



CLUB MAGNUM

VINS ET EXPÉRIENCES

LES HÉRITIERS DU COMTE LAFON



THE STORY OF THE FAMILIES OF BURGUNDY IS AS INTEGRAL A PART OF THE REGION AS THE PATCHWORK QUILT OF THE VINEYARDS THEMSELVES.



The building up and sub-dividing, be it by death, marriage or birth, by debt, fortune or revolution link the human stories to the land itself and provide the context for the region's rich heritage as well as its many quirks and eccentricities.

Some generations feel the urge to expand more than others. For Jules Lafon, his desire to build up the estate in his adopted region was driven by his own passion as a collector, as a man of social standing and someone who enjoyed the fine things in life. His sons did not share that same level of passion: the estate started to be broken up, rented out and risked

falling into disrepair. The third generation, in the shape of René Lafon, stopped the rot, stabilised the situation and handed on the chalice with opportunity aplenty. It was Dominique Lafon though who seized the gifts of his birthright and propelled the estate properly into the premier league.

However Dominique was not content to simply rest there. From the beginning of his tenure, he looked for opportunities to expand his holdings, realising that much of Burgundy was slumbering and that he could make a difference. Buying land in the Côte d'Or, however, was (and still is) no simple task and

while a few small transactions were possible, a major play remained elusive. So Dominique, as with so many of his contemporaries, looked outside of the region. In 1999, he purchased seven hectares in Milly-Lamartine, one hour's drive to the south in the Mâconnais, immediately converting the vines to biodynamics. In reflection of the good fortune of his birth- and possibly to the inspiration of his great-grandfather, Jules Lafon- he christened the estate 'Les Héritiers du Comte Lafon'.

From the outset, Dominique was very sure that he wanted to make great Mâcon wines rather than baby Meursaults. At the time, the region still had the reputation

of being rather down at heel, a 'white Beaujolais', if you will.

The familiar tale of over-production, industrialised wine-making and chemical dependence in the vineyards, particularly in the post-war era, ensured it a cheap image. Both Beaujolais and Mâconnais are however blessed with natural beauty, dependable weather patterns, stunning hillside vineyards, complex geology and a heritage of old vines.

With Chardonnay the dominant variety, Dominique was clearly quickly at home and with the short journey times, this was a far more manageable proposition than heading to the Midi or the New World, as a number of his friends had done.

A KEY FEATURE OF THE PURCHASE HAS BEEN TO SEEK OUT HIGHER ALTITUDE, HILLSIDE VINEYARDS.



By 2003, the project was already going well and an opportunity arose to add seven hectares in the villages of Chardonnay and Uchizy, in the north of the appellation. In 2009, a contract was signed to farm the vineyards of the Château de Viré in the appellation Viré-Clessé and in 2014, vines were added in Mâcon-Prissé, St. Véran and Pouilly-Fuissé. The estate today produces some 200,000 bottles from 26 hectares and since 2006, Caroline Gon has been the head winemaker.

A key feature of the purchases has been to seek out higher altitude, hillside vineyards. By doing so, Dominique felt certain that the resultant wines would have more character, more tension and more interest than the generic wines produced on the flats. In the cellars, there is a noticeable absence of new wood, vinification and élevage taking place in a combination of stainless steel, old wooden foudres and demi-muids instead.



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At the entry level is a simple Mâcon villages, blended from holdings across all of the villages in which the Lafons have vines and designed to be an affordable, easy-drinking wine. There are then two village-designated wines: Mâcon-Milly-Lamartine from multiple high-altitude parcels in the original 1999 vineyard purchases and a smaller cuvée of Mâcon-Prissé which comes from the lieu-dit of La Verchère.

We then have a fascinating series of single-vineyard wines from contrasting Mâcon villages. In the southern sector, we have the celebrated 'Clos du Four' in Milly-Lamartine, a 1.4ha mid-slope parcel facing due east with a richer clay content in the clay-limestone mix giving a substantial, powerful wine. In the neighbouring village of Bussières, we have 'Le Monsard', a more sheltered site just below the rock of the same name on shallow soil with less clay content and south-west facing.

In the northern sector we have Mâcon-Uchizy 'Les Maranches' - a 2ha holding split between two parcels in Les Maranches, one planted in 1977 and the other in 1999- and in neighbouring Chardonnay, the 'Clos de la Crochette', a beautiful, historic south-facing walled vineyard which tends to ripen early and produces a confident wine that also retains elegance and balance very well.

We then move to the Viré-Clessé appellation, which Dominique confesses is one of his favourites. One cuvée is produced here, blended from several parcels that include the oldest vines on the estate, dating back to 1950. The situation is mid-slope at around 250m and there is once more a little more clay in the soil mix. The wine often appears to be drier and with more obvious minerality than some of its stablemates and certainly more serious in tone.



Arguably the two best known appellations in the region are St Véran and Pouilly-Fuissé. In the former, the Lafons have holdings in the northern sector across the villages of Davayé and Prissé, the resultant wine generally showing a very attractive combination of gently ripened fruit underpinned by good acidity. In Pouilly-Fuissé, there are now 1.5ha of vines in Vergisson, a particularly prized village. The wine is aged one third in old Meursault barrels, one third in puncheons and one third in ovals until July, spending then only three months on its lees in stainless steel before bottling in

an effort to avoid reduction. It is particularly fine and precise with perhaps an additional layer of luxurious creamy texture. In the space of 20 years, the Lafons have created a top tier estate in this under-valued region. Mâcon is motoring again, with Pouilly-Fuissé in the process of formally gaining premier cru vineyards and a new generation of wine lovers discovering the region's charms. Much is owed to the vision, courage and energy of the leading growers, of which Lafon is unquestionably one.

