

VINTAGE CELLAR x EDOUARD MOUEIX

AN INTIMATE WINE DINNER IN LONDON



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Vintage Cellar welcomed guests to an intimate London evening hosted by Edouard Moueix, where he opened up a range of wines from the famous family's various properties, and took us inside Bordeaux's Right Bank.



In the upper echelons of Bordeaux wine, the name Moueix stands apart. A pillar of the fine-wine scene, the family's interests, somewhat unusually, span both production and distribution. Its most significant arm, commercially, is its negociant business, Ets. Jean-Pierre Moueix, which allocates any top Bordeaux wine you care to mention to more than 500 importers across 87 countries. Yet the Moueix name is better known to wine lovers as the owner of several standout estates on Bordeaux's Right Bank.

Jean-Pierre Moueix himself made his name as a merchant, establishing his eponymous business in 1937. But it was his belief and investment in Right Bank wines – notably those of Pomerol – that defined his legacy. In the 1950s, Pomerol was a Bordeaux backwater, its wines not yet widely recognised. JP Moueix saw its potential and began acquiring several now stellar properties, among them Châteaux La Fleur-Pétrus, Trotanoy and – most notably of all – Pétrus. He entrusted care of the latter to his son Christian, who proudly boasted of having pruned every single vine of the estate across his 38 vintages there before his elder brother Jean-François inherited the property in 2009.

Christian, 80 this year, joined the family business in 1970, and initially focused on his true passion – the group's vineyards. In the 1980s, he expanded into California, establishing Dominus Estate in Napa Valley (which he still runs today). Later, he added to the firm's Right Bank holdings through the acquisition of the likes of Château Hosanna in Pomerol in 1999, and the Saint-Émilion Premier Grand Cru Classé Château Bélair-Monange in 2008. Third-generation Edouard Moueix, by contrast, focused initially on the distribution side, which he runs in totality today. He still works with his father on the vineyard side, however, playing a key role in the 2012 merger of Château Bélair-Monange with Château Magdelaine, and driving the subsequent modernisation of this 26-hectare estate, on which he lives. 'When you're in the heart of the vineyard, it leaves a mark on you,' he says.

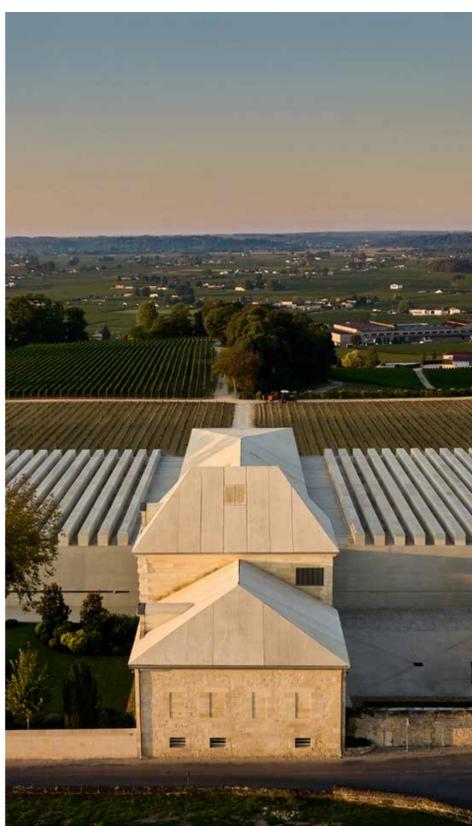
Knowing Pomerol's nuances

That mark was clear on a dark January night in London, when Edouard Moueix – a long-time partner of Vintage Cellar – lifted the gloom by hosting an exclusive dinner for 25 wine lovers at the elegant Ten Trinity Square hideaway within the city's Four Seasons Hotel, within sight of the Tower of London. A genial host, Edouard peppered some spectacular wines from across the Moueix portfolio with plentiful bons mots, both in our fireside chat beforehand, and at the table over the course of a convivial evening.

He began by taking guests inside the working practices of the Moueix's stable of Bordeaux properties. All the estates lie in close proximity and are tended by a single team, which oversees all aspects of viticulture and vinification. Such a structure allows you – forces you – to focus on the terroir, says Edouard. 'When you have just one property, you tend to put yourself at the same level as the soil – and then you end up having a bigger impact on the wine. We put ourselves behind the soil.'

'It's true that there's no terroir without people – but people can't beat nature. And producing wine is tough – you depend on the weather, which you can't control. So as vigneron, you need to have a certain amount of character. But there's a difference between character and ego. You don't want people to drink your ego – it doesn't have a good taste. You want to promote the place where you are – because nature is so much bigger than all of us.'

It is sobering to be reminded that the plateau of Pomerol, home to nearly all its top names, extends to a mere 200 hectares of vines. 'You stand in the centre of the plateau, and you can see all the great estates,' says Edouard. The various Moueix properties on the Right Bank cover 75 hectares between them – less than a single decent-sized Médoc cru classé. Trotanoy is a modest 8ha, Hosanna a miniscule 4.5ha. And yet within that, each has a different terroir. 'That's where our job becomes really exciting,' says Edouard. 'When you taste these wines, all produced by the same people with the same philosophy, they all taste different. And we want them to taste different.'



Opening the drinking window

For Edouard, 15 years of age is the prime time to broach top Bordeaux. 'You still have some fruit, you have some tertiary aromas, and the wine has found its balance.' Some years ago, he coined the catchphrase DBY – 'Drink Bordeaux Young' – in response to what he felt was a tendency to hold on to wines for too long. 'My grandfather never drank 50-year-old wines,' he said. 'That trend has only played out in the recent era.' He puts much of the habit down to 'bigger wines' of the 1990s and early 2000s, which were 'undrinkable' on release and 'clearly needed time to age'. Then there is the investment scene, he says, which encourages an approach of 'the older, the rarer – and therefore the more desirable'. But, he points out, the older the wine, the more it loses its identity. 'In a young wine, you see the vineyard. In a 50-year-old wine, you're happy if you can even tell it's Bordeaux.' Ultimately, wine is meant to be drunk not kept, he argues – an approach he is pleased to see now gaining traction. By way of evidence, the 2016 Bélair-Monange we are served is wonderfully approachable – all delicate granularity, minerality and tension. The minerality comes from the vineyard's position atop the St-Émilion plateau, just above Château Ausone and next door to Canon. So ingrained is this in its identity, that when the new cellar was commissioned for the expanded estate, the design, by Swiss architects Herzog and de Meuron, paid homage to the famous limestone of the plateau.

Dominus 2021 completes the evening and marks a step change in style, if not philosophy. The Dominus wines all come from the property's famous old Napanook vineyard, which is dry farmed – a rarity in Napa Valley. Edouard explains the reasoning: 'If you irrigate a vine, it will develop its root system just within the environment that is influenced by the irrigation, maybe 30 centimetres depth maximum. So it doesn't get the full influence of the soil. Whereas if you don't irrigate, it forces the vine to go deeper, to go and get the moisture. Then, through the roots, the vine will express the identity of the place and the vintage.' Vines are like humans, he adds. 'We all have motivation – otherwise we get lazy. As soon as you have stress in your life, you push yourself forwards.' As a consequence, he prefers the term 'winegrower' to 'winemaker'. 'A grower takes more risk, but is more open to vintage variation,' he said.

Predicting the market

On the subject of risk, what are his thoughts on the thorny topic of Bordeaux's annual En Primeur campaign? 'A wounded animal,' he said. 'And if the 2025 campaign doesn't work, En Primeur could be dead.' He doesn't believe that will happen, though. 'There were reasons the last few campaigns didn't work: '24 was not a great vintage; in '23 the volumes were huge, so there was no urgency; and in '22 the wines were very good but the prices were extremely high.' 2025, he says, will be a 'good-to-very-good-vintage' across the whole region, though with small volumes. 'And the prices will be similar to '24, but for much better quality. With those three elements together, it should be a successful campaign.'

As a distributor as well as a producer, it is important to him that it is successful. And that means the wines being accessibly priced. Ultimately, Edouard says, he simply wants bottles to be opened – as he did for a keen audience of Vintage Cellar clients on the night. 'I'm a big believer in the beauty and the uniqueness of wine. It's such a magical product.'



Photos taken on our 28th January event held at Ten Trinity club in London

Explore the wines selected by Édouard Moueix

Add to Cellar

CHATEAU
2009
HOSANNA
POMEROL