



KUSUDA

Directors: Amber Easby, Henry Oliver

A cyclone threatens to destroy the harvest of Japanese winemaker Hiro Kusuda, forcing him to reflect on the fragility of life.

AVAILABLE ONLINE FROM 9 JULY 2015

SHORT SYNOPSIS

Kusuda enters the world of Japanese winemaker, Hiro Kusuda, during a particularly challenging harvest at his vineyard in Martinborough, New Zealand.

When a cyclone threatens to destroy his entire crop, Hiro can only hope his vines survive the stress. Hiro reflects on the uncontrollable forces of nature, his winemaking process, and the fragility of life itself.

LONG SYNOPSIS

Kusuda is about a Japanese winemaker, Hiro Kusuda, living in Martinborough, New Zealand.

Harvest is a high-stakes balancing act for any winemaker. Pick too soon and the grapes may not have reached optimum ripeness, pick too late and the grapes begin to rot. *Kusuda* follows Hiro during a particularly challenging harvest, when a cyclone threatens the loss of his entire crop.

Knowing his grapes aren't ready for picking, Hiro can only hope his vines survive the stress and be ready to pick at a moment's notice. Hiro reflects on the uncontrollable forces of nature, his winemaking process, and the fragility of life itself.

Co-Director/Co-Producer: Amber Easby

Amber is an independent producer and has produced a vast range of commercial, film and television projects, as well as music videos for Lorde, The Naked and Famous and Flight of the Conchords. She has produced several short films, including *43,000 Feet*, winner of best short at the 2011 Traverse City Festival, and more recently, *Baba*, one of the films funded under last year's Loading Docs initiative.

Kusuda is Amber's first film as director.

Co-Director/Co-Producer: Henry Oliver

Henry Oliver is a freelance writer and radio producer. He is a regular contributor to Metro, HOME, Sunday, and Radio New Zealand's Music 101 programme. He is the popular music critic for North & South magazine. He also co-wrote the book *Art of the Band T-Shirt* with Amber Easby.

Kusuda is Henry's first film project.



DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

We first heard of Hiro about six years ago, relatively early in his winemaking career. We were instantly intrigued by this story of a Tokyo-salaryman turned diplomat, who had given it all up to study winemaking in Germany then relocate his family to Martinborough, New Zealand to start his own winery. Not only was Hiro exploring quite unusual flavour profiles for New Zealand wine but he was getting impressive reviews from big-name, international critics. We were also interested in what these critics were describing as the most rigorous and precise picking and grape sorting process they'd seen.

Our filmmaking process very much mirrored the experience you see on film. Getting our entire crew to the Wairarapa on short notice, to then shoot in heavy rain and strong winds was challenging, but like Hiro, we had to give in to the weather and let it lead our process.

We were amazed at how calm Hiro remained despite the impending cyclone and the threat of losing his entire crop. Rather than treating the cyclone as the dramatic midpoint to our story, we saw it as a catalyst to explore Hiro's philosophies as a winemaker, which is what makes him truly unique. Ultimately Hiro's reflections on nature, winemaking and the fragility of life are what shape the three-minute film.

PRESS RELEASE

Most New Zealanders know that Martinborough is the home of many a great vineyard but few know of Kusuda Wines, the winery of meticulous Japanese winemaker Hiro Kusuda. Moving to New Zealand in 2001 on a quest to create the perfect Pinot Noir, Kusuda hosts a large group of Japanese volunteers at the end of each summer who pick the grapes with the utmost care.

Kusuda and his winery is the focus of a 3-minute documentary by husband and wife filmmaking team Amber Easby and Henry Oliver. The film has been made as part of Loading Docs 2015. Easby says that the documentary is quite different to the original vision they had for the film which was to be about a winemaking perfectionist and his team of visiting volunteers. While they were in production, Cyclone Pam hit and Kusuda's entire harvest came under threat. Expecting to find the fastidious winemaker in a volatile state, they were surprised to find him the opposite: calm and philosophical about being at the whim of nature and having to pick the grapes early without many volunteers at all. This became the focus of their contemplative mini-doc.

The Loading Docs initiative that *Kusuda* is a part of supports 10 filmmaking teams to experiment with the confines of a 3-minute timeframe to make innovative and creative documentaries that tell New Zealand stories, this year based around the theme of connection. You can view *Kusuda* online at www.loadingdocs.net and on **TVNZ OnDemand** from 9th July, 2015.

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