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LOUIS LATOUR'S MULTI GENERATIONAL WINE BUSINESS CELEBRATES BURGUNDY

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There is something fascinating about a business that has operated independently for more than 200 years. Founded in 1797, the Latour family has built, expanded, and preserved its legacy across 12 generations. Having accumulated prestigious vineyards throughout Burgundy, and crafted long standing relationships with growers, Maison Latour, based in the village of Aloxe-Corton, now represents one of the most visible and accessible references in this complex region.

The driving force behind the Latour empire is a large negociant operation that facilitates the release of over 150 wines each year, providing without doubt, one of the best single company windows onto Burgundy you can find. From the chalky soils of Chablis, extending south through the Côte de Nuits and Côte de Beaune, to the much warmer granite slopes of Beaujolais, the company prides itself on a portfolio that showcases regional, village and single vineyard terroir. For many consumers approaching Burgundy for the first time, Latour's wines are a comprehensive introduction.

The latest releases, a stable of village and Premier Cru wines, rouse plenty of enthusiasm in director Florent Latour. "We're extremely excited about this vintage. We've got both volume and quality, which is a welcome relief after some tough vintages". The whites are typically well-structured and offer good balance between acidity and concentration. Favorites include the fresh, approachable Pouilly-Fuissé (\$39.99) and the fuller, richer Meursault (\$115). The reds, from communes such as Marsannay (\$39.99), Pommard (\$85) and Volnay (\$95) are elegant, with plenty of ripe fruit and spice.

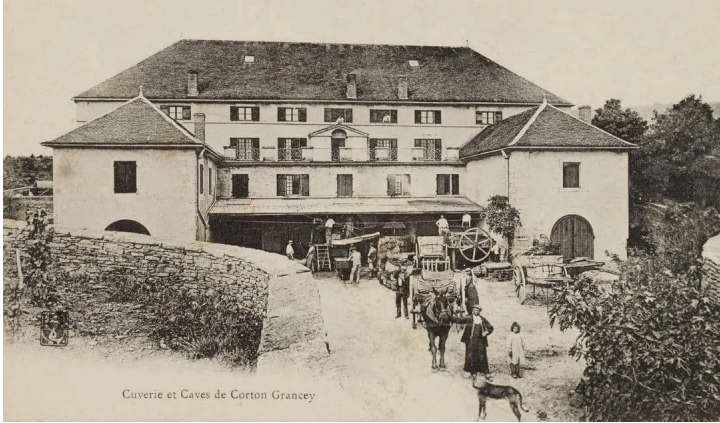


Across the board the Latours were pleased with 2022. "It was a lovely surprise. We had a hot, dry summer but it went cooler towards the end of August, allowing us to achieve that typical Burgundian balance." Although there was concern during the intense summer heat, conditions played out positively in the end. With so many wines to oversee, that picture is far too simplistic; but, it is in the more challenging years that the strength of the Latour network shows.

Christophe Deola, who through his role at Domaine Louis Latour looks after the company's 48 hectares of owned vineyard, including 27 hectares of Grand Cru, points out the importance of working together. "Those relationships are central to our being able to produce the highest-quality wines." Although the company produces some exceptional wine from their own vineyards, ensuring the continuity of additional supply is a crucial aspect of the business. Florent Latour elaborates that "I'm the 11th generation, so what we bring to the table as a family isn't always tangible. We work with many families and it's our way of life to talk to the next generation. We're always trying to be the solution and together we build the appellation."

Sustainable agriculture is a curious subject in the Burgundy. At the top end of the trade, organics and biodynamics are the foundation of the region's highly collectable fine wines. Nevertheless, the use of pesticides across the region is still disappointingly high. Growers may point to the viability of conversion, especially in light of recent vintage variation, but the concentration of surface area under vine here is so dense that

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individual farming decisions have repercussions beyond property boundaries.

Latour says, “we try to see beyond the parcel. My brother defended forests at the top of the hill. We try to go beyond talk of practices. We are heavily involved in local organisations. We understand that the solution always involves our neighbours.” He reminds us that you can’t deal with soil erosion on your own, and the company has created an organisation to increase biodiversity. “The idea is to preserve the whole landscape, but we’re always trying to improve. What comes out of the vineyard must go back in.” The deployment of solar and use of electric robots are also nudging the business in a more sustainable direction.

That ethos arguably extends beyond simply a respect for the environment, but also into the preservation of adjacent trades and traditions. “We’re the only company to operate our own cooperage”. Producing around 3500 barrels each year, half of which are used for ageing their own wines, and the other half exported around the world, it’s a sizeable operation. “When taking care of a multi generational business it is important to think about the future and never stand still. Experimentation is always taking place, but we also work on contingencies.”

Critics have pointed out how expensive Burgundy has become in recent years, although it does appear the market is correcting. “We really had the wind behind us in 2020 and 2021. People all over the world wanted Burgundy, and then frost hit the harvest, meaning that volumes fell. The combination of those two things really elevated prices.” This is where Latour’s vast range of wines is a positive however. “We have a series of village

wines, Premier and Grand cru at all price points. We still feel there is room for everyone and Burgundy isn’t unattainable.”

Maison Louis Latour has been represented in the U.S. for more than 30 years through their wholly owned U.S. subsidiary. Florent Latour points out that, “of course we need the visibility that comes with a volume business, but, we’re fortunate to have terrific long-term partners in Southern Glazer’s Wine & Spirits, M.S. Walker, and Touton Selection.”

Cindy Leonard at Southern Glazer’s reflects on that relationship. “We have had the pleasure of representing and working with these beautiful wines since 1971, when Mel Dick began our long-standing relationship with the 10th-generation leader of the firm, Louis Latour. We are proud to have grown our business under the leadership of Louis’s son Louis-Fabrice, and with his recent passing, with his brother Florent Latour, and the new general manager, Eléonore Latour”.

Representing the 12th generation, Eléonore’s appointment is exciting. Leonard says “it’s important to note this new leadership role, as she is one of the first women, certainly the youngest, to lead a major burgundy house.” When pushed, Florent Latour believes that at heart they are Chardonnay specialists, and on every rung of the price ladder there is another piece of Burgundy to discover. My personal favorites are the village level wines of Auxey-Duresses, Pouilly-Fuisse, Macon-Lugny, Chassagne and Puligny Montrachet, and who could forget, the consistently good Meursault.

