

## **Joe Babich – New Zealand Winemaker**

Joe Babich, Babich Wines' Managing Director, has long been acclaimed as one of New Zealand's most talented and most respected winemakers and wine judges, and has carved out a reputation for consistently outstanding wines during more than 35 vintages as a winemaker. During this time, Joe has won an international reputation for his stylish, finely balanced white and red wines.

When he joined the family business in 1958, Babich Wines' annual grape crush was around 30 tonnes, with a resulting production of predominantly fortified wines and generic whites and reds.

Joe and his older brother Peter progressively modernised the winery and, in his role as winemaker, Joe revolutionised Babich's approach to winemaking. During a visit in the mid 1960s to Europe's wine regions, he was hugely impressed with many of the wines. In 1983 he identified the company's recently developed Irongate vineyard in Hawke's Bay as having the best potential to produce wines of the style and structure that had impressed him so much in Burgundy and Bordeaux. Keeping his plan secret from everyone in the family and winery, Joe produced an oak fermented chardonnay without malo-lactic fermentation: the resulting wine received spectacular success in New Zealand and proved definitive for Babich's winemaking style. Joe's insight and ability was officially recognised with the Winemaker of the Year Award at the New Zealand Royal Easter Show in 1994.

Throughout the 1980s and 1990s Joe Babich's wines received a multitude of awards and a growing reputation in New Zealand and overseas. At the same time Babich Wines was expanding its vineyard operations beyond Auckland, to include holdings in Hawke's Bay and Marlborough. The company also sources fruit from Gisborne.

Throughout this time, he continued as a wine judge, including being the Chairman of Judges at the Air New Zealand Wine Awards on six occasions. In 1996 Joe retired from wine judging, ending a 35 year involvement in this field.

In 1996 Joe Babich took on the role of Babich Wines' Managing Director, and became the Director of Winemaking. This saw him maintain a strategic role in the winemaking, with the help of a dedicated winemaker and production team.

Under the helm of Joe and Peter Babich, the company has become one of New Zealand's leading wineries. In 2006 the winery crushed 2300 tonnes of grapes. The wines are marketed in New Zealand and approximately 30 export destinations around the world.