

JOE BABICH ONZM - New Zealand Winemaker. Born: 10.10.40 Auckland, New Zealand

Education: Swanson Primary School; 1946 – 1952. (Dux of school in 1952.)

Henderson High School: 1953 – 1957. (Prefect 1956 & 1957.)

Joe Babich, Babich Wines' Executive Director, has long been acclaimed as one of New Zealand's most talented and respected winemakers and wine judges. He carved out a reputation for consistently outstanding wines during more than 35 vintages as company winemaker. During this time Joe 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 early 1980s to Europe's wine regions, he was hugely impressed with many of the wines. In 1985 he identified the 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. Keeping his plan secret from everyone in the family and winery, Joe produced one of the first New Zealand Chardonnays to be not only matured, but also fermented and matured on its yeast lees in the barrels: the resulting wine enjoyed spectacular competition success and proved definitive for Babich Wines' 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, 1990s and into the new millennium, Joe Babich's wines received a multiple of awards and a growing reputation in New Zealand and overseas. At the same time the company expanded its vineyard operations beyond Auckland, to include holdings in Hawke's Bay and Marlborough.

Throughout this time, he continued as a wine judge, including being Chairman of Judges at the Air New Zealand Wine Awards on six occasions. In 1998 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 the company's dedicated winemakers.

A highlight of his career came in 2012 when the Babich brand was named in the "TOP 50 WORLD'S MOST ADMIRABLE WINE BRANDS" by Drinks International magazine. Another highlight was the building of the new winery in Blenheim in 2013. With 50 years of experience in winemaking, Joe played a pivotal role in the design, building and outfitting this new facility which became operational for the 2014 vintage. The following accolades are a tribute to his career; The Sir George Fistonich Medal in recognition of service to New Zealand wine (2013), the ONZM in the New Year's Honours for services to the Wine Industry (2015), induction into the New Zealand Wine Hall of Fame (2015), induction into the West Auckland Business Hall of Fame (2016), and investiture as a Fellow of New Zealand Winegrowers in 2017.

Under the helm of Joe and Peter Babich, the company has become one of New Zealand's leading wineries producing wines for domestic sale and export to over 35 countries around the world.