

Leaving the Helm at Louis Jadot

After more than 35 years at Burgundy's Maison Louis Jadot, 31 as president, Pierre-Henry Gagey is stepping back from day-to-day activities.

During Gagey's tenure, Burgundy has seen significant changes: warmer vintages have improved quality; there is better vine material, yields and harvest dates are more controlled; there is stricter grape selection; a new generation of growers is more conscientious; and global demand for the region's limited supply of wines has increased.

Gagey rose to the tasks, taking the helm of Jadot when it was essentially a two-man operation and building it into a global powerhouse exporting to 120 countries.

Born in Beaune, Gagey joined Jadot in 1985, the same year the house was acquired by U.S. importer Kobrand. Jadot was successful, yet small compared to other companies at the time, selling most of its wine in the U.S., where Kobrand had been the importer since 1945, and in the U.K. Pierre-Henry's father, André, and winemaker Jacques Lardière did everything.

Gagey credits the pair for teaching him about Burgundy and the business. He has a degree in engineering and an MBA and worked in finance in Paris. Lardière taught him about soil, *terroir* and the wines; André showed him the road ahead to follow and the importance of having a strong team and staying humble.

The company philosophy was simple: 100% Burgundy, quality wines, and only one label to establish a clear relationship with the consumer. The domaine is the base, augmented with grapes and wines purchased from growers and sold under the Jadot name, encompassing the complete range of Burgundy wines from regional level to *grand cru*.

"To be an expression of Burgundy you also have to be able to open the door to the young generation," explains Gagey. His mandate was to adhere to this model and develop the company. That meant buying vineyards, especially as many *premiers* and *grands crus* parcels as possible, a strategy that was easier 30 to 40 years ago. He saw that the supply of grapes would become tighter; the parents of his school classmates were happy to sell grapes to Jadot, but they all wanted to make and bottle their own wines. His first deal was to buy the vineyards of Clair-Daü in



For more than 35 years, Pierre-Henry Gagey rose to the tasks of a changing Burgundy winescape.

Marsannay, which brought parcels in Chambolle-Musigny Les Amoureuses and Gevrey-Chambertin Clos St.-Jacques into the Jadot fold.

It also meant developing markets worldwide. The challenge was to have the grapes to produce consistent quality and volume to satisfy distribution as Louis Jadot grew. Gagey purchased vineyards over the past 30 years, built a new winery that opened its doors in 1998, and established wineries in Beaujolais, Mâconnais, Givry and Chablis. He also worked closely with growers who supply grapes to Jadot.

Jadot was already dominant in the Beaujolais-Villages appellation when it bought Château des Jacques in Moulin-à-Vent, an estate specializing in *cru* Beaujolais. Already a force in Pouilly-Fuissé, the company acquired top domaine Domaine J.A. Ferret in 2007. Until those purchases, Jadot owned no vineyards in either area, making wine from purchased grapes.

By 2005, Gagey and the team considered producing Pinot and Chardonnay outside Burgundy, and 2013 settled

on the 20-acre Résonance vineyard in Oregon. "The only thing we changed was adding an accent to the "é" to send the message that there is a French team behind the project," says Gagey.

Though Gagey has evolved with the changing Burgundy landscape and global markets over the past three-plus decades, he still sees challenges ahead. Being able to produce consistent yields of grapes, in the face of changing weather, with the right clones and selections is paramount. He also feels that Burgundy as a community must stay humble, remain focused and serious and "remember where we came from" to continue to make great wines. And that it's important to keep the strong relationship with the customer.

Personally, one of his most recent challenges was the transition from technical director Lardière to Frédéric Barnier when Lardière retired. Making wines from 130 appellations, from Chablis to Beaujolais is a formidable task.

These challenges may one day become the responsibility of Pierre-Henry's son Thibault, currently the managing director. Gagey is hopeful that Thibault will continue his path and that of his grandfather. For American owners Kobrand, the name Gagey has delivered the quality and consistency of the Jadot label.

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