

KUMEU RIVER

Biographies



At Kumeu River, wine is a family matter. As a business, Kumeu River has some of the most qualified, experienced and dedicated staff in the industry; as a family, working together is a dynamic and rewarding experience. Just as each Kumeu River wine has its own distinct character, so, too, do the individuals who work hard to produce them.

Melba Brajkovich, Managing Director

Melba Brajkovich was a primary school teacher when she met her husband Maté in 1957. In the many decades since, she has become one of New Zealand's most experienced and knowledgeable women in the wine industry. Although Maté passed away in 1992, Melba has remained involved in all aspects of the family business, now run by their four children, Michael, Marijana, Milan and Paul. From its humble beginnings to its distinguished standing in the industry today, the success of Kumeu River Wines has been a labor of love for Melba, and she looks forward to many more years of success as the business continues to flourish under a third generation of Brajkovichs.



Michael Brajkovich, M.W., Winemaker

Michael studied winemaking and viticulture at Roseworthy College in South Australia, earning a bachelor's degree in oenology in 1981. In 1983, he went on a tour of the wine regions of California, Oregon, Washington and Italy. Michael then spent several months in France working in Bordeaux, before visiting Burgundy, Champagne, Alsace, and the Rhône and Loire valleys. This tour was very important in molding much of Michael's winemaking philosophy. On his return to New Zealand, Michael was able to adapt many of the successful techniques he had observed and put them into practice at Kumeu River. The result has been a series of wines that are innovative, distinctive and unique in both style and quality for New Zealand. In fact, his Chardonnay is often compared to white Burgundy. In 1989, Michael became the first Master of Wine in New Zealand.

Michael is married to Kate and has two children, Milla and Markus.



Milan Brajkovich, Vineyard Director

With a bachelor's degree in chemical engineering from the University of Auckland, vineyard director Milan Brajkovich is the mind behind much of the machinery and technology at Kumeu River Wines. Milan manages 40 hectares (nearly 100 acres) of vines, including 10 hectares (24.7 acres) belonging to the regional growers that supply grapes to Kumeu River.

One of the things Milan finds most fascinating about winemaking is how minor variations in soil can result in major variations in how wine tastes. "We have two vineyards that are practically next door to each other growing the same grapes in the same conditions, yet their minor soil differences are very obvious in the final product."

Milan is married to Karen and has two children, Matthew and Anna.

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Paul Brajkovich, Marketing Director

Looking for new ways to promote and market Kumeu River Wines is at the heart of marketing director Paul Brajkovich's role. With a strong background in sales and marketing and bachelor's degree in commerce from the University of Auckland, Paul has been instrumental in securing Kumeu River's place within the international market.

Married to Kelly and with two children, Maddy and George, Paul is actively involved within the local community and enjoys coaching his son's cricket team.

Marijana Brajkovich, Marketing Director

Marijana enjoys working in a thriving family business where the day-to-day routine is very much a cooperative effort. Her background in sales and marketing and a bachelor's degree in commerce from the University of Auckland is an enormous asset to Kumeu River Wines.

Growing up at the winery and surrounded by three brothers has provided Marijana with valuable experience for her role within the business, as well as her role as mom to three boys of her own: James, Scott and Charles. Marijana is married to Grant and enjoys balancing her family time with her involvement in many areas of the winery including financial management and marketing.

Marijana credits much of the winery's early success to her father's pervasive presence within the industry. "Kumeu River Wines always has been, and always will be, a welcoming place where good wine and great hospitality come together in a family atmosphere of history and tradition."

Nigel Tibbits, Cellar Master

Cellar master Nigel Tibbits joined Kumeu River Wines in 1974 when he was just 16 years old. As a student, Nigel had been working at Cooks Wines during school holidays when the opportunity for a full-time job became available at Kumeu River (then San Marino Vineyards).

Over the past three decades, Nigel has enjoyed being part of an industry where technology and technique continually evolve. Most of the winery's current vineyards originate from the nursery vines that Nigel tended during Kumeu River's formative years when Maté Brajkovich was at the helm.

Today, there is very little that Nigel doesn't do in his day-to-day role; from working in the laboratory to meeting with customers, Nigel's wealth of practical experience and knowledge is invaluable in the on-going evolution of the Kumeu River style.

