemaking to sharing the story of wine with guests



# How to tell the story of the wine through landscape architecture?



Above: Guests enjoying the tasting room at Idiot's Grace winery in Mosier, OR

At the tasting room my job is to tell the story of Idiot's Grace wine so that I can help people connect to the experience and engage with sense of place through a wine tasting.

I love sharing the story of Idiot's Grace wine with people who visit!

However, as a landscape-architect-in-training I can't help but view this place through the lens of design.

How could I use landscape architecture to tell this story – where place, wine, and sensory experience interact to create a singular experience?

To do that, I started to think about the different ways we can understand sense of place at Idiot's Grace that contribute to the experience of the wine.

conceptual  
background

# terroir

*Understanding sense of place through wine  
Perceived through a sensory experience*



Terroir is a concept in wine that articulates how sense of place can be perceived through wine. It's the essential phenomenon that makes the sensory experience of a glass of Willamette Valley Pinot Noir distinct from a glass of Pinot Noir from Burgundy.

Essentially, it relates the physical and environmental context within which the grapes are grown to the sensory qualities of the wine. (Merriam Webster 2022, Van Leeuwen & Seguin 2006)

Terroir is a huge component of wine and winemaking culture. In fact, the Master Sommelier exam culminates in a blind tasting where candidates must accurately identify the varietal, region, and vintage for six glasses of wine. (Grainger & Tattersall 2016)

# genius loci

*Understanding sense of place through landscape  
Perceived through a sensory experience*




In landscape architecture, we also have a concept that articulates how we understand sense of place through a personal sensory experience. "Genius loci" conveys the essential and unique spirit of each place.

This Latin phrase goes back to the time of the Romans, where it represented a spiritual entity that had a connection to a specific place.

In contemporary use, it is often used to refer to the intangible value of a place. However, genius loci can go beyond the intangible experience of a place, encompassing the genius of its material and physical properties as well. (Vecco 2020)



# How can landscape architecture contribute to the sense of place that's already present within the wine itself?



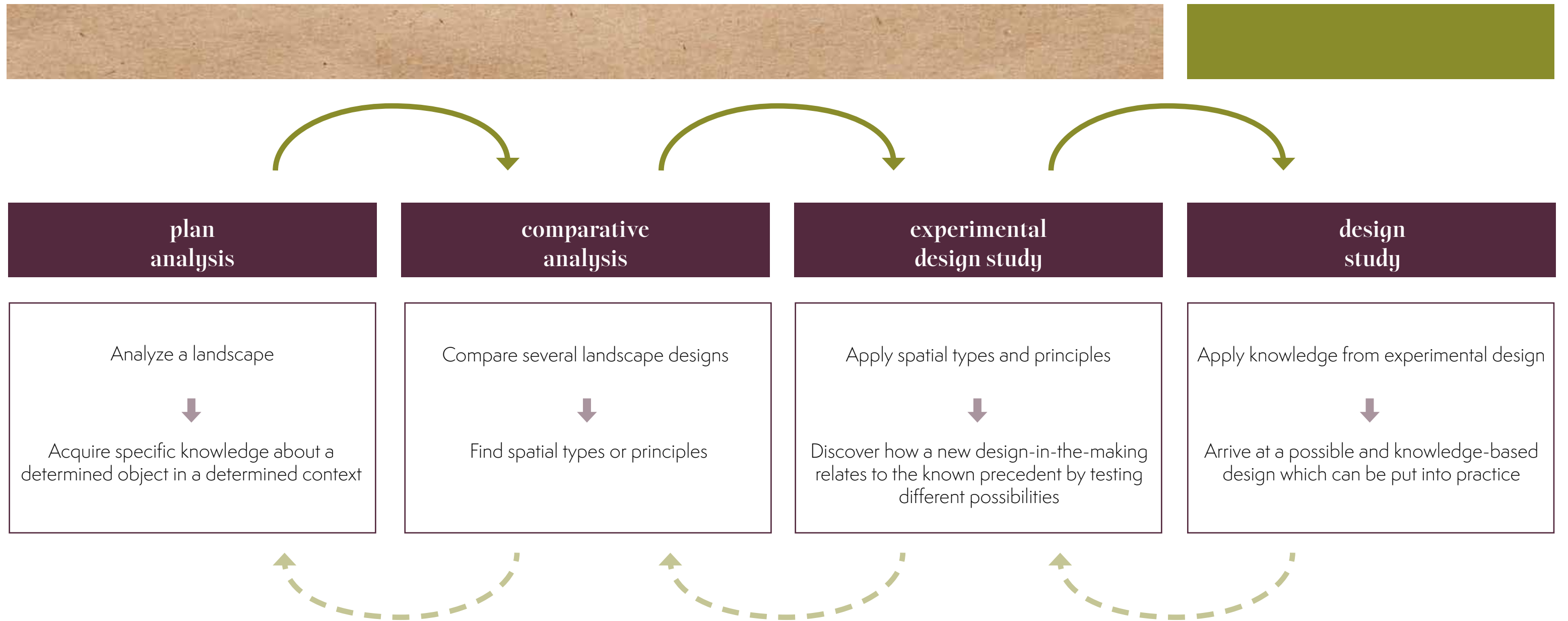
The culture of winemaking has long worked to convey sense of place through wine. How can the sensory experience of place - which is already present in the wine - be enhanced through landscape architecture?

Because of my personal understanding of the winemaking process, as well as my training in landscape architecture, I am uniquely situated to explore this design problem.

I wanted to see if I could achieve this for Idiot's Grace. However, I thought it would be interesting to go beyond a single design and explore whether I could create a set of design principles that might be applied to similar wineries in order to enhance how sense of place is experienced through wine.



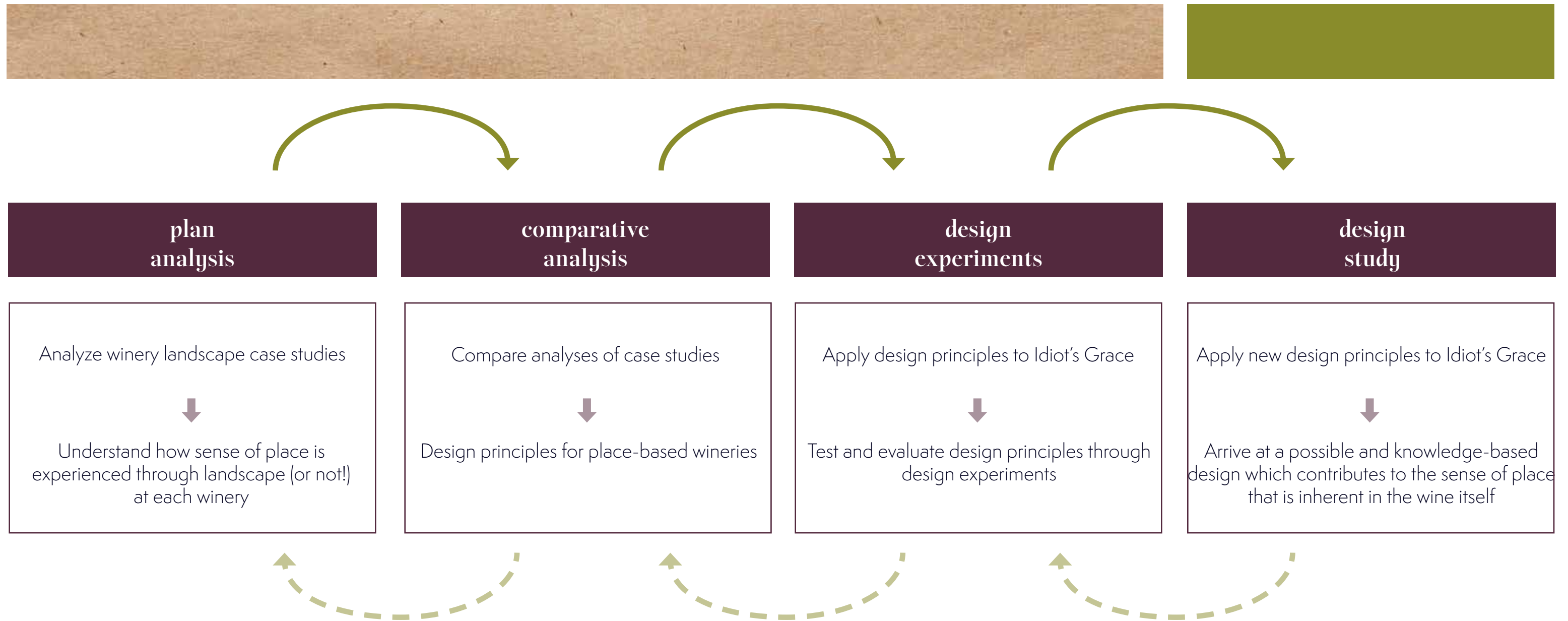
methodology



Steffen Nijhuis & Inge Bobbink, 2012

As a starting point, my advisor Michael Geffel introduced me to the design-as-research methodology described by Steffen Nijhuis and Inge Bobbink of TU Delft in their 2012 paper: "Design-related research in landscape architecture". (Nijhuis & Bobbink 2012)

Within this framework, the composition of a landscape design is not an accident but rather the result of a developmental process that involves plan analysis, comparative analysis, experimental design study, and design study. The ultimate goal is to arrive at a possible and knowledge-based design which can be put into practice



Celia Hensey & Michael Geffel, 2022

Working with Michael Geffel and using Nijhuis and Bobbink as a starting point, I developed a road map for how I might arrive at a possible and knowledge-based design.

In the **plan analysis** phase, I analyzed a series of small-scale place-based wineries similar to Idiot's Grace in order to understand how landscape architecture might influence the way that sense of place can be experienced. After analyzing the case studies in the plan analysis phase, I moved into the **comparative analysis** phase. I used my findings from plan analysis to search for possible design principles, paying attention when patterns began to emerge.

Once I discovered these preliminary design principles it was time to put them to the test in through **design experiments**. Using Idiot's Grace as a test case, I attempted to apply my preliminary design principles for place-based winery design. The insights I gained from the experimental design study were used to adjust and improve my design approach.

Finally, I applied what I learned from the design experiments to Idiot's Grace in a **design study**. In the end, I arrived at a design which is both possible and knowledge based – and that could help visitors to the winery connect with the sense of place that is inherent in the wine itself.



## design problem

How can landscape architecture contribute to the sense of place that's already present within the wine itself?

## methodology

Using the "design-as-research" framework from Nijhuis & Bobbink (2012) as a starting process, I used plan analysis, comparative analysis, design experiments, and design study to create a possible and knowledge-based design that responds to the design problem

## potential outcomes

1. *Design principles* for enhancing the experience of sense of place at a small-scale, place-based winery
2. A *design for Idiot's Grace* that responds to the design problem and provides an example of how these design principles could be applied to create a design that is both possible and knowledge-based

My design problem was: How can landscape architecture contribute to the sense of place that's already present within the wine itself?

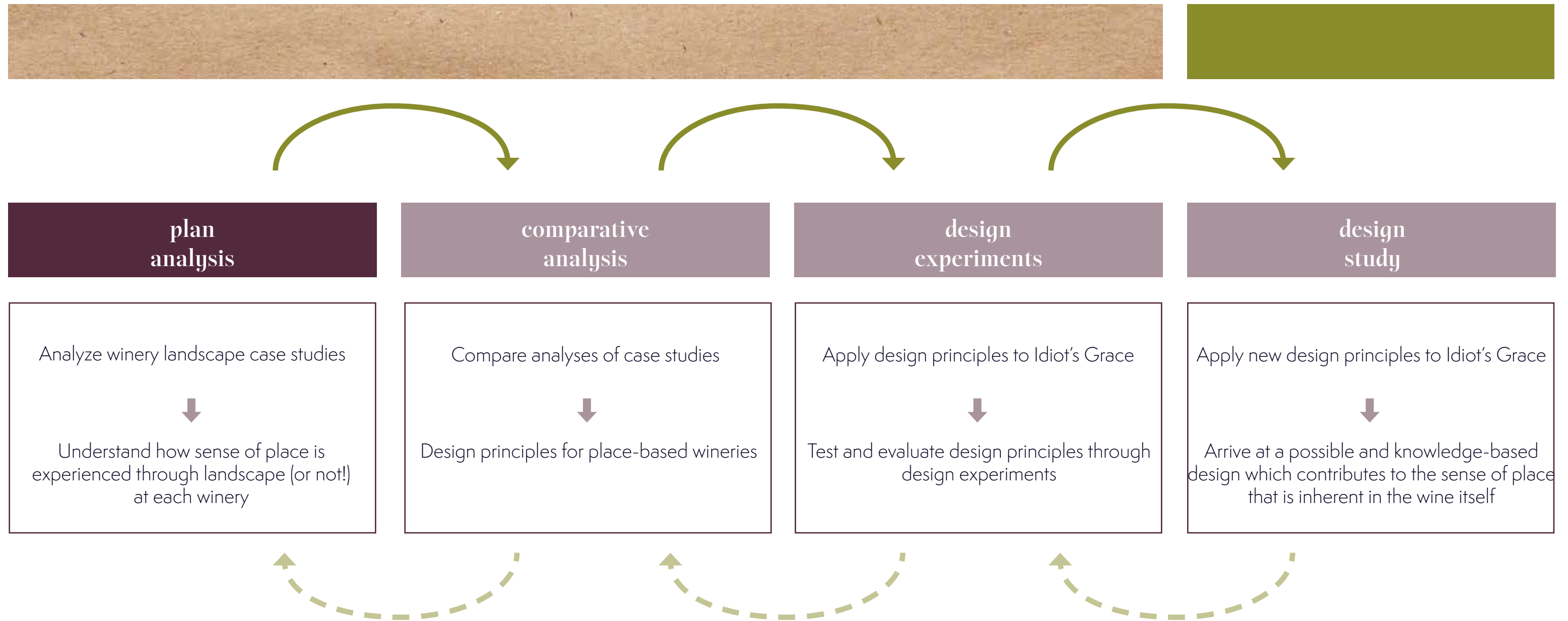
Using the "design-as-research" framework from Nijhuis & Bobbink (2012) as a starting process, I used plan analysis, comparative analysis, design experiments, and a design study to create a possible and knowledge-based design that responds to the design problem.

As I embarked on my project, my potential outcomes included:

- *Design principles* for enhancing the experience of sense of place at a small-scale, place-based winery.
- A *design for Idiot's Grace* in response to the design problem which would provide an example of how these design principles could be applied to create a design that is both possible and knowledge-based.

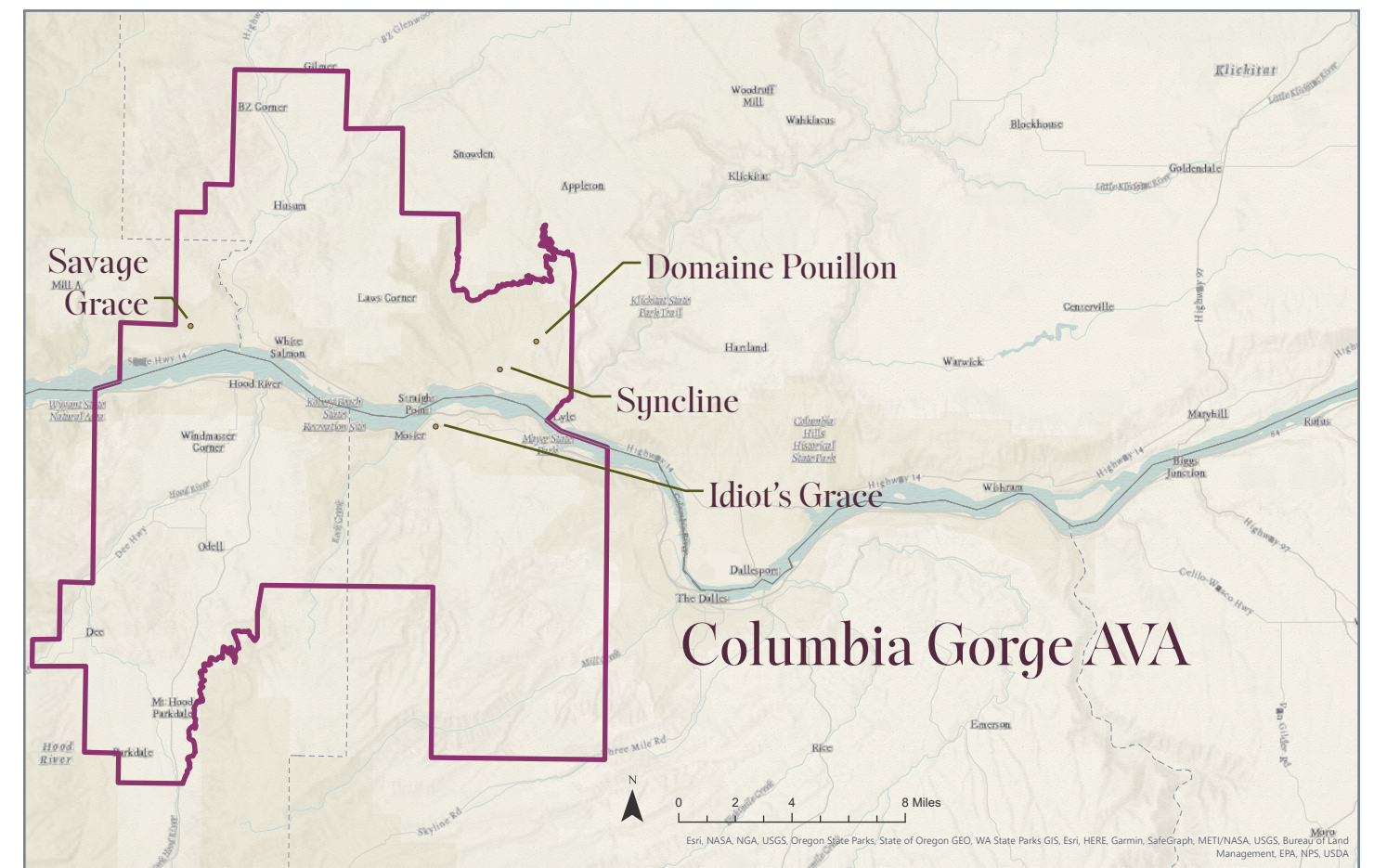
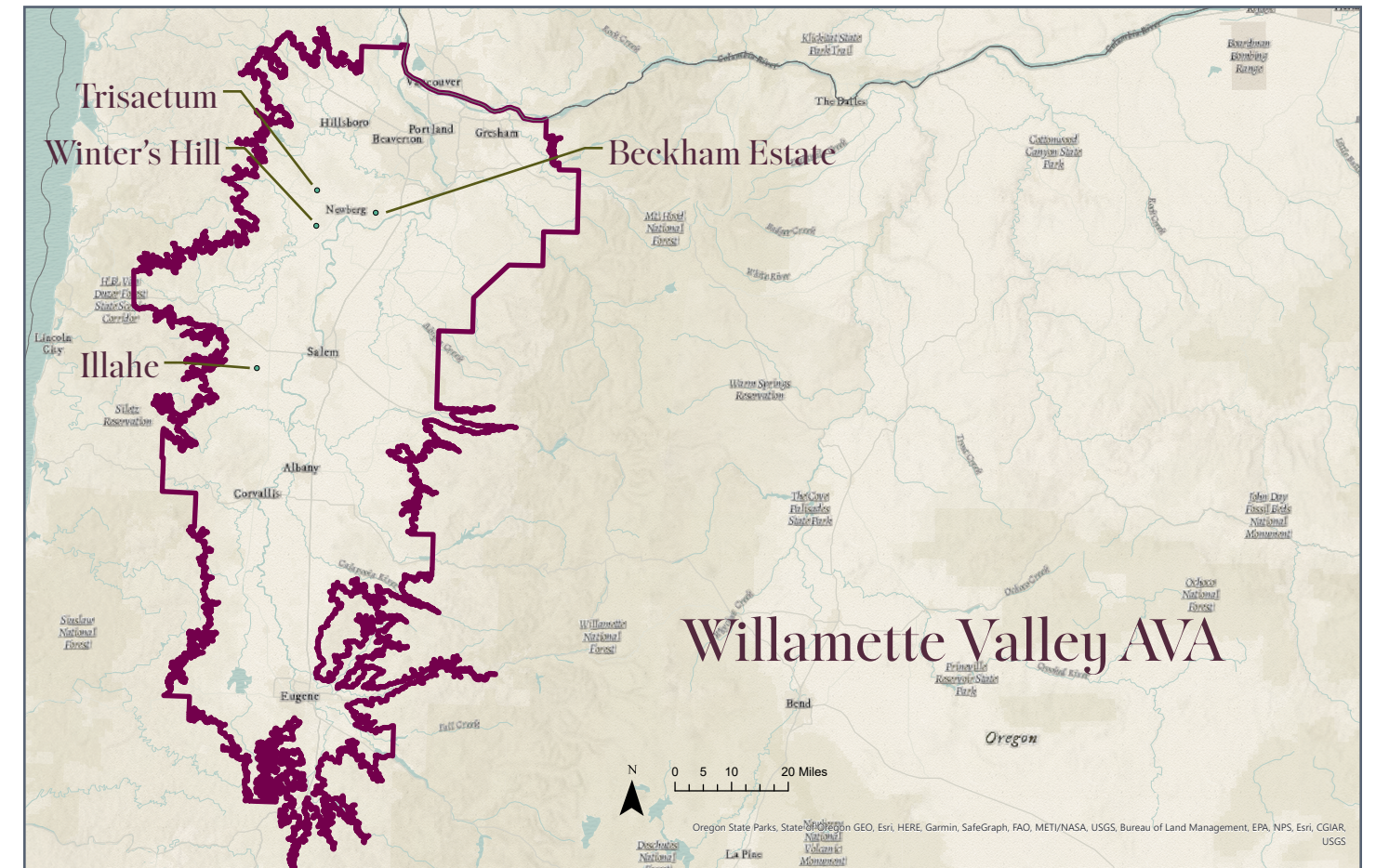
My hope was that my master's project could be used as a starting point for a place-based winery design project and in this way it could be a meaningful contribution to the field of landscape architecture as well as a potential resource for small-scale, place-based wineries.

# plan analysis



Celia Hensey & Michael Geffel, 2022

In the plan analysis phase, I analyzed landscapes to acquire insights that could be used in a design project. This included the analysis and description of aspects of the composition of the landscape in relation to how they affect the visitor experience of genius loci and terroir.



I wanted to analyze wineries that were similar to Idiot's Grace in scale, winemaking process, and intent. I decided to limit my selection to wineries where the tasting room was situated within a working viticultural landscape.

I also considered a number of factors including:

- Certifications and organizations, like Oregon Slow Wine or the Deep Roots Coalition; and
- Certain winemaking and viticultural practices that are inherent to a small-scale, place-based approach.

I looked within two major AVAs (or American Viticultural Areas) that were within driving distance of Eugene: the Willamette Valley AVA and the Columbia Gorge AVA. In the end, I selected eight wineries for plan analysis.



## elements for plan analysis

### basic form

the way in which the topography of the natural landscape or the man-made landscape is reduced, rationalized, and activated in the ground plan of the design

### programmatic form

the spatial program leads to a functional layout in relation to patterns of movement

### spatial form

the form and functioning of three-dimensional landscape space, which creates a spatial dynamic

### sensing genius loci



the way that the spirit of the place is perceived or understood through the senses

### metaphorical form

the way in which iconographic and mythological images and architectural structural forms are connected with one another and with elements from nature

### sensing terroir

the way that the sense of place of the wine is perceived or understood through the senses



Once my winery selection was complete, it was time for my plan analysis phase. In other words, it was time for me to do some wine tastings! However, plan analysis required more than just drinking wine. These are the elements which I considered for each site: basic form, spatial form, metaphorical form, programmatic form, sensing genius loci, and sensing terroir.

I visited all eight wineries and at each winery I did a full tasting. To the bemusement of the tasting room staff, I brought along a base map, sketch book, and several guiding reflective prompts.

I will provide an example of what this in-depth process looked like for several case study wineries: Trisaetum, Beckham Estate, and Winter's Hill.

# Trisaetum

## Location

Newberg, OR  
Ribbon Ridge AVA

## Year Established

2003

## Certifications & practices

Dry farm  
No-till  
Zero herbicides  
Deep Roots Coalition  
1% For The Planet  
Slow Wine Oregon

## Winemaking approach

Hand-harvested  
Whole cluster  
Indigenous yeasts  
Punchdown & pumpover



**basic form** vines aligned perpendicular to slope  
organic form of entry road intersects with rigid vine forms  
orientation of the building responds to Ribbon Ridge

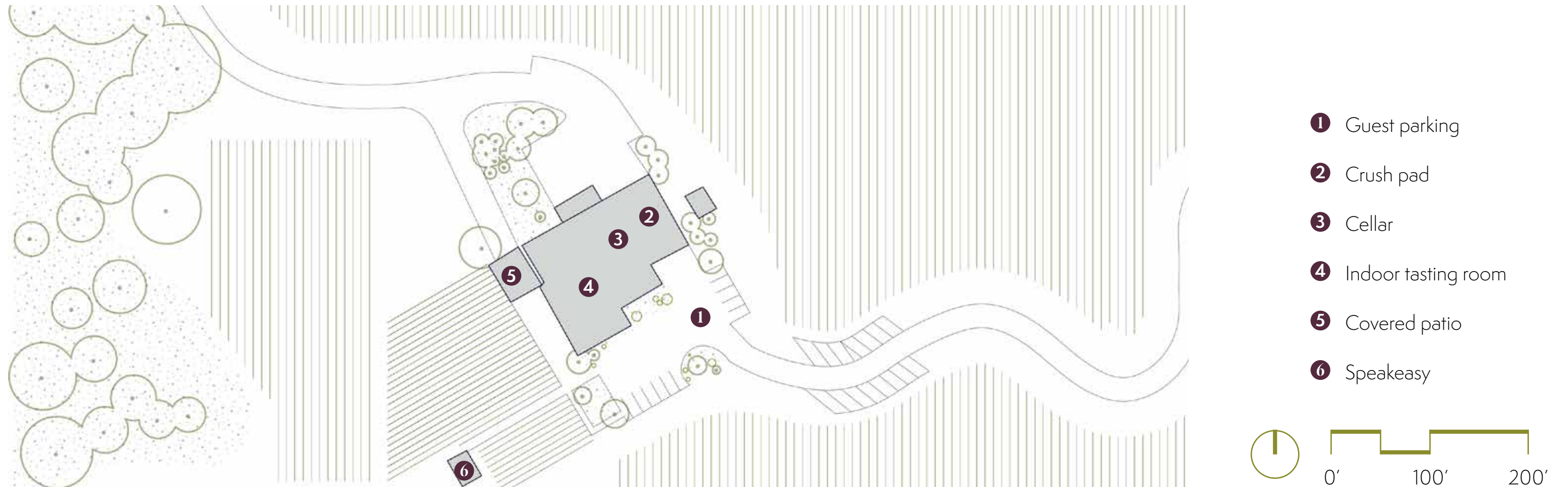
**spatial form** nestled into side of the ridge  
water draining perpendicular across vines to forest  
creates views up, down, and across grade

**metaphorical form** repetition of lines, grids and blocks  
blocks pulled out to engage with topography  
reinforced spatial logics of agricultural landscape

**programmatic form** agricultural pathways parallel entry road  
winery building provides separation between uses



View northeast from tasting room entrance towards parking lot at Trisaetum



2021  
Ribbon Ridge  
Estate Dry Riesling



varietal  
Riesling

**vineyard**

Ribbon Ridge Estate  
Ribbon Ridge AVA

**notes**

aged using neutral oak &  
concrete

sweeter on the nose than on  
the finish

balanced acid, moderate  
viscosity

light, sweet, floral

2019  
Ribbon Ridge  
Estate Pinot Noir



varietal  
Pinot Noir

**vineyard**

Ribbon Ridge Estate  
Ribbon Ridge AVA

**notes**

moderate tannins  
provide texture

balanced acidity,  
light on the palate

deep berry, jewel tone

fruit-forward character

2021  
Artist Series #57  
Pinot Noir



varietal  
Pinot Noir

**vineyard**

Coast Ridge Estate  
Yamhill-Carlton AVA

**notes**

single block of Pomard clone

basalt volcanic soil

depth of color

luscious, fruity nose

**experiencing  
sense of place**

agricultural machinery sounds in the distance; light breeze undulating landscape paired with vines is mesmerizing feel the wind move through the landscape trees at bottom of ridge tell the story of water moving through



View southeast from covered patio towards vines at Trisaetum



View northwest from parking lot towards crush pad at Trisaetum



# Beckham Estate

## Location

Sherwood, OR  
Chehalem Mountains AVA

## Year Established

2005

## Certifications & practices

Terracotta vessels  
Deep Roots Coalition  
Slow Wine Oregon  
Regenerative farming  
No-till

## Winemaking approach

Hand-harvested  
No fining  
Indigenous yeasts



**basic form** two very strong linear alignments: N-S and NE-SW  
all buildings are in alignment with a vineyard block  
cellar and tasting room are at a distance from each other

**spatial form** viewpoint between Coast Range and Cascades  
tasting room is terraced into the ridge  
forest creates walls on all sides

**metaphorical form** intimacy with vines  
experience landscape change over time

**programmatic form** driveway loop provides central point of access for the site  
no wayfinding  
winemaker's house as nexus



View north from driveway to vineyard blocks at Beckham Estate



- ① Guest parking
- ② Crush pad
- ③ Cellar
- ④ Indoor tasting room
- ⑤ Winemaker's house



2021  
Beckham Estate  
Trousseau



**varietal**  
Trousseau

**vineyard**

Beckham Estate  
Chehalem Mtns. AVA

**notes**

fermented in terra cotta  
amphorae

light red color  
and round mouthfeel

red fruits, pine, earth, savory

deep finish

2019  
A.D. Beckham  
Pinot Gris



**varietal**  
Pinot Gris

**vineyard**

Beckham Estate  
Chehalem Mtns. AVA

**notes**

fermented in terra cotta  
amphorae

savory strawberry  
& apricot jam

earthy mouthfeel  
& notable tannins

completely novel pinot gris

2021  
A.D. Beckham  
Riesling "Sincerus"



**varietal**  
Riesling

**vineyard**

Beckham Estate  
Chehalem Mtns. AVA

**notes**

fermented in terra cotta  
amphorae

citrus-like acidity  
and tannins on finish

notes of apple & pear

dry with crisp finish

**experiencing  
sense of place**

agricultural machinery sounds in the distance; light breeze  
undulating landscape paired with vines is mesmerizing  
feel the wind move through the landscape  
trees at bottom of ridge tell the story of water moving through



*Clay amphorae vessels in the cellar at Beckham Estate*



*View looking west from central loop to entrance sequence at Beckham Estate*

# Winter's Hill

## Location

Dayton, OR  
Dundee Hills AVA

## Year Established

1990

## Certifications & practices

Slow Wine Oregon  
Hand-harvested  
Willamette Valley Bird Tral  
LIVE Certification  
Salmon Safe

## Winemaking approach

Hand-harvested  
Inoculated yeast



**basic form** given how large the site is, the active space is very compact  
organic shapes are filled with native plantings  
distance from established vines

**spatial form** located on the flat top of a hill  
dramatic views to the south as topography drops sharply  
artificially elevated crush pad is only integration with topography

**metaphorical form** emulate neighbor commercial wineries  
pnw château  
commanding views

**programmatic form** entry and parking as series of loops  
production flows and visitor flows intimately connected



View east from patio to new vineyard blocks at Winter's Hill



- ① Guest parking
- ② Crush pad
- ③ Cellar
- ④ Indoor tasting room
- ⑤ Covered patio



2019  
Pinot Noir  
Block 10



**varietal**  
Pinot Noir

**vineyard**

Winter's Hill Estate  
Dundee Hills AVA

**notes**

highest block in the vineyard

concentrated depth of flavor

plush tannins & deep finish

2015  
Pinot Noir  
Reserve



**varietal**  
Pinot Noir

**vineyard**

Winter's Hill Estate  
Dundee Hills AVA

**notes**

blended from 11 barrels  
after aging

light red color  
and round mouthfeel

silky with tannin for grip

2017  
Hans & Lena  
Pinot Gris



**varietal**  
Pinot Gris

**vineyard**

Winter's Hill Estate  
Dundee Hills AVA

**notes**

honey, wildflowers, pear

sweet finish

very balanced acid

in general, the wines had a lack of distinct character  
which may be reflective of the lack of character of the site

**experiencing  
sense of place**

red soil, oak savannah, ancient landform relic  
rising and winding to rest on the top of the Dundee Hills

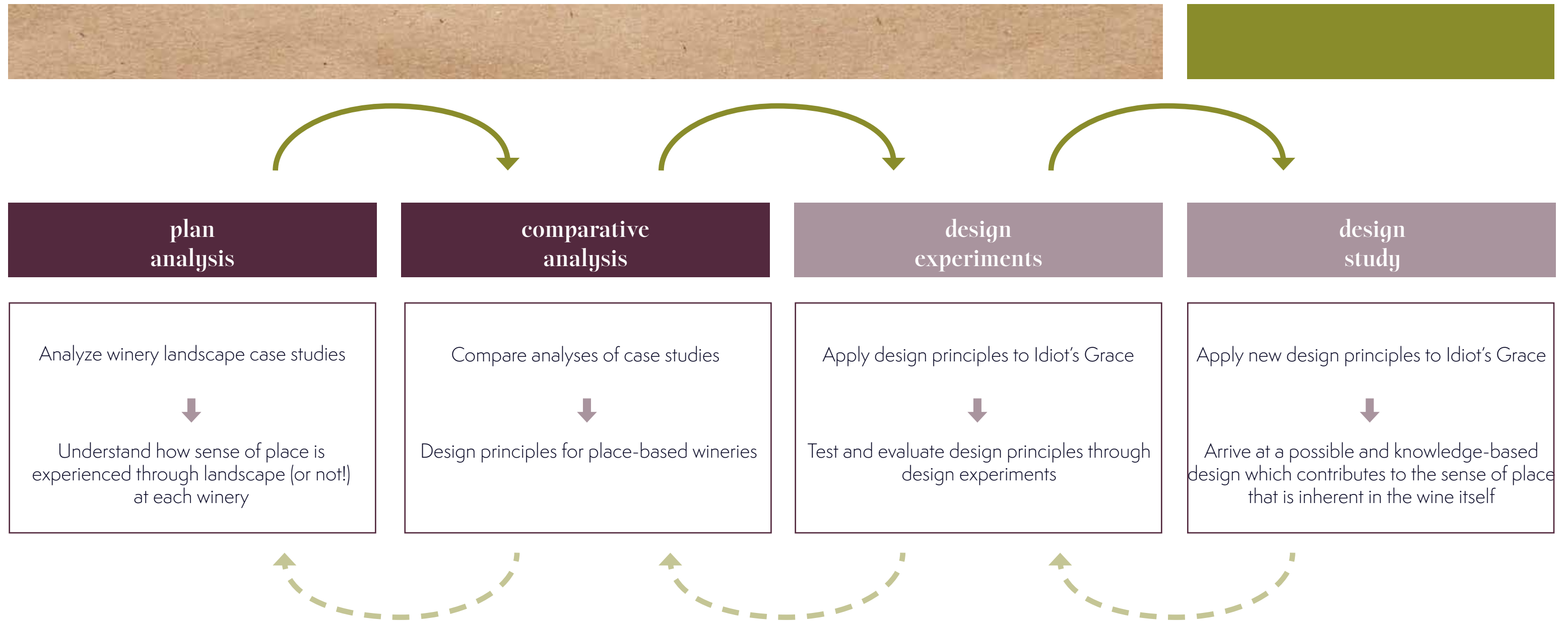


View looking east from entrance to elevated crush pad at Winter's Hill



View looking west from parking lot towards pond and native plantings at Winter's Hill

# comparative analysis



Celia Hensey & Michael Geffel, 2022

I learned a lot from looking at these wineries separately, and my next step was to put all of those pieces together through comparative analysis. This involved comparing these designed landscapes to reveal their relationships and differences. The goal of this phase was to see whether any typologies or formal and compositional principles emerged.

When I started to compare the findings from plan analysis, I noticed a few clusters of experience...



## Trisaetum

## Syncline



look for design elements from these wineries that particularly enhance the experience of genius loci

focus on physical characteristics of AVA?

## Beckham Estate

## Savage Grace



look for design elements from these wineries that particularly enhance the experience of terroir

interpret winemaking process?

Some wineries helped me to experience a particular connection to genius loci. I felt like I really connected to the spirit of the place of both Trisaetum and Syncline Winery. At Trisaetum I felt connected to Ribbon Ridge, while at Syncline I felt immersed in the shrub-steppe ecosystem. When I investigated the features that helped me connect to genius loci, I realized that those were the same features that were identified as characteristic of the AVAs for each vineyard. Perhaps focusing on the distinct physical characteristics of an AVA could be a starting point for designing for genius loci.

Some wineries helped me to experience a particular to terroir. I felt like I really understand what made wines from Beckham Estate and Savage Grace distinct to those places and winemakers. Both of these wineries have winemakers with very distinct approaches, which come through in the wine. And while I felt connected to terroir, at both places I felt I was only able to access genius loci through views – not through an embodied sensory experience. Perhaps highlighting the winemaking process through interpretive features could be a starting point for designing for terroir.

Trisaetum

Syncline



Illahe

Idiot's Grace

genius loci

terroir



Beckham Estate

Savage Grace



look for design elements from these wineries that particularly enhance the experience of terroir

provide opportunity to engage with viticultural landscape as well as non-viticultural landscape?

Some wineries offered me were transformative experiences where I felt that I was able to deeply connect to both genius loci and terroir. I felt this at Idiot's Grace as well as Illahe. For both wineries, I noticed that the tasting room experience, the working landscape, and non-productive landscape features were brought into close spatial proximity in a way that could be accessed by visitors. Perhaps offering visitors a way to engage with the surrounding landscape as well as the designed viticultural landscape could be a starting point for a design that integrates both genius loci and terroir.

Some wineries felt like they didn't help me to relate to either genius loci or terroir in a particularly strong way. Interestingly, both Domaine Pouillon and Winter's Hill emulated European tasting room experiences, and I think that may have impacted my experienced of the spirit of the place. Also, the tastings on offer at the time did not provide many opportunities to experience wines that were grown on the same property as the tasting room, which affected my ability to connect with terroir.

## landscape context



## integration



## storytelling



- Nestle/embed within topography so that visitors can access and experience it
- Use terrain forms strategically to create and/or connect to views
- Use site-based material palette
- Allow visitors an opportunity to engage with the landscape and ecosystems

- Extend arrival sequences to promote engagement with working agricultural landscape features and activities
- Views should instigate associations between working landscapes and large scale landscape features

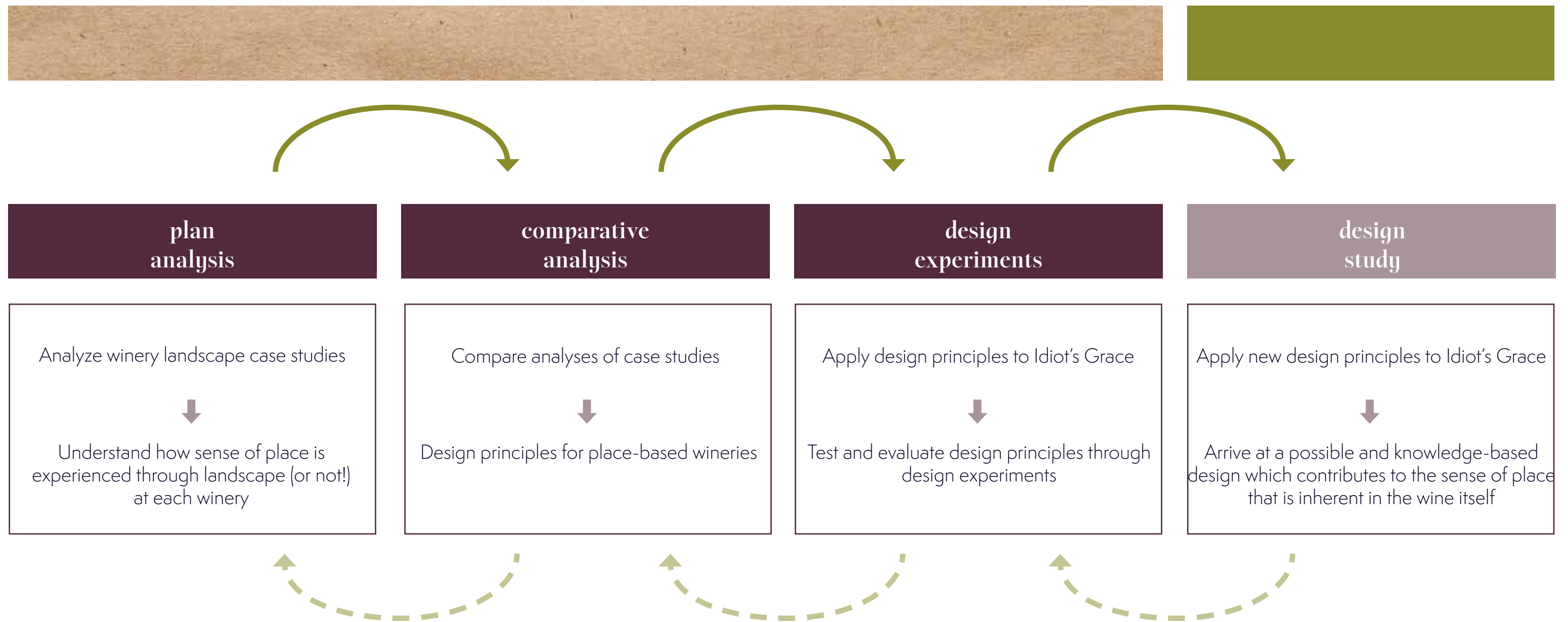
- Interpretive feature/design to immerse visitors within the winemaking process
- Use views to connect to viticultural landscape when physical engagement is not possible

To move from these initial insights to potential design principles, I used these experiences as a starting point to identify design elements from these wineries that were already working to express genius loci and terroir. I also considered what elements were already working to integrate genius loci with terroir for the guest experience.

Note that when divorced from site, these design principles are rather abstract. While these design principles were a helpful starting point, I needed explore whether they could be expressed in site-specific ways.



design  
experiments



Celia Hensey & Michael Geffel, 2022

Once I identified my initial design principles as a result of my comparative analysis, it was time to test them out through design experiments.

For this phase, I used Idiot's Grace as a testing ground to explore whether these design principles could really be used to create a design that contributes to the sense of place inherent in the wine itself. In order to do that, let's first ground ourselves in the context for these design experiments: Idiot's Grace winery in Mosier, Oregon.



Above, looking north towards the Columbia River from Mosier Plateau; below looking south toward the valley from the Mosier Plateau.

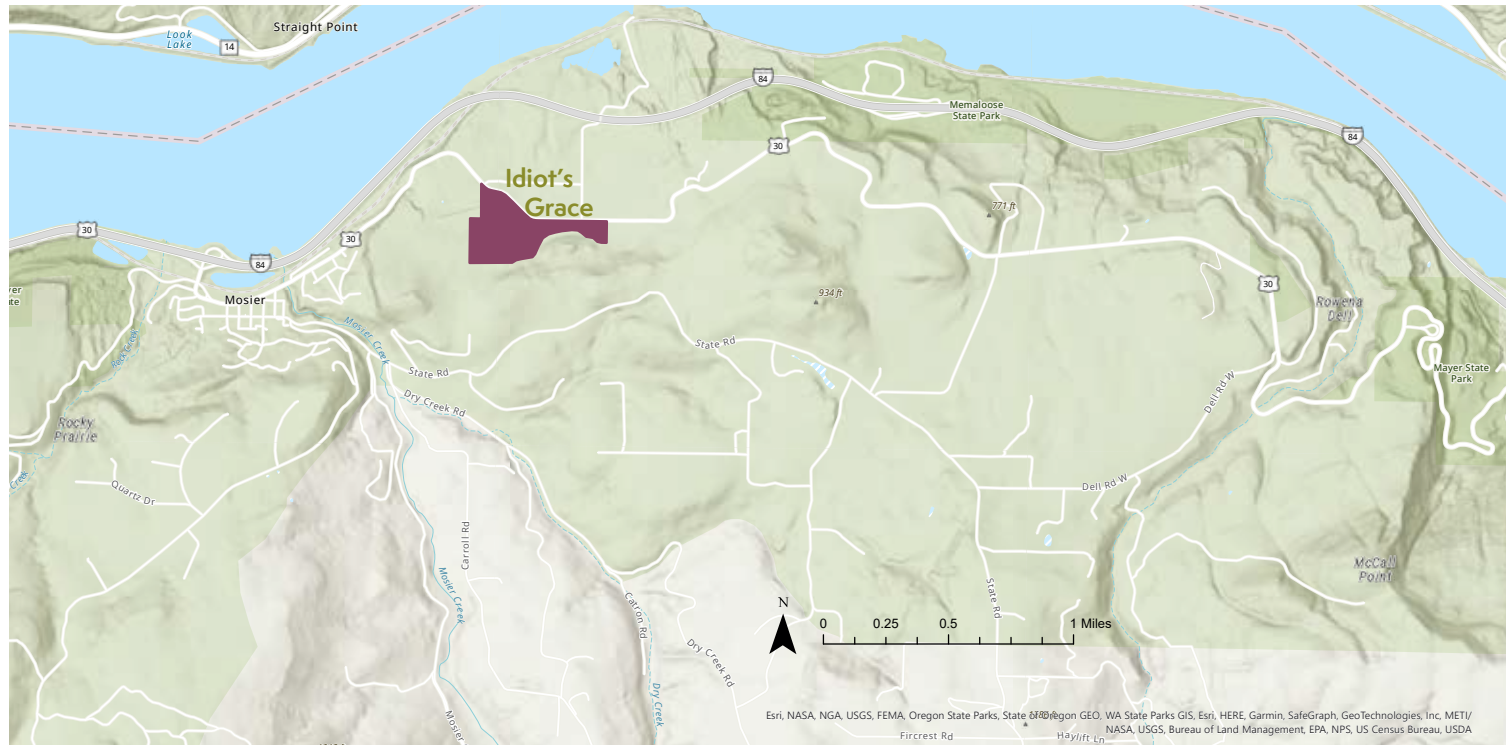


Images of the East Cascades Oak-Ponderosa Pine Forest and Woodland, including impacts of wildfire in 2022.



Mosier is located within the Columbia Gorge AVA. This AVA was created to recognize how the unique geological characteristics of the Gorge create distinctive wines. Intensive geologic activity, combined with the impact of the Missoula floods, created the unique soils, rock formations, and microclimates that define this iconic landscape. The topography of Mosier is a gentle sloping valley on a plateau above the Columbia River. Steep basalt bluffs rise above the Mosier Plateau from the south. Strong Columbia Gorge winds are constant year-round, switching directions in the morning and evening, but are most intense in the summer.

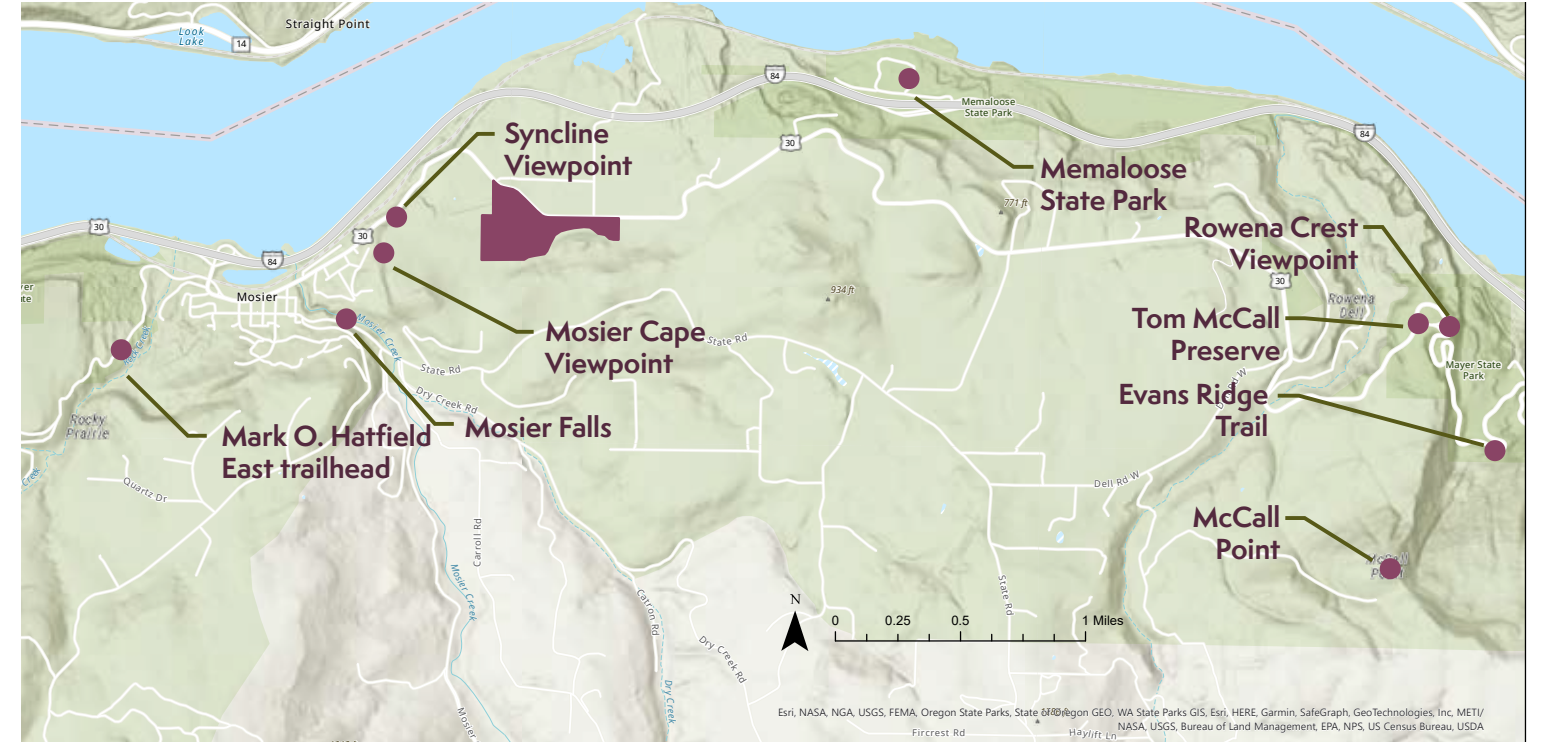
Mosier is within a warm-summer Mediterranean climate. Average annual precipitation for Mosier is 30.6", with the most precipitation occurring in January (average of 5.8") and the least amount occurring in July (Average 0.2"). As a result of its unique climate and geology, Mosier is in a transitional zone between a temperate forest ecosystem (like Hood River) to the west and a shrub-steppe ecosystem (like The Dalles) to the east. It's home to a very unique transitional ecological system called the East Cascades Oak-Ponderosa Pine Forest and Woodland (see images above). This ecological system is not only rare but also highly threatened.



Above, terrain context map of Mosier; below, aerial context map of Mosier



Mosier, Oregon is a small agricultural town located in the Columbia River Gorge. The first commercial orchard in Mosier was established in 1878, and since then the area has remained mostly rural and agricultural. Cherries are well adapted to this mesic climate and are the main crop in this area. Idiot's Grace was established on a former cherry orchard, and as you can see from this above aerial view the the surrounding properties are primarily orchards, vineyards, and woodlands that cover the top of the Mosier plateau.



Above, popular recreation spots near Mosier; below, e-bike users with Sol Rides enjoy a tasting after biking up to Rowena Crest



As the Columbia Gorge becomes increasingly popular for recreation, Mosier is also becoming a popular destination for tourists who are drawn to hikes, biking opportunities, and scenic viewpoints. Idiot's Grace is very close to several very popular recreation spots. Because the winery is located on historic Highway 30, many visitors who are on their way to or from a recreation destination will stop by to taste wines. Many people will hike, bike, or recreate nearby and then visit Idiot's Grace for a wine tasting (see images above). In this sense, a tasting at Idiot's Grace is a continuation of the experience of place.



Context map: grapes in purple, cherries in green, pears in blue, vegetables in orange



Varietals of wine grapes at Idiot's Grace

The tasting room for Idiot's Grace is located on an Oregon Tilth certified working farm. The farm was primarily planted with cherry orchards until the McCormick family purchased the property in 2002. The Mosier farm is 50 acres, which includes 15 acres of cherries, 4 acres of pears and 15 acres of vineyards, among other fruit and vegetable crops. U-pick cherries are open at the farm throughout cherry harvest. An organic vegetable farmer named Micaela Ballenger leases 4 acres of the property. She farms organic row crops and specializes in heirloom tomatoes. Idiot's Grace is also a CSA distribution point for Gorge Farmer Collective.



Aerial view of the wine cellar and tasting room at Idiot's Grace



View of hoop houses and picnic tables looking west at Idiot's Grace tasting room

Over 20 varieties of wine grapes are grown at the Mosier farm! As each vineyard block enters its moment of optimal ripeness, the grapes are harvested by hand. Harvested grapes are transported to the crush pad, where they are sorted and crushed. Next, the crushed grapes are moved into the wine cellar to begin their unique journeys of fermentation. Finally, the resulting wine will be bottled in the wine cellar and then moved into the tasting room to be enjoyed by guests! Most of the wine sales for Idiot's Grace happen in the tasting room – from visitors who buy bottles and wine club members who stop by to pick up their wine allocations.

Wine production and bottling happens in the same building as the tasting room. Since the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic, the interior of the tasting room has not been used for guest seating. Instead, guests experience an outdoor tasting room which includes six picnic tables and a small patio area. This outdoor area is bisected by a gravel road that leads to the wine production area, and farm vehicles traverse this space each day. There are some pear trees near the entrance to the tasting room that guests like to manhandle. There are also two Stepping Stone Farm hoop houses nearby that guests tend to be very intrigued by!





Guest circulation context map

Currently, guests can only move through a small portion of the site. Driving along the historic highway, cars head south and enter the site through a small gravel access road. After a short drive framed by fruit trees and oaks, guests arrive at the parking lot. The parking lot only has 8 parking spots, and is adjacent to the tasting room.

Guests cross the access road and enter the tasting room through an outdoor patio space. From there, guests move to picnic tables or the patio for a wine tasting. Guests typically do not directly engage with any of the working landscape, and their access to the site is limited to this small portion near the tasting room.

An alternative entry experience occurs in early summer, when the existing cherries are sold as a U-Pick. For the U-Pick, guests drive in from the eastern edge of the property and park near this Airstream trailer which serves as the hub for U-Pick customers. U-Pick visitors remain separated from the tasting room both spatially and programmatically.



## What about terroir and genius loci?





For this project, I felt it was critical to go beyond the typical layers of site analysis and explore how people are already experiencing terroir and genius loci at Idiot's Grace. I turned to online guest reviews to see how visitors articulated their experiences...

These are some of the phrases that guests used that captured their experiences of the terroir and genius loci of Idiot's Grace.

However, I have my own relationship with how terroir and genius loci at Idiot's Grace! Here are some of the phrases I use to capture my own experience of the terroir and genius loci.



## design experiment opportunities

- Idiot's Grace is situated within a unique and iconic landscape in the Columbia Gorge
- Guests seem to desire to interact with working landscape but are currently prevented from doing so

## design experiment challenges

- Idiot's Grace already seems to express both genius loci and terroir quite well
- Design principles from comparative analysis are quite abstract

## design experiment goal

**Apply the insights of comparative analysis to Idiot's Grace by testing design principles through design experiments**



Now that we've grounded ourselves in the context of the site, let's a moment to reflect. How could I apply my knowledge of Idiot's Grace to the design experiments?

I identified some immediate design opportunities:

- Idiot's Grace is situated within an actively farmed productive landscape, situated within a geologically scenic framing landscape
- From my experience working in the tasting room, guests seem to desire to interact with working landscape but are currently prevented from doing so. They are constantly asking if they can get into the pear orchard or interfering with Micaela's vegetable starts!

However, I also identified an immediate design challenge: based on my personal experience as well as those shared by guests, Idiot's Grace already seems to express both genius loci and terroir quite well. Another challenge was that the design principles generated through comparative analysis were rather abstract.

Ultimately, my goal was to apply the insights of comparative analysis to Idiot's Grace by testing design principles through design experiments.

*revisiting the design principles...*

# landscape context



# integration



# storytelling



- Nestle/embed within topography so that visitors can access and experience it
- Use terrain forms strategically to create and/or connect to views
- Use site-based material palette
- Allow visitors an opportunity to engage with the landscape and ecosystems

- Extend arrival sequences to promote engagement with working agricultural landscape features and activities
- Views should instigate associations between working landscapes and large scale landscape features

- Interpretive feature/design to immerse visitors within the winemaking process
- Use views to connect to viticultural landscape when physical engagement is not possible

Let's revisit the initial design principles that I created as a result of my comparative analysis of 8 wineries. You might notice that though these all sound very lovely, many of them are either very abstract or not particularly relevant to Idiot's Grace .

For example: "views should instigate associations between working landscapes and large scale landscape features". Sure, that's a pattern that emerged from my comparative analysis but...what would that actually look like when expressed at Idiot's grace in a sensitive site-specific way?

*...and attempting to translate them to Idiot's Grace?*

## landscape context



## integration



## storytelling



- Create experience of the wind
- Create experience of the benchlands
- Create views to the Gorge
- Connect experiences to historic agricultural practices on this land

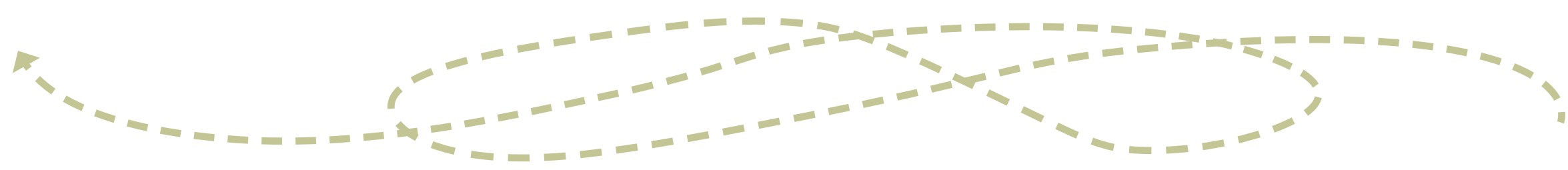
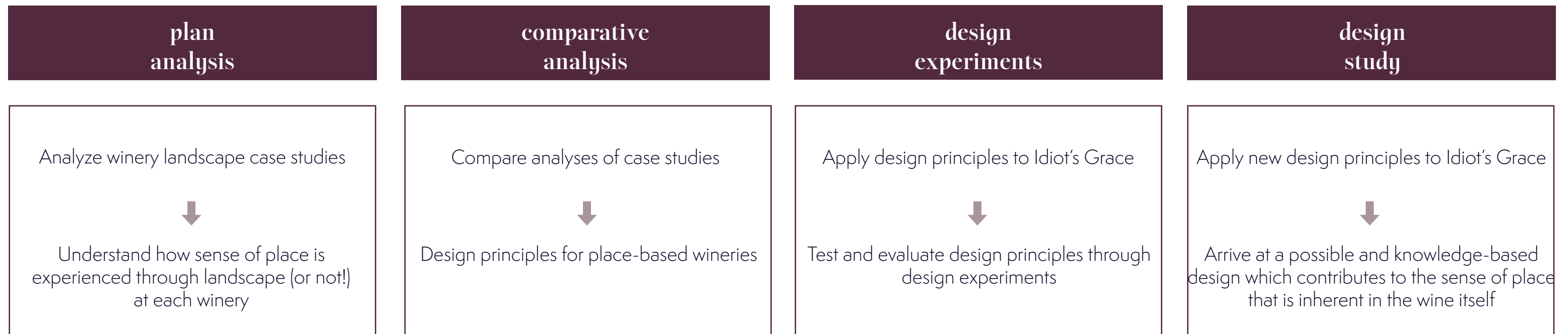
- Interpret winemaking process

- Extend arrival sequence through working landscape

I tried to apply these design principles to Idiot's Grace to see if they could be deployed in a more specific context, and these were my primary lines of inquiry. For design experiments for genius loci, I thought about things like creating an experience of the wind, creating an experience of the benchlands, creating views to the Gorge, and connecting experiences to historic agricultural practices on this land. For design experiments for terroir, I thought about things like extending the arrival sequence through a working landscape and interpreting the winemaking process.

In all honesty, I really struggled with applying these principles in straightforward ways!

Because the design principles that emerged through comparative analysis were quite abstract, it was difficult to creatively apply them deeply to Idiot's Grace. How could I recontextualized them within this unique landscape? I tried starting from specific design elements to see which design principles they might integrate, reinforce, and discover.



It became apparent that my process would not be as linear as I had thought it would be. I learned that linear, research-based processes don't always persist in the messy world of design. Here are some other lessons I learned:

- It is hard to adapt generalized principles to a highly specific context in a way that meaningfully adds to the experience of the place.
- It was hard to design something that enhanced the existing experience of place rather than detracting from it.
- Perhaps genius loci and terroir could be reinforced or enhanced through separate design elements.
- Just like terroir cannot be understood merely by running a sample of wine through a mass spectrometer, the experience of a place cannot be understood merely by reducing it to a set of design principles.

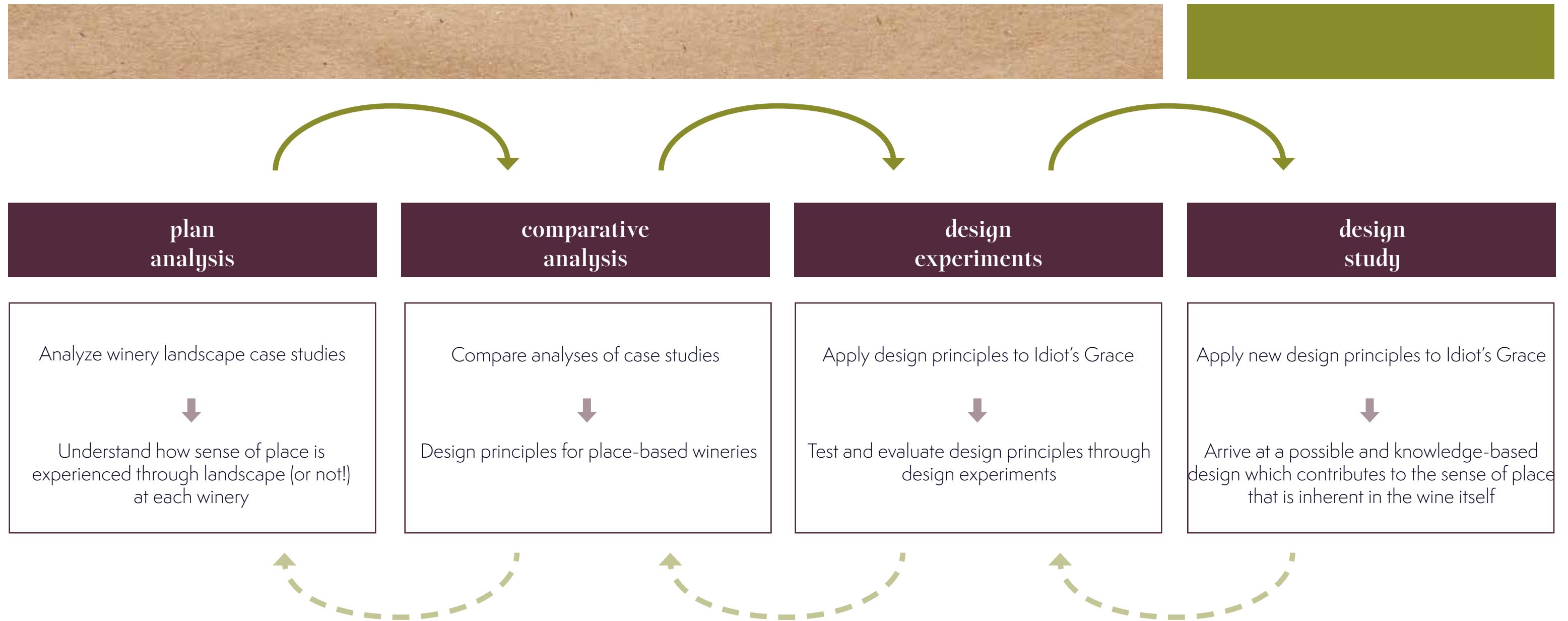
Genius loci and terroir may be experiences that transcend design. They are alchemical creations of place, people, and time that we are lucky to experience – and design can only help to instigate in serendipitous ways. However, both genius loci and terroir are perceived through a personal sensory experience.

Therefore, **by designing an experience that grounds people in their senses and in place, I can prepare them to experience the magic of Idiot's Grace.**

This approach guided my approach as I moved into the final phase of my project: the design study.



a design for  
Idiot's Grace



Celia Hensey & Michael Geffel, 2022

Now we enter the final stage of the project: a design for Idiot's Grace!

My task was to translate the key learnings from my design experiments to Idiot's Grace, to ultimately produce a design would enhance the experience of terroir and genius loci for guests.

The biggest lesson that I learned from my design experiments was that the most effective way for me to help people experience the terroir and genius loci of Idiot's Grace is to design an experience that grounds them in their senses and encourages them to begin to connect to the place.



*Design principles for Idiot's Grace*

Enhance sensory experience of the site  
Encourage guests to connect with landscape

Extend arrival sequence

Give guests a chance to engage with a working landscape  
while limiting their impacts on that landscape

Use a site-based material palette

Pull out parking lot → Extend arrival sequence

Create new arrival sequence with winding curves → Slow down visitors

Situate arrival sequence within the orchard → Engage with productive landscape

Use materials and plantings that are found nearby → Reinforce sense of place

Introduce sensory elements to the entry sequence → Enhance sensory experience

Juxtapose agricultural and native ecologies → Understand Idiot's Grace as nexus

Applying the knowledge gained through my design experiments, I arrived at the design principles that formed the basis of my final design. This included: enhance sensory experience of the site, encourage guests to connect with landscape, extend arrival sequence, give guests a chance to engage with a working landscape while limiting their impacts on that landscape, and use a site-based material palette.

When I applied these revised design principles to Idiot's Grace, some design elements were revealed.



*Existing site plan*



*Proposed site plan*

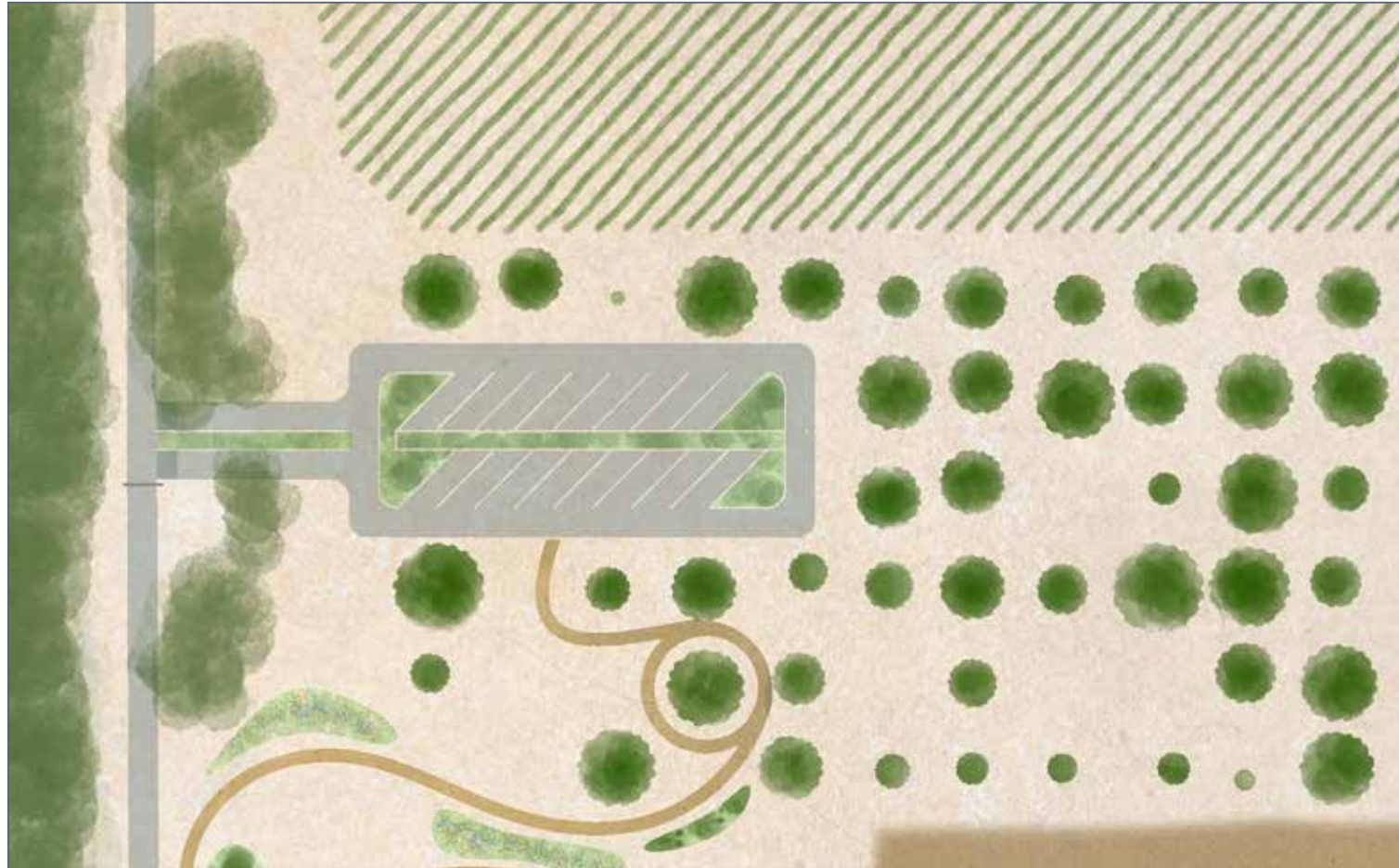


Applying the design elements resulted in this site plan. While the character of the site has largely been retained, there are several areas of design intervention:

- The parking lot
- The entry sequence
- The herb and vegetable garden
- The additional guest seating in the site of the previous parking lot

In the next pages, I will explore how the design choices in these areas work together to enhance the sense of place that's present in the wine of Idiot's Grace.

# parking



Scaled illustrative plan

The parking lot has been moved away from its current location adjacent to the winery, so that it is now closer to the historic highway. It is now about 100 yards from the tasting room. Guests will turn left from the access road and park next to the vineyard block, within the cherry orchard. This parking doubles the amount of available parking, from 8 spots to 16 spots. A one way traffic flow and generous six foot turning radius makes getting in and out easy.

Because the access road is part of a utility easement, the road has been retained but access limited by a gate. The gate offers guidance to direct guests into the parking lot while also providing an opportunity for an aesthetic moment, with Corten elements that match the existing sign along the historic highway.

As guests enter the path to the winery from the parking lot, the threshold is marked by a grape arbor – reinforcing that guests are situated within an active productive landscape and creating a connection with the vines directly behind them.



Above, rendering of gate detail; below, rendering of grape arbor detail



# entry path



Scaled illustrative plan

Since the parking lot has been moved away from the tasting room, guests have a new entry sequence to travel as they make their way to the tasting room. This new path winds through the space, slowing guests down to encourage them to connect with the landscape.

The path begins by winding through the cherry orchard, giving guests the opportunity to walk through and engage with an actively farmed landscape. These cherries are already open for u-pick and are therefore already programmed for guest interaction and are resilient to tourist use. This design intervention formalizes the way that guests interact with the orchard and provides an experience for them that is designed with intention.

As the trail winds out of the orchard, the regular plantings of the cherry trees begin to interact with plantings of native plants. In this way, plantings that reinforce the agricultural landscape mingle with native plant ecologies and guests can explore this interface. In this way, they are immersed in the genius loci of Idiot's Grace, the cherry orchard and the Oak-Pine woodlands. Tall grasses and gentle mounding provide seasonally changing visual screening so that guests experience moments of surprise as views are revealed along the journey.

# meadowscape

- achillea millefolium* (Common yarrow)
- eriogonum compsoitum* (Heart-leafed buckwheat)
- eriophyllum lanatum* (Oregon sunshine)
- eschscholzia californica* (California poppy)
- festuca iadahoensis* (Idaho fescue)
- gaillarda aristata* (Blanket flower)
- linum lewisii* (Blue flax)
- lomatium pailioniferum* (Desert parsley)

# shrubscape

- artemisia tridentata*
- carex geyeri*
- chrysothamnus vscidiflorus*
- purshia tridentata*



Above, rendering of basalt threshold detail

# sensory garden



Scaled illustrative plan

Finally, the addition of a vegetable and herb garden provides guests with a more hands-on opportunity to engage with agriculture while enhancing their sensory experience. This area of the orchard has been cleared of trees to accommodate additional vegetable beds.

Guests are very intrigued by the plants and vegetable starts that are in the hoop houses, and the staff constantly has to shoo them away. Now, guests have an opportunity to interact with a vegetable garden in a controlled way, redirecting them away from the vegetable bed for Stepping Stone Farm.

Guests are very intrigued by the plants and vegetable starts that are in the hoop houses, and the staff constantly has to shoo them away. Now, guests have an opportunity to interact with a vegetable garden in a controlled way, redirecting them away from the vegetable bed for Stepping Stone Farm.

**see** *echinacea purpurea* (Purple coneflower)  
*anethum graveolens* (Dill)  
*Helianthus annuus* (Common sunflower)

*thymus serpyllum* (Creeping thyme)  
*nepeta mussinii* (Catmint)  
*lavendula angustifolia* (Lavender)

**smell**

**touch**

*artemisia schmidtiana* (Satin wormwood)  
*thymus pseudolanuginosus* (Woolly thyme)  
*stachys byzantina* (Lambs ears)

*panicum virgatum* (Switchgrass)  
*baptisia australis* (False indigo)  
*platycodon grandifloras* (Balloon flower)

**hear**

**taste** selections by Micaela Ballenger  
of Stepping Stone Farm

Below, rendering of herb and vegetable sensory garden





Above, rendering of gate detail; below, rendering of basalt threshold detail



Together, these designed areas – the parking lot, the entry sequence, the additional seating area, and the herb and vegetable garden – provide guests with additional layers of context and connection as they experience Idiot's Grace. These elements contribute to the overall experience of place without overpowering or detracting from the place itself.



Above, rendering of grape arbor detail; below, rendering of herb and vegetable sensory garden



Guests can enter the site through an orchard, experience a slow and engaging entry to Idiot's Grace through the new arrival sequence, sit down for a tasting at the new seating area, or take their glass and wander through the herb and vegetable garden. Before a drop of wine has been poured, they are already starting to engage deeply with this place. And when they finally swirl their glass and take a sip, they are primed for a moving and transformative sensory experience – one that connects them to these grapes and this place.

*critical reflections:*  
design as research  
& the master's project process



Above, rendering of herb and vegetable sensory garden

In conclusion, the comparative analysis phase did generate design principles; however, these were (as a result of the process) too general to be applied successfully to a site during the experimental design study. My experimental design study was successful as a form of reflective inquiry – however, since terroir and genius loci are both so intrinsic and specific to a place it is incredibly difficult to apply generic knowledge in a specific way. Analytical approaches can be useful, but they don't always reveal something new about an experience – especially one that is so inherently personal. While the experiences of terroir and genius loci are real, they are specific to an alchemical mixture of person, place, and sensation.

I learned so much about design and the design process through this project! Here are some things that will stick with me moving forward. Re-grounding myself in the site as a designer is critical: otherwise, I get so stuck in my head. Every time I revisited Idiot's Grace, my design clarified itself. Idiot's Grace, and all of the people who work there, are so important to me. I felt an immense burden to honor this place, which sometimes made it difficult to give myself permission to design freely. I don't need to create Disney World – less can be more! I realized I was feeling an urge to make some kind of monument fitting of a "Master's Project". That's not what this place is, and that's not how I can tell the story of the place effectively. While minimal, I think that my interventions thoughtful, grounded in place and – most importantly – effective.

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## *image credits*

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<b>PAGE</b>	<b>CREDIT</b>
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6-7	Tasting room entrance: <i>Idiot's Grace 2023</i>
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16-17	All images: <i>Idiot's Grace 2023</i>
104	Top: Mark L. Scott Real Estate, 2022 Bottom: Paul Gerard, 2018)
105	E-bike patrons: <i>Sol Rides 2021</i>



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