

Chapter 73

Constructing Thoroughbred Breeding Landscapes: Manufactured Idylls in the Upper Hunter Region of Australia

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73.1 Introduction

Driving north from Sydney through the Upper Hunter region, past the open cut coal mines only partly hidden behind berms and saplings, one enters a flat landscape of remnant dairy farms and the occasional thoroughbred stud. If this was the extent of the thoroughbred industry, one would wonder why the largest town in the Upper Hunter Shire, Scone, is indisputably the “horse capital of Australia”. North of Scone more thoroughbred studs (otherwise known as thoroughbred farms) face the highway or are concealed behind the hills. Everybody notices Emirates Park because it spans the entire distance between the small towns of Blandford and Murrurundi, on both sides of the highway (Fig. 73.1). There are, however, many other major studs hidden along smaller roads, such that there are approximately 65 studs in the region, from which over 70% – of Australia’s thoroughbred foals are conceived, and which includes all of the top sires and broodmare bands in the country (NSW Department of State and Regional Development, 2008).

These thoroughbred breeding farms are a significant part of the regional economy, major users of water and a crucial source of cultural identity for the town of Scone and the Upper Hunter region (see McManus, 2008a, 2008b). The farms vary in ownership, from international operations such as Coolmore (Ireland), Emirates Park (Dubai), Darley (Dubai) and formerly Vinery (American – Tom Simon) to large Australian enterprises (Arrowfield, Widden) and small, local operations that may be expensive boutique studs or less well-off concerns. The larger international studs are primarily responsible for the importing of shuttle-stallions, that is, stallions that serve mares in both the northern and southern hemisphere during the different breeding seasons. These shuttle-stallions arrive from Europe (including the UK and Ireland), Japan and the U.S., stand at stud in Australia for a season, and then return to their base in the northern hemisphere. It is an aspect of the international thoroughbred breeding and racing industry that is not highly visible compared with

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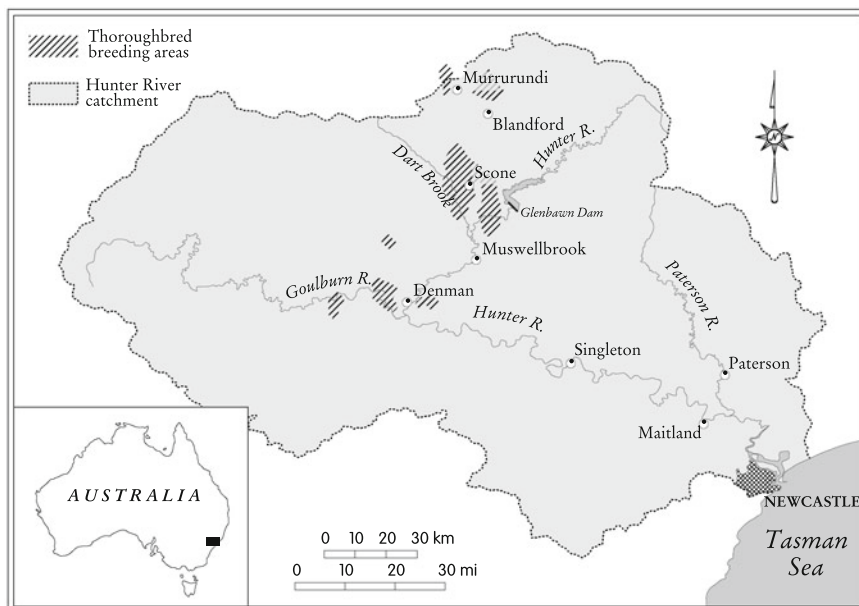


Fig. 73.1 Location of horsefarms in Upper Hunter region. (Cartography by Dick Gilbreath)

international racehorses competing in prestige events throughout the world, but it is often more lucrative over the long-term.

While the farms vary considerably in ownership, size and niche in the thoroughbred breeding industry, it is notable that there is a concentration in the field of equine architecture, which is the industry that is primarily responsible for planning and designing the equine landscapes. In Australia there are two main equine architecture practices that service the industry; Ladd-Hudson Architects, based in the suburb of Rozelle in the inner-west of Sydney, and Timothy Court and Company, based south-west of Sydney. The former practice designed projects such as Northwood Park for Darley Australia, Brooklyn Lodge in the Upper Hunter, and major work at the historic Vinery stud in the Upper Hunter. The latter practice designed facilities such as the Hunter Valley Equine Research Centre in Scone, parts of the Newmarket auction complex in Sydney, and the 2008 Olympic facilities for equestrian events in Hong Kong. The concentration of equine architectural work means that a few firms, and key individuals, are largely responsible for the design of equine landscapes in places such as the Upper Hunter.

In this chapter we explore the engineering of landscapes on the various thoroughbred studs, and the ways that the notion of “landscape” is incorporated into planning mechanisms and is designed to maintain local and regional attributes, amenity and to reduce conflicts. Before beginning this discussion of landscaping and its importance to thoroughbred breeding operations, it is useful to remember the sage advice

of John Hislop (1992: 1) who noted that “the land and water-supply must be suitable to producing good racehorses” and “the land on which horses are raised is a far, far more important factor than is appreciated generally”. Hislop (1992: 2) continued, “the most dangerous move is to choose a property on account of the beauty of the house or the surrounding countryside, regardless of the suitability of the land to the purpose.” The discussion about thoroughbred farms in this chapter is made with these thoughts of Hislop’s in mind.

The chapter begins by briefly discussing the concept of landscape and by identifying four concepts of landscape from the vast literature on this subject that appear to be most relevant to thoroughbred breeding in the Upper Hunter. These four notions of landscape are; rural idyll, landscapes of conspicuous consumption, brandscapes and landscapes of work. We apply these four concepts to the landscape of thoroughbred studs in the Upper Hunter region, before exploring the use of landscape as a planning instrument in an attempt to reduce conflicts between competing land uses at the local and regional scales. The chapter concludes that landscapes at the scale of the individual stud, and in terms of local/regional conflicts between different land uses, cannot be de-linked from the political-economy of the stud and the region. The engineering of thoroughbred landscapes is inherently an economic, social and environmental process with economic, social and environmental impacts that enhance or constrain future activities.

73.2 The Concept of Landscape

The concept of landscape has generated much debate in geographical and related literature over many years. Kenneth Olwig (1993) provides an etymology of the term “landscape”, and how the word has been used in different countries to refer variously to a “natural environment” outside of human engagement, as scenery, and as a cultural landscape. The latter notion of cultural landscape was often understood as being after human settlement, and generally narrowed to the time period of European colonization of “wilderness” in North America, or “the bush” in Australia. This concept of landscape has been undermined by environmental historians such as William Cronon (1983, 1991, 1996) and Carolyn Merchant (1989) whose work demonstrates that Indigenous people were present and their actions influenced the composition of flora and fauna in an area. Contemporary engineering of landscapes is usually different from changes made by Indigenous people in the intent, the scale of change, and the impacts, but importantly Indigenous people were modifying their environments and it was only perceived as being “undisturbed” when viewed through “western” eyes.

Recent work by Winchester et al. (2003) focuses on the cultural landscape, moving away from notions of nature and environment to explore the impact of films, religious beliefs and understandings of the body as landscapes. The idea of landscape has also been linked with scale, such that the concept of the landscape scale is often used to prioritize particular approaches vis-à-vis other scales such as the local

or national scale. Paul Selman (2006) focuses on the landscape scale, a concept used in natural resource management to, among other things, avoid fragmentation caused by local decision-making and a focus on individual species or projects, and to avoid the constraints of administrative boundaries that do not equate with ecological systems and physical landforms. The concept of landscape is also important in urban planning and architecture, where settlements and buildings are planned and designed to relate to the landscape in particular ways. This notion of landscape is often more local than the more regionally oriented notion of landscape found in the work of conservation biologists and others using the term.

Arising from these changing and often conflicting ideas of landscape are four notions of landscape that will be used to structure this chapter. These landscape concepts are; rural idyll, landscapes of conspicuous consumption, brandscape and landscapes of work. These concepts may be present simultaneously and landscaping devices may serve multiple purposes such as improving safety for the horses and promoting a message of cleanliness and care, while also displaying wealth, tradition and status. It is also crucial to note that landscape is not just the physical phenomenon, it is the perception of physical phenomena that results in various interpretations being present simultaneously. Yi Fu Tuan (1974) noted this reasoning in his book *Topophilia*. This concept has been extended by Albrecht et al. (2007) in the notion of solastalgia, where landscapes of resource extraction and employment prospects for some people are understood as landscapes of irreversible environmental damage by other people, usually residents of an impacted area. Donald Meinig (1979) identified ten “ideologies” of landscape, and noted the potential for others. Many of these ideologies identified by Meinig (including landscape as pristine nature, landscape as biological systems, landscape as resources and wealth) are understood to be present in the spaces created and inhabited by the Upper Hunter thoroughbred breeding industry.

73.3 Four Landscapes of the Upper Hunter Thoroughbred Breeding Industry

73.3.1 Rural Idyll

The rural idyll has long been associated with ideas of pastoral wealth, anti-urbanism and a search for a time and place where life seemed better in the sense of it being more controllable and less turbulent (Boyle & Halfacree, 1998; Cloke & Little, 1997; Mingay, 1989). This notion of landscape infuses poetry and art, as well as urban critiques of the city and the solutions to integrate urban and rural lifestyles in various planning visions (see McManus, 2005). The rural idyll has been critiqued by contributors to Cloke and Little (1997) and Boyle and Halfacree (1998) because it conceals poverty, is racially discriminatory in that it is focused on whiteness to the point where this category itself is not interrogated (see Shaw, 2007), and that it does not recognize the marginality of some rural lives.

Despite these critiques, rural landscapes that appear natural, but well managed by humans according to shared understandings of what is good management, have widespread appeal. In Australia, although Indigenous people were seen and did work to achieve good environmental management in many areas that kept the undergrowth clear for hunting, this was not recognized and valued by non-Indigenous settlers. Instead, as in thoroughbred breeding landscapes such as the Kentucky Bluegrass, the understanding of a well managed landscape emanated from an English tradition of landscaping, which, although being an “acquired taste” (Murray-Wooley & Raitz, 1992: 106) was related both to the ancestry of the gentlemen farmers and their travels to England (Raitz & VanDommelen, 1990). Travelling is not simply a physical or historical feature of thoroughbred breeding landscapes. Raitz (1987: 6) noted the transfer of thoroughbred breeding imagery from the Bluegrass to other parts of Kentucky, such that it has “come to convey a pastoral image for the entire state”.

The rural idyll is a simplification of complexity. As Egoz and Bowring (2004: 60) noted in relation to farming in New Zealand, there is “a complex interplay between the appearance of the farm, its perception by others, the type of farming practiced, and the world views and values of the farmers”. Despite this recognition of complexity, it can be said that the rural idyll applies today in the Upper Hunter, and in other thoroughbred breeding locations. This is because the needs of breeders throughout the world are very similar. Although local climate, topography and culture ensure some differences between regions, the imperative of producing and protecting highly valuable animals to be sold at auction, raced and/or used for breeding more highly valuable animals, creates similar landscapes of black wooden fences with no corners, wire or other obstacles which may injure or kill a horse. The thoroughbred breeding farm is perpetuated by success (whether producing horses that win races, sell for high prices at auctions, or enable significant taxation benefits to accrue) and this goal requires a significant degree of functional standardization.

The influence of functionality begins with the choice of region. The Bluegrass forms approximately 16% of Kentucky, yet the state is known as The Bluegrass State (Raitz, 1990). As noted by Conley (2002) in his explanation of the concentration of horse farms in the Bluegrass region of Kentucky and the reason for the geographical limits of thoroughbred breeding in that state;

Gentle hills are ideal for expensive horses. But drive about thirty miles from downtown Lexington in any direction . . . the hills are steeper, the pasture is poorer, and the footing is far too dangerous for the tender, twistable ankles of the Thoroughbred.

(Conley, 2002: 26–27)

Functionality shapes the landscaping needs, but this then acts as a signifier of other values, such as competency and care – a message that is generally standardized throughout the thoroughbred breeding world. These messages are particularly important in thoroughbred breeding because unlike many other rural properties, the clients do visit the farm, stay in the accommodation and tour the facilities. This was noted by one interviewee who is associated with thoroughbred breeding and racing in Kentucky;

If you want to tell what kind of a farmer a man is, first then what catches your eye is his fences. If his fences are bad then he's not that, you know, that good of a farmer, you know. You can drive by farms and you see a nice, immaculate, well kept farm then that's a good farm. – Kentucky Interviewee 2

The notion of a rural idyll and its relationship to function is therefore important and is evident in the following quotes from thoroughbred breeders (TB) and people associated with the industry.

Generally horse breeding is clean, green and environmentally friendly, while coal mining is nearly the reverse – they use massive amounts of water and they're dusty and dirty. They leave a big scar on the landscape. Thoroughbred farms are basically boutique botanical garden type properties. (TB9)

This farm in previous years has been very heavily stocked. There's been a certain amount of pasture degradation. That's something we have seriously looked at in the last five years, just trying to re-establish pastures ... a lot of the other farms ... particularly if they are ex-dairy they're very flat with not a tree in sight because they rotationally grow Lucerne and the farmers knocked down all the trees because they didn't want to drive around trees. (TB2)

These quotes highlight some of the other major activities in the Upper Hunter Region (see also McManus, 2008b). These activities include coal mining (which is often in conflict with thoroughbred breeding over issues such as water, dust, employment and landscape amenity value), viticulture (which is mostly based closer to Sydney in the Lower Hunter Region), and dairy farming, which is retreating from this region and in the Australian context is becoming more concentrated in the southern state of Victoria and on the south coast of New South Wales.

The image of a bucolic rural idyll is, however, created not just by the well maintained black fences but also by green grass in a dry climate and by the absence of threats to the horses (Fig. 73.2). The construction of such a landscape requires the extensive use of water, which may be in short supply in the Upper Hunter in times of drought and with the impacts of climate change (see McManus, 2008a). Some studs have taken this issue more seriously than others, and have attempted to design facilities and operations to have minimal detrimental impact on the environment, and given the past history of (over)use of the land, have planned to encourage environmental restoration on parts of their thoroughbred farm. This is consistent with what Egoz and Bowring (2004) note in relation to farming landscapes in New Zealand;

Although we tend to accept the rural farming landscapes as ordinary cultural landscapes that have evolved through time, these landscapes have to be, in fact, carefully designed. By design we mean the intended articulation of space and materials to create a landscape that answers functional needs.

(Egoz & Bowring, 2004: 66)

In summary, good landscape design and maintenance is intended to convey the message that the stud is organized and caring, and that the care shown in the landscaping is transferred into care for the horses. Landscape is therefore symbolic of caring for animals and for an owner's investment.



Fig. 73.2 Thoroughbreds in a paddock of irrigated, green grass in summer

73.3.2 Landscapes of Conspicuous Consumption

The thoroughbred breeding and racing industry is reliant upon attracting new investors on a regular basis. While this has recently extended to overseas locations, for example the yearlings produced in the Upper Hunter may be exported to South Africa, Hong Kong, Japan, and other locations throughout the world, it is also reliant upon people coming into the industry in Australia by buying studs and/or horses for racing.

Why do people invest in thoroughbred racing, particularly when it is widely known that many people do not make money by doing so, and many lose money? In this sense, thoroughbred breeding is a luxury leisure activity, and some of the leading thoroughbred breeders in the world have identified the major competitor industries as being yachts and sports cars. Thoroughbred breeding and racing offers status as “the sport of kings” and attracts people who have made their money in other industries. In this regard, Kentucky and the Upper Hunter are similar in that money enters the industry and the region after being generated in other activities, ranging from stock broking to coal mining and chicken farming. These activities are often based outside of the region, as seen with Nathan Tinkler who, since early 2007, has invested heavily in the development of Patinack Farm in the Upper Hunter region of New South Wales using money acquired from selling his stake in Macarthur Coal, which operates primarily in the north-east state of Queensland.

In order to project this image of status, and perhaps to show off their new wealth and to attract clientele with similar expectations of what a thoroughbred stud should look like, thoroughbred studs are landscaped in order to attract investment.



Fig. 73.3 Ornate main entrance to Patinack farm

In Kentucky this landscaping ranges from Calumet Farm's white fences, the traditional barns of Lane's End through to the lake, mansion and the stars on the gate of WinStar Farm. In the Upper Hunter, it includes the lawns and statue at Arrowfield, the green grass and the steep roof lines at Darley and the gates of Patinack Farm (Fig. 73.3). Many of these thoroughbred farms employ similar architecture and entrance statements to the vineyards in the lower Hunter Valley around Pokolbin and Broke-Fordwich. The main difference between the vineyards and the thoroughbred studs is the gate – the thoroughbred farms are increasingly conscious of security issues and the gates are large, solid, attractive and locked. They generally include inter-com arrangements, but unlike some of the largest horse farms in Kentucky, do not usually employ a security person on the main gate itself.

The need to relate to clients has an impact on landscaping. This is recognized by some of the thoroughbred breeders;

We could do this without the black fences for a lot less money, but that's the emotive image people are looking for. (TB2)

Paddocks are irrigated because it looks good (Arrowfield manager, Rob Wallace, quoted in Munro, 2006: 17)

The need to appeal to clients makes the thoroughbred breeding farm different from agricultural spaces that are not client focused. The thoroughbred farm is similar to wineries in their landscaping for clients, but differs in relation to security, hence the electronically controlled gates. This is, in itself, a sign that some people are excluded and those who make it inside these gates are special to the farm operators. This is another part of the emotive image, or what is also known as an "experience economy."

73.3.3 *Brandscapes*

The thoroughbred breeding and racing industries are experience economies. Participants become involved in these industries despite the evidence that few of them will make money from this involvement and many will lose money. It is unlikely that they will act similarly with regard to other investments such as the ownership of shares or property. Participants become involved for a number of reasons, including a genuine interest in horses, the thrill of beating other business people, the status that thoroughbred racing offers the owners, and the desirable connections that can be made with other people involved in the industry (Cain, 2004). The fact that a horse is visible and tangible, as well as being a set of data stored in various breeding, accounting and veterinary databases, is another consideration that could influence potential participants to become involved in this industry despite the evidence that many participants do not gain financially from their involvement.

Part of this involvement includes being associated with a particular brand. Klingmann (2007) demonstrated that architecture is not simply about buildings, but about providing an experience considered desirable. It is not a landscape, but a brandscape. Branding is no longer a symbol of production, but the sign value that helps, in the case of thoroughbred breeders, to generate profits above the functional value of the horse (which in the case of thoroughbred breeding is very challenging to determine because the primary marketing, the yearling auction market, is about selling the potential of a young animal). As Klingmann (2007: 56) noted, “brand products are no longer bundles of functional characteristics but a means of providing a customer with a certain identity.”

To varying extents, the thoroughbred breeding farm both creates and reflects this identity. While the farm is landscaped to reduce the risk of injury or illness to a valuable commodity (for example, fencing without corners, the vertical posts on the outside of the paddock, fields rolled smooth to avoid small gullies and potholes), in places such as the Bluegrass Region of Kentucky the buildings, landscaping, entrance gates and color scheme are all designed to reinforce a particular brand. This branding is consistent with the website, and with advertising in thoroughbred journals and other publications where the thoroughbred farm advertises. The major studs extend this branding to the sponsorship of horse races and to hospitality tents at thoroughbred auctions.

Anecdotal evidence suggests that the use of landscape features as branding is somewhat limited in the Upper Hunter region. It often involves the use of color for a barn roof, but unlike some of the farms in Kentucky (see Clapp, 1992) does not usually extend to the microlevel landscaping of the farm. Where there has been evidence of branding is in the use of vegetation. Darley is the name of His Highness Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum’s global breeding operation. Darley Australia, the Australian arm of this operation with properties in both New South Wales and Victoria, has planted eucalypt trees to give their properties a distinctive Australian feel that is not present in their Kentucky, French, Irish, English and Japanese establishments. The use of color is often about enhancing the image of the horse, and is therefore based on matching the dominant colors of thoroughbreds, which are usually bay, brown, black or chestnut. Darley’s new facility at Northwood Park in

northeast Victoria is an example of making the color range Australian (Darley do not promote their identity as a regional organization based on Australian states, but each facility in different thoroughbred regions contributes to the identity of Darley in Australia). The color scheme was described in the submission by Ladd Hudson Architects (2008) as;

The inherent palettes of the Australian bush are used in the tonal range of chalky sandstone, with grey washed roofs and hardwood sliding doors combined with dulled edged metal framing.

73.3.4 Landscapes of Work

Given the use of landscaping to create a rural idyll, and an environment that may be interpreted as a playground for the rich, it is easy to overlook the importance of work in both establishing and maintaining these landscapes, as well as being the primary activity that takes place within the landscape. The creation of smooth paddocks without obstacles, the drainage of land prone to flooding, and the thousands of kilometers of fencing evident in the Upper Hunter thoroughbred breeding landscape, involves the labor of architects and landscape designers, fence builders, gardeners and other professional and laboring occupations.

The laborers are often invisible when the showcase events are held at various horse farms. On tours, stallion parades and other open day events, the landscaping is designed to appear finished. While not originally directed towards thoroughbred breeding, the observations of Richard White (1996) about work and nature are particularly pertinent to thoroughbred breeding, which relies on a discourse of nature to perpetuate breeding practices that exclude artificial insemination and other reproductive methods. White (1996: 173) wrote;

We seek the purity of our absence, but everywhere we find our own fingerprints. It is ultimately our own bodies and our labor that blur the boundaries between the artificial and the natural.

In the activity of thoroughbred breeding, labor involves many gendered roles relating to the handling of stallions through to the birth of a foal. There are glamorous occupations such as the staff that meet and greet important clients, and there are occupations such as guiding the stallion's penis into the mare's vagina. The management of highly valuable animals in environments that are often far removed from the historical environments in which these animals have emerged is very intensive. Despite the use of technology in the form of labor-saving devices, labor is still important in creating, maintaining and working within the landscape. This is apparent when viewing the publicly available development applications submitted to the Upper Hunter Shire Council – the applications submitted by thoroughbred farms often include “workers accommodation.”

The workers in the Upper Hunter differ from those in other major thoroughbred regions around the world. Unlike parts of the U.S., in the Upper Hunter there is not a reliance on cheap illegal labor. Unlike Newmarket in England, where breeding and

racing co-exist and there is a large demand for stable-hands and riders for horses in training, in the Upper Hunter the focus is primarily (but not exclusively) on breeding thoroughbreds. The focus of the racing industry is the major cities, particularly Sydney, where the training of many racehorses occurs. In the Upper Hunter, the labor force varies. It includes both men and women, involves workers from Ireland, New Zealand, India and Middle-Eastern countries. The landscaping of thoroughbred farms to include worker accommodation is partly in response to labor shortages in the industry, which some industry participants blame on the coal mines because they can afford to pay higher wages.

The thoroughbred breeding industry has concentrated on career paths (through various schemes) and amenity, partly as a way to retain labor in the face of competition from other industries. This includes education and training, including the development of a Technical and Further Education (TAFE) program in equine studies at Scone in the Upper Hunter Region. Other Australian states offer various education programs for people working in the equine industry, although the prestigious occupations such as veterinarians tend to be educated in the older universities in the Australian capital cities, such as The University of Sydney and the University of Melbourne. In NSW, Charles Sturt University in the regional city of Wagga Wagga (southwestern NSW) also offers a veterinary degree.

73.4 Other Uses of the Landscape in the Upper Hunter Region

Before concluding this chapter about the landscaping of thoroughbred farms, it is important to note other uses of landscaping in the Upper Hunter region because these applications of landscape have an impact on thoroughbred breeding. Two key points are worth noting. First, the main town in the region is Scone, which is branded as “the horse capital of Australia.” While this branding is obvious in the bunting in the town’s main street, and in the names of hotels, the presence of a statue and the labeling of toilets as “colts” and “fillies” (Figs. 73.4 and 73.5), the town centre does not exude a rural village feel that encourages strolling and enjoying the ambience of an area like Cambridge (New Zealand), Midway (Kentucky) or Saratoga (upstate New York). The main highway through the town connecting Sydney and Brisbane, and the railway crossings where long coal trains cause major traffic congestion for a town of this size, highlight the other activities that influence the regional economy. These activities can also be seen in the landscape, where horses graze in paddocks beneath the high-tension power-lines that convey electricity from coal-fired power stations at Bayswater and Liddell in the Upper Hunter into the National Electricity Grid and to towns and industries outside the region.

Coal mining causes major conflicts with the thoroughbred breeding industry and the viticulture industry (Upper Hunter Thoroughbred Breeders Association, Thoroughbred Breeders Australia Ltd. & Aushorse, 2007). This is evident in current debates about coal mining, where roadside billboards promote the horse industry as a “clean and green” activity; particularly around the issue of water, as

Fig. 73.4 Bunting in the center of Scone promoting the town as the horse capital of Australia



Fig. 73.5 Male and female toilets near the tourist information center in Scone



Fig. 73.6 Billboard linking horse riding and water quality issues in the Upper Hunter region



Fig. 73.7 Billboard showing coal mining to be a dusty activity that destroys vegetation and the rural landscape

opposed to coal mining. Figure 73.6 shows horses being ridden in a small river, the suggestion being that the water quality is high and that horses are associated with clean activities, unlike the coal mining shown in Fig. 73.7.

The debate was also evident in the attempt in the mid-1990s to prevent Bengalla coal mine from proceeding (see McManus, 2008b). A crucial part of the conflict was the role of landscape integrity, and the fact that the proposed coal mine would have intruded in the landscape. This was not permitted in the local government (Shire of Muswellbrook) Local Environment Plan, but following a successful appeal by a wine producer (Rosemount Estate) to the Land and Environment Court, in 1996 the state government of New South Wales passed new legislation that permitted the coal mine to be developed. Bengalla opened in 1999 and is part of the Hunter Valley Coal Chain that makes the port of Newcastle the world's largest coal export port by volume. The ongoing expansion of the port has implications for the landscape of the Upper Hunter, because until the world economic downturn in late 2008 it was the capacity of the port and rail system that was the limiting factor in the export of coal, and therefore was delaying more mining ventures from proceeding in the Upper Hunter region.

73.5 Conclusion

The notion of landscape, although not necessarily rigorously interrogated within the industry, is vital to the thoroughbred breeding industry in the Upper Hunter. This chapter has discussed the notion of landscape, and then drawn on four concepts of landscape that the authors have found relevant to an understanding of thoroughbred breeding in this region. The four concepts are; rural idyll, conspicuous consumption, brandscapes and landscapes of work. We perceive them to be present to varying degrees, often simultaneously and sometimes as a secondary consideration to the purpose of breeding future racehorses.

The thoroughbred breeding landscapes of the Upper Hunter share many similarities to other thoroughbred breeding regions throughout the world, mainly because the needs are similar in different places; the safety and health of horses and people, the client based industry where visits to the premises are expected and the need to communicate an image of care and professionalism. Many thoroughbred breeders from the Upper Hunter have visited international breeding establishments in Kentucky, Newmarket (England), Hokkaido (Japan), Ireland and New Zealand to learn about landscaping, amongst other considerations. Where there are differences in the landscaping between the Upper Hunter and other thoroughbred breeding regions in the world, this is often related to climate (particularly rainfall, temperature and sunlight). Where there are differences in landscaping between other client based industries such as viticulture, this is usually to do with security issues and the need to ensure safety around animals.

Thoroughbred breeding landscapes are similar to other agricultural landscapes in many ways, but they are also unique creations based largely on the breeders' perceptions of the functional requirements in the industry, and the availability of financial resources to construct and maintain those landscapes. By studying thoroughbred breeding landscapes we can learn about a particular form of landscape, and about the concept of landscape more generally.

In the thoroughbred breeding industry, the nexus of political-economy and landscaping of thoroughbred breeding farms is somewhat fluid. John Hislop (1992: 142) observed that “while an untidy, ill-kept stud is an eye-sore, it should be remembered that it is good, well-farmed pasture, judicious choice of mares, selective mating, correct management and feeding that produces winners, not paint and flower-beds.” In a client-driven industry, particularly at the top-end of the sector, it is often the combination of good farming, breeding, animal care, branding/advertising *and* paint and flower-beds that makes a successful farm.

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Websites of Major Thoroughbred Farms

Arrowfield (<http://www.arrowfield.com.au/>) emphasizes the marketing strategy (now being “the year of the outcross”) that best promotes its stallions. The website is comprehensive, and includes material on the farm’s location in “the Segenhoe Valley, a highly fertile pocket of land in the Upper Hunter Valley, renowned for its production of class racehorses and surrounded by leading agistment farms.” The website emphasizes the advantages of the region and the engineering of vegetation, for example: “The Pages River traverses centrally through the irrigated property. Well drained undulating hill country complements the rich alluvial flats pastured with a mix of high production grasses in order to provide the perfect balance of nutritional requirements for raising thoroughbreds to maximum potential.” (Accessed 12 May 2009)

Coolmore (<http://www.coolmore.com/>): This website is entered via the promotion of stallions. The website tells a story about the history of Coolmore in Ireland, with links to champion sires, top trainers, and so on. The website also emphasizes Coolmore’s operations on three continents – in Ireland, America and Australia. Each country has a sub-section of the website. The Australian

- portion includes the following comment about Coolmore's operations in the Upper Hunter; "We choose our land in Australia just as carefully as we do everywhere else. And we found the best of it in the Hunter Valley. We also found that it contained its own vineyard, and one day we might just bottle our own. In the meantime, we're producing winners." (Accessed 12 May 2009)
- Darley (<http://www.darley.com.au/homepage/AUS>) is branded in blue (the racing colours of the Godolphin stable which is the prestige racing arm of Darley). The website is about the Australian arm of a global operation, and it emphasizes stallions, horse sales and racing results. There are links to other Darley websites – Darley's Flying Start program for people wanting to work in the thoroughbred industry and Darley Kids, which is an interactive website for children to "learn all about us and the exciting world of racehorses". (Accessed 12 May 2009)
- Emirates Park (<http://www.emiratespark.com.au/main.htm>): Branded in blue and red, this website concentrates on marketing the stallions standing at the farm. Other information such as the history of the farm and the owner, His Excellency Nasser Looah, a Dubai-based businessman is available, but the initial access is through stallion services and this is the emphasis of the site. The website is smaller than those of many other leading thoroughbred studs and there is little information about the farm(s) apart from location and history. (Accessed 12 May 2009)
- Widden (<http://www.widden.com/>): This is a comprehensive website, with information on stallions, mating analysis, the history of the farm and its physical setting. Widden emphasizes its history "as the oldest thoroughbred stud in the world owned and run continuously by one family, the Thompsons" and its geography as being "located on 8,000 acres of spectacular country in the Widden Valley surrounded by the World Heritage Listed Wollombi National Park, the farm features rich alluvial creek flats sheltered by magnificent sandstone cliffs with spacious paddocks and ample room for horses to be happy." (Accessed 12 May 2009).