

## Jacques Lurton is committed to change and improvement

**An inveterate rock drummer has taken over the management of the prestigious Vignobles André Lurton winery after the death of his father. With energy and vision, he is renewing and improving one of Bordeaux's most prestigious wineries.**

### **Caption:**

Jacques Lurton at Château La Louvière with the apple of his eye, Suzette, who follows him everywhere.

The wines of Bordeaux have been celebrated for a long time but have been considered unaffordable with astronomical prices. Yet Bordeaux is one of the world's greatest wine regions, offering both big and small. The star shines on a few super wines where collectors have driven up prices, but among the smaller chateaux there are bargains to be had!

Last spring, we received alarming news from Bordeaux. The primary campaign was disastrous, with prices down 30%, the Chinese and Russians are no longer buying, and the general world crisis is hitting the economy hard. Bordeaux is no longer what it was. Has the shine faded?

I decided to go to Bordeaux and ask those who know. It's usually for the best.

An earlier lunch with winemaker Jacques Lurton in Stockholm triggered me. He described how they at Vignobles André Lurton focus on change and improvements to counter the crisis.

Innovation is the only way to survive. He had two examples with him. Red Château Bonnet in a PET bottle would have been unthinkable five years ago and Diane Blanc de Noir Brut Nature, a white sparkling wine made from Cabernet Sauvignon, would not have been possible either.

The Lurton family is the highest aristocracy in the wine world. Dating back to the 18th century, they have been firmly rooted in Bordeaux for generations. An ability to produce many children also means that there are a number of different branches of the family. The most famous is Vignobles André Lurton, which until 2019 was led by the former war hero and winemaker André. He spent over 70 years in the vineyards and when he passed away at the age of 94, his son Jacques took over with the support of his siblings.

André Lurton was a true visionary, there is no doubt about it. He created a wine dynasty that today consists of no less than six prominent châteaux in Bordeaux. Château Bonnet was the first one he inherited with 20 hectares. In 1965, he bought Château de la Louvière, followed by Château de Rochemorin, Château Couhins-Lurton, Château de Cruzeau and Château de Barbe Blanche.

André Lurton's success was mainly in Graves, where he fought hard to create the Pessac-Léognan appellation. He succeeded when the better châteaux in the north, with the coveted gravel in their vineyards, broke away in 1987. He lived all his life at Château Bonnet in the Entre-Deux-Mers area, sandwiched between the Garonne and Dordogne rivers.

Jacques has a long history as a flying winemaker, working in Australia, Chile, Argentina and most countries in Europe. After school in Bordeaux in the 1980s, he started working with his father André, but the cellar was too small for two such driven personalities.

He went out into the world to try his wings. In Australia, he was mentored by legends Brian Croser and Len Evans.

Now he is in charge of one of the most prestigious family businesses in Bordeaux. They own over 640 hectares of land, produce over four million bottles, and employ over 185 people, so the responsibility is heavy. At his side is Mathilde, André's granddaughter and daughter of his sister Christine. She has been trained through a couple of years working with Francois and oenologist Anne Neuville, who succeeded Vincent Cruège who chose to leave the company after 30 years when André passed away.

- When I took over, I wanted to get straight to work on the changes. I had visions, but I was weighed down by all the administrative details that made me frustrated. It was important that I got relief and Mathilde is perfect as CEO. I'm primarily a winemaker and I want to do quality work in the vineyard and in the cellar," says Jacques during our interview at Château Bonnet.

- You can imagine, for the last ten years, a lot had stopped, we were not adapted to the market. There were so many fires to put out and we needed to raise capital.

Couhins-Lurton was in a terrible state and has now been restored, today it is the jewel in the collection as the only Grand Cru Classé wine.

- Both La Louvière and Rochemorin were in good condition, but the wine at Château Bonnet needed a fuller touch to be more food-friendly. We increased the proportion of sémillon which was a successful move, today the wine is better than ever says Jacques and I am inclined to agree.

Then came Covid, Ukraine, Gaza, inflation. The prices of everything have risen sharply and have of course created major problems.

- If we don't sell the wine, the costs are still there. The only solution is to make better wine and be innovative. But it's a struggle every day. Thanks to the support of the family, it is still fun to go to work every day," Jacques says emphatically.

He says he is primarily a white wine maker, but many innovations lie among the red wines. One range of wines that is clearly aimed at a younger audience is Bla Bla (avec toi). Made from either Cabernet Sauvignon or Merlot. It's a typical New World-inspired wine that spends six to eight months in steel tanks before bottling. Easy to drink, it is served cold and is perfect for summer light meals. We have already mentioned Diane Blanc Brut Nature and Château Bonnet Rouge on PET.

Rochemorin Noroit 2020 is another new wine invented by Jacques. A micro cuvée made from 100% Petit Verdot, an odd bird in the nest but a delicious one, made in only 1200 bottles annually.

We get into what everyone is talking about today, ecological thinking in the vineyard and sustainable work in production. Jacques immediately states that he doesn't believe in organic certification, but then he lists a number of certifications they have joined. His hesitation about organic certification is the size of the area and the fact that he wants to use as little copper as possible.

- "We are respectful and use the methods that we believe are the least harmful. We use the best consultants, apply biodiversity inside and outside the vineyards to promote wildlife. We plant trees, but we are careful as it can affect the risk of frost. We see that it is positive for the ecology. Lighter bottles and reduced waste saved 550 tons of CO2 in 2022. Balance is key!

The Château de Barbe-Blanche in Saint-Emilion is the first to convert to fully organic farming. From 2024, the wine will be certified organic. The small jewel Couhins-Lurton is Grand Cru Classé and here they invest in regenerative cultivation. This means, among other things, cover crops between the rows and manual gentle plowing to make the roots go deeper.

The red and white wines are divided according to different vinifications in the cellar, with Couhins-Lurton Acte I made using traditional methods, while Acte II contains less oak and is mainly matured in amphorae.

- It is not a second wine. We select what is best suited to the different methods," says Jacques.

Climate change is another obvious topic. Bordeaux was traditionally a difficult growing area with a lot of moisture from the Atlantic that meant mildew attacks. Frost and hail can threaten in spring, and in the past, grapes did not always ripen fully. Twenty years ago, sugar sacks were piled up as the must was chapitalized to bring it up to 13% alcohol. Forget that today! Now, the harvest is done much earlier so as not to get too much alcohol and to keep the elegance.

More petit verdot, cabernet franc, malbec, albariño, colombard and hybrid grapes that thrive in heat are planted.

- Cabernet Sauvignon is also ideal for warmer climates. The important thing is to develop

disease-resistant varieties, so we can cut down on pesticides.

The efforts have paid off, Château La Louvière received high marks for both red and white at this year's premier tasting despite 2023 being a challenging vintage.

If you want to visit Vignobles André Lurton, Château La Louvière is recommended. Here you can taste and buy all the wines and visit the wine cellar. Vignobles André Lurton's wines are available at Systembolaget in the fixed range:

Ch Bonnet Blanc 2023, full and half bottle no 4151, 109/69 SEK, Ch Bonnet Rouge 2021, no 52028 PET, price 129 SEK.

Most of the other wines mentioned are available to order.

### **Captions:**

Claes Löfgren enjoys a glass of Diane Blanc Brut Nature with Jacques Lurton before dinner.

The wine cellar at La Louvière is constantly being modernized and is in top condition.

Château La Louvière with its castle park and pond.

Hectic days during the harvest, the weather must be right and many people are on site

Château Bonnet in Entre-Deux-Mers is the core of the Lurton family's production.

Happy faces despite hard work in the vineyard.

Château Couhins-Lurton is the jewel in the collection and has received a major renovation with, among other things, horizontal amphorae as a novelty.