

Lawson 'family' mark 20 years

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In these uncertain wine times it was a pleasure to attend a function that celebrated the sense of family and friendship that can still be found in the wine industry. Twenty years ago Ross and Barbara Lawson established Lawson's Dry Hills and on Friday, July 29, a gathering of growers, winemakers, current and former employees, several wine writers and friends were brought together to mark this special anniversary. The warmth of the occasion is the most enduring memory of a night where a light touch was all that was required to bring home the significance of the occasion.

Bob Campbell MW gave a well-thought out speech that honoured the memory of the late Ross Lawson and revisited the way he met his wife. He said it had something to do with Ross feeling "weak and vulnerable" while in a hospital where Barbara was nursing. As they say, the rest is history.

He also recalled Ross's first visit to Rapaura Vintners where he saw banks of tanks, pipes and machinery and must've thought "I have to get into this!"

Bob spoke personally and warmly, reminding us of what the Lawsons had achieved, particularly with their gewurztraminer and riesling.

Barbara's response was also warm, speaking of the immense pride and gratitude she felt for the people who had helped build the business into what it is today.

Lawson's first winemaker was Claire Allan, who with husband Mike now owns Huia Wines.

Claire reminisced about those early days and remembered a remark Ross made about his favourite wine, chardonnay. "Why do we have to spend so much on oak work," he asked Claire. At the time the Lawsons owned just four barrels – so times were obviously tight in those early years.

Mike Just, owner of Clayridge, was the winemaker from 1997 until 2004 and Marcus Wright now holds that position. All in all it was a fantastic night "representing a very happy arrangement" as Peter eloquently puts it. "There were people there that had thoroughly enjoyed their time with the company before moving on to their own business, the family and friends – the general warmth was in stark contrast to recent experiences by people in the wine industry who have lost contracts, money and prospects.

"The closeness, tight-knitted teamwork, sense of family and faith in the future are still alive within the industry, and where it exists it's to be held close," he says.