

## **MR WOLFGANG FRANZ OTTO (WOLF) BLASS**

### **Citation for the conferral of a Doctor of Applied Science (*honoris causa*)**

Wolf Blass began his career in the wine industry as an apprentice in winemaking and viticulture in Germany. He received his Master of Wine at the tender age of 20, and was acclaimed as the youngest recipient of the Kellermeister Diploma in Germany.

Mr Blass then travelled to France, where he studied champagne making and later to England, becoming a Cellar Superintendent for the major importing firm, Avery at Bristol. He became the first Fellow Member of the British Bottler Institute and holds the Institute's Diploma of Wines and Spirits.

With his talent in winemaking discovered, Wolf Blass received job offers in Australia and Venezuela. Fortunately for Australia he accepted a 3 year contract with Kaiser Stuhl Wines in Australia, and arrived in 1961. During these years he developed sparkling wines for Kaiser Stuhl, providing enormous competition for the then market leader, Orlando's Barossa Pearl.

When his contract was complete, Mr Blass began consulting to companies such as Woodleys, Normans, Basedows and the Clare Valley Co-operative for the princely sum of \$2.50 per hour. His main vision was to introduce quality wines on to Australian tables.

Wolf Blass purchased his property "Bilyara" in 1969. "Bilyara" is the Aboriginal word for Eaglehawk, and as the Eaglehawk was the national symbol of his homeland, he adopted this as his emblem.

With Bilyara in its infancy, Mr Blass was appointed winemaker and manager of Tolley, Scott and Tolley, where he developed many styles of red wine. By the early seventies, he was dominating the young red classes in national wine shows and shaping the Australian wine industry even further.

A few years later, Mr Blass left Tolley, Scott and Tolley to concentrate on Bilyara, which at that stage consisted of a \$2000 overdraft and an old army shed. The first vintage was 250 dozen of his red wine. He developed this so well that in 1974, 1975 and 1976 Wolf Blass Wines won the Jimmy Watson trophy at the Melbourne Wine Show - an unmatched achievement. In his own style he was quoted as saying "My wines make strong men weak and weak women strong!"

It is arguable whether Wolf Blass made the Jimmy Watson trophy famous or the Jimmy Watson trophy made Wolf Blass famous!

In 1975 he was dominating wine shows throughout the nation. The Eaglehawk label is able to boast a show success rate of approximately 80%. Wolf Blass Wines have received over 3000 awards both nationally and internationally, 170 trophies for excellence in winemaking and over 900 gold medals.

Wolf Blass also revolutionised wine marketing and packaging by adding the famous Blass "bow tie" and label descriptions based on label colour.

In 1977 he developed a new style of riesling which became Australia's most preferred riesling and also became the riesling benchmark for other winemakers.

Wolf Blass Wines pre-empted the current boom in Australian wine exports by actively exporting wines before it was fashionable to do so. Wolf Blass wines are now available in most countries around the world. Wolf Blass initiated the export of wine to Asia and the rest of the industry is set to follow his lead into this important market.

In 1986 Wolf Blass Wines acquired Quelltaler, one of the Clara Valley's most famous and historic wineries. This has now been transformed into Eaglehawk Winery. After 30 years of achievement Wolf Blass Wines merged with Mildara Wines to form Mildara Blass. Wolf Blass became the major shareholder of the group and Deputy Chairman of the Board. In 1995, when Fosters Brewing acquired Mildara Blass, Wolf Blass was retained as statesman for the group, being deeply involved in vintage and winemaking procedures and actively promoting his wines around Australia.

In 1992, at the International Wine and Spirit Competition in London, an independent panel of peers from the wine industry around the world awarded Wolf Blass and Wolf Blass Wines, the Robert Mondavi trophy for "International Winemaker of the Year". This award focused much attention on the image and quality of the Australian wine industry and was a fitting tribute to the success and world wide recognition of Wolf Blass Wines for "Quality, Character and Consistency".

On the eve of his 60th birthday, Wolf Blass established the Wolf Blass Foundation. The principal purpose of the Foundation is the further education and advancement of winemakers, viticulturalists and marketing people within the industry.

A \$1,000,000 donation was placed into a Trust. The return on the investment will be used by the Foundation to recognise individuals or companies who have demonstrated excellence in viticulture, wine making or marketing. In particular, the Foundation will recognise specific achievements in viticulture due to its importance in furthering the quality of all Australian wines.

As Chairman of the Foundation, it is Wolf Blass' hope that an annual exchange of students will take place, during vintage, between Australian universities and universities in Europe, Germany, Switzerland, Austria and France which teach viticulture, winemaking and marketing.

In a career spanning 35 vintages Wolf Blass has made a significant contribution to the success of the Australian wine industry and through his ideas and actions has been in the vanguard of developments and innovations in the industry.

**Dated this Eighth day of November One Thousand Nine Hundred and Ninety Six**