



CLUB MAGNUM

VINS ET EXPÉRIENCES

DOMAINE DES COMTES LAFON



MEURSAULT MAY LACK GRAND CRUS BUT IT CERTAINLY DOES NOT LACK GRAND TALENTS.



If the ultimate goal of any vigneron is to maximise the potential of his or her vineyards, the good folk of Meursault- as evidenced by the village's over-achieving *premiers crus* and village wines- can stake a considerable claim to be nearer that goal than many of their neighbours. Among the leaders in the village, Domaine des Comtes Lafon is without question a key part of the arrowhead in that effort.

Jules Lafon, the founder of this world-class estate that spans four communes- Volnay, Meursault, Monthélie and Chassagne-Montrachet- would surely have been described as a 'renaissance man' had he been

born three centuries earlier. A native of south-west France, Jules was a brilliant man with wide-ranging interests. A writer, traveller, collector, lawyer, administrator and adventurer, he moved to take up a position in Dijon in 1887 and married Marie Boch in Meursault in 1894. The Boch family had built the magnificent house and cellars in Clos de la Barre in 1869 and together, Jules and Marie began to assemble the estate as we recognise it today, buying some of the very finest parcels of land available, including some precious Montrachet in 1918, to add to the Boch family's existing holdings.

In 1918, Jules was made a Papal Count, a title which can still be carried by his male heirs to this day. In 1923, as Mayor of Meursault, he reinstated the tradition of the post-harvest celebration known as 'La Paulée', initially for 35 of his neighbours but which has now grown to become one of the most cherished features of Burgundian life, part of 'Les Trois Glorieuses' and the inspiration for a whole host of events around the globe. He continued in public life as a magistrate until 1931 when he decided to devote his final years to his vineyards until his death in 1940.

By this time, of course, Burgundy was under occupation. His two sons, Pierre and Henri were entrusted with the preservation

and continuation of Jules' legacy. However, Pierre died in 1944 and Henri never showed the same interest in the vineyards as his father, the vines being leased out to sharecroppers. Increasingly it became clear that he wished to sell until his nephew, René, an engineer who was living in Paris, intervened and decided to take it on in 1956, renaming the estate Domaine des Comtes Lafon.

René continued a double life between Paris and Meursault, working with the sharecroppers to restore the vineyards after the neglect of his father and uncle's era, replanting the family's holdings extensively. By 1961, Lafon's share of the production was being bottled at the Domaine and in 1967, he moved to Meursault full-time. His son,



Dominique was born in 1958 and after a number of years of travel and work overseas came back to work alongside his father and brother, Bruno in 1984 before taking full charge in 1985.

Part of a celebrated new generation in Burgundy, alongside the likes of Etienne Grivot, Christophe Roumier and Patrick Bize, Dominique quickly became a central figure in the re-emergence of the region onto the global stage. With his energetic and dynamic personality, the results of his work began to show quickly and duly encouraged he started to unwind the complex set of sharecropping agreements, finally achieving full control of the estate in 1993.

With this achieved, Dominique was able to go further with changes in viticultural practices on the estate, removing the use of herbicides, recommencing the working of the soil and moving towards organic viticulture. By 1998, the estate was fully biodynamic with Dominique widely recognised as one of the movement's leading proponents, alongside the likes of Anne-Claude Leflaive and Lalou Bize-Leroy.

In 2010/11, together with his close friend Jean-Marc Roulot and some investment partners, he purchased Domaine Manuel adding a little more than 3 hectares to his holdings, bringing it up to 16.3 hectares today, split over fifteen

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appellations. In 2019/20, Dominique's daughter, Léa and nephew, Pierre joined him at the estate in preparation for the next chapter.

After the extensive replanting by René Lafon and with biodynamics established in the vineyards under Dominique, the estate today is in great health. Density is 10,000 vines per hectare and new plants are selected either from cuttings of the best old vines (*massale*) or from carefully chosen clones, the team working hard to retain a high average vine age where possible.

The style of winemaking at Lafon has also evolved over the years. As with many, Dominique has moved progressively away from high percentages of new

wood and no longer conducts *batonnage*. His cellars are particularly deep and cold and therefore *élevage* is more extended than with many of his neighbours although still less than in his father's era. In 2014, he took the decision to switch to DIAM corks to ensure the best possible chance of maintaining freshness and good ageing potential in the wines.

A tour of the estate inevitably starts in his back garden: the monopole of Clos de la Barre. This is a superb plot within the village of Meursault on a very gentle slope with very stony soil, covering 2.1 ha. There are three separate plantings in the Clos, which enables the Lafons to maintain a high average vine age. The walls of the Clos offer



good protection against spring frosts but the sheltered position means it often ripens after the more exposed hillside vineyards. It is without question one of the standout vineyards in the appellation and can produce a remarkably long-lived wine. Staying with AC Meursault, there

is a very good blend made from four parcels (*En la Barre*, *Clos de la Baronne*, *En Luraule*, *Crotots*) and the younger vines of some of the *premiers crus*. In addition, there is a single vineyard bottling called 'Désirée', the old name for a vineyard known today as either *Les Plures* or *Les Petures* which



is on the Volnay border and is early-ripening on heavier, clay-rich soils and typically giving a more generous, exuberant style for early drinking.

The heart of the Domaine is of course its fabulous array of *premiers crus*. In the middle of the hill are three: Bouchères, at 0.3ha the smallest holding; the poetically-named Gouttes d'Or, in which the Lafons own 0.4ha and Porusots, the largest holding at nearly 1 ha producing a square-shouldered, muscular style but that also shows a lifted quality, as if forming a bridge to neighbouring Genevrières.

To complete the Meursault holdings, we then have what are considered to be the 'big three': Perrières, Charmes and Genevrières. In each of these great sites, the Lafons could hardly be better placed, owing much to the astuteness of Jules Lafon. In Genevrières, the smallest holding of the three, there is 0.55ha in the upper ('Dessus') part of the vineyard, adjacent to Perrières, split between two plantings (1946 and 1993). In Perrières itself, the holdings now total 0.91ha following a purchase in Perrières-Dessus in 2004 that came into production in 2010, adding to the historic Lafon holding in Perrières-Dessous.

IN EACH OF THESE GREAT SITES, THE LAFONS COULD HARDLY BE BETTER PLACED, OWING MUCH TO THE ASTUTENESS OF JULES LAFON.



In Charmes, the Lafons have what is widely-considered to be the best parcel, 1.71 ha in the upper ('Dessus') part of the vineyard against the southern boundary. In an appellation that can easily tilt towards over-ripeness and richness, the Lafon example is particularly noted for its precision and finesse. By any measure, these are three truly magnificent wines.

Tucked away behind Meursault is the very attractive village of Monthélie, its name deriving from 'Mont Helios', the hill of the sun. Pinot Noir dominates here and the Lafons have an excellent holding in 1er cru Les Duresses, a stony, hillside vineyard on the west of the village shared with neighbouring Auxey and facing

due east. 1.06ha are planted in Pinot Noir and just 0.15ha in Chardonnay, the latter coming from the very steep upper section, only workable by horse and very rarely seen.

It would be remiss not to mention the single holding in the commune of Chassagne-Montrachet: Le Montrachet. The holding is 0.32 ha on the southern boundary of the vineyard on a very gentle slope, with 80% of the vines planted in 1953 and the remainder in 1972. The vines have responded very well to the introduction of biodynamics, becoming more consistent in their yield. It is a wine of quite extraordinary depth and scale.



DOMAINE DES COMTES LAFON

In Volnay, the Lafons are also a major force. The Boch family holdings were concentrated here, in addition to the Clos de la Barre, and these vines are a vital part of the family's story. The interest is far more than merely emotional, however. The wines produced are quite superb, frequently among the leading examples and in the case of Les Santenots-du-Milieu, the absolute standard-bearer.

On the upper part of the hill, there are 0.38 ha in Clos des Chênes, a magnificent vineyard exposed to the east capable of producing wines of huge depth, aromatic character and longevity.

The holding is in the lower part of the vineyard, just above the road dividing the vineyard from Les Caillerets below. Further down the slope and below the village is the half-hectare holding of Les Champans in which two-thirds of the vines date back to 1922, constituting the Domaine's oldest. Wine produced from the young vines from these two vineyards, together with those from Les Santenots, are often blended

to produce a 'straight' Volnay despite being entitled to the designation of 1er cru.

Last but by no means least, therefore, is Volnay Santenots-du-Milieu. Les Santenots is effectively shared between Volnay and Meursault, the reds taking the former name and the whites the latter, although officially it comes under the commune of Meursault. The appellation is large, some 29ha, split into four subsections of which the Les Santenots-du-Milieu (8.80 ha) is without question both the heart and the prime piece of real estate. The Lafons have a substantial 3.75ha piece of it and it produces a profound wine with exceptional longevity, its deep clay-rich soils providing for a full-bodied, concentrated style, further heightened by the old vines and the winemaking philosophy of the Domaine. Very good at ten years old but more often than not even better at twenty, this is one of the landmark reds of the Côte de Beaune and a fitting counterpoint to the brilliance of the Meursaults.

