

Valladolid, 27th March 2013

AB Your background is Bordeaux, you have close links with people there. When the primeurs time comes along, do you ever feel you'd like to be part of it?

DB Spain is Spain and Bordeaux is Bordeaux. The négoce, the brokers, the owners, the primeurs, all that is part of a traditional machine that is the Bordeaux wine economy. It's a business in itself which feeds off the primeurs system. I'm a world away from that. It's not for me.

AB Do you respect it though?

DB Great properties rarely make poor wines today. What the primeurs tastings achieve above all is enhance the image of Bordeaux. This is what helps Bordeaux to sell its wines. But this is all wrapped up in petty rivalries and politics, which are a long way away from what Bordeaux should be about -which is the quality of its wines.



AB Do you ever consider buying wine en primeur in Bordeaux?

DB You, me, the man in the street, we're not concerned by it, because it's out of our reach. It's become too expensive.

AB If the demand in the market is there, prices go up. It's normal...

DB Well I think Bordeaux has overplayed its hand in the Chinese market. Prices have shot up, and now traditional markets cannot afford the top growths.

AB It was an opportunity they couldn't refuse...

DB I once had the opportunity of selling a large part of my production to a top airline. I turned the order down, because I didn't want to become dependent on one client, whatever the sales price. Secondly, I wanted to develop my brand in a

wide range of markets. Some Bordeaux growers that have sold to China no longer sell in other important markets today. That's not what I want.

AB Do you focus more on the traditional, mature markets?

DB My first aim when I started was to succeed on the national market here in Spain. You can't claim to make a great wine, if it's not successful where it's produced. Now that was far from easy, because my wine was a barrel-fermented white, and it was expensive compared with all my neighbours, and Spain at the time was not as interested in premium whites as it was in reds. But it worked out for me. Until recently I was selling more in Spain than abroad.

AB Although you can't really sell en primeur, you do have a payment in advance system, don't you?

DB Clients are invoiced 10% of their order in advance. For the last four years, I have added the condition that if they haven't collected their allocation by September 1st Belondrade can pay them back their 10% and sell elsewhere what they haven't taken. It allows them to take a risk on the amount they order, in the knowledge that if they've allocated themselves too much, they may get reimbursed for what they cannot sell.

AB This was after several years of success in the market. At the beginning, you had to find your own markets. You didn't have the equivalent of négociants to help you get started.

BL I started from scratch, but there was very little risk. I was small with very little money put up front. It wasn't a big project. The important thing was to control production and not give in to demands for more and more wine from clients. I could easily have doubled my production and sold it, but my priority was always to make wine solely from my own vines, and so I was limited to what I could produce myself.

AB Some might say you missed a good business opportunity, if the market was craving for more bottles...

DB Wine is not like a lottery. It's not something you just cash in on; it's for the long haul. The vineyard is a long process with dozens of tiny details that you fine-tune for years ahead. Things move slowly. Wine is a culture, in which risk-taking and attention to detail are so important, if you aspire to making something really great. When you release your wine on the market, you should have no doubts about it, because you know it so well.

AB Isn't that the case for all great wines, including Bordeaux?

DB That's the problem of primeurs week. What do those young, specially prepared samples really represent?

AB An idea of what the final wine may become?

DB A sample should reflect what the final consumer will get. I no longer submit samples for this type of tasting. I prefer to say "go and buy the bottles in the market, do your tasting, send me the receipt and I'll reimburse you".

AB Latour's new strategy is more up your street maybe?

DB I've been following what they're doing, and I think it's very interesting. All the great Bordeaux growths should perhaps do the same. I know that the primeurs system is a help financially for the growers, but perhaps a compromise could be found whereby producers are able to receive a percentage of payment in advance. It seems crazy to me that clients have to pay producers in advance, particularly when prices are not particularly attractive.

AB I imagine you also find it crazy that in the Bordeaux distribution system you don't necessarily know where your wine is sold, because some négociants don't tell you...

DB I'm lucky enough to have my own distributors. Perhaps if there had been a négociant system in place in Spain I would have opted for that. Who knows? The reality is that I have been able to choose my distributors, and that has been a huge advantage.

AB What do you look for in a distributor?

DB As a producer of a premium white, I look for distributors with top-end reds, because these people, with such high quality growths, cannot sell lesser white wines. I've always sought top-end wine channels rather than traditional white wine channels. The second thing is that when you find the distributor you want, respect and protect that distributor. I have never short-circuited anybody. Transparency and trust are very important.

AB Keeping up that relationship of trust with your distributors requires lots of travelling to the four corners of the wine-drinking world. Bordeaux négociants can do this on a regular basis. With all your commitments at the winery, how can you possibly do it?

DB The face behind the wine is fundamental. You really do need to be with your distributor and visit his or her clients. They need to feel they're real partners and not just sales reps. It's a job that you share. I continue to travel throughout Spain and Europe to the traditional markets, and modestly I think people are very

pleased to meet the founder of the winery and the man behind the wine, particularly during these difficult economic times when buyers are taking refuge in the more established brands.

AB What about more remote markets?

DB That will almost certainly be the job of my son Jean. He's still young, but he's warming to the task, and what's more his surname is Belondrade Lurton, the name of the wine, following the Spanish system of having both parents' surnames. In these new emerging markets, it doesn't matter if they meet Didier or Jean, because they don't really know me any better than him.

AB And Jean is already a budding Didier!

DB He's worked in the vines, harvested the grapes, assisted with the wine-making, done the DUAD diploma in Bordeaux and a lot more. He's totally involved and passionate about our wines. I see him taking over the responsibility of the Asian and American markets very quickly, at the very least. He will be the new face of Belondrade!