

Wine Spectator



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TASTING REPORT
CALIFORNIA
CABERNET'S
CLASSIC 2021
VINTAGE

88 WINES
RATE 95+

PLUS
12 Napa
Cabernet
Wineries
Shaping
the Future

EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW
CHRISTIAN
MOUEIX

The Famously Private Vintner
Shares His Life From
Pétrus to Dominus

“After school at U.C., Davis, in ’68 and ’69—those were great years in California—my father called me back and said, ‘It’s about time to work.’ I was determined, when I registered at Davis, to see something else. That opened me up to the world.” —CHRISTIAN MOUEIX



38 Christian Moueix speaks up

COVER STORY

38 A Frank Conversation With Christian Moueix With over 50 vintages of experience, Bordeaux-born Christian Moueix is regarded as a titan of fine wine. With a career that includes helping his family’s famed Pétrus for more than three decades beginning in his twenties, his illustrious résumé today ranges from A-list Right Bank estates such as Trotanoy and Bélaire-Monange to the Napa Cabernet Dominus, a must-have for serious collectors. But the very private vintner is not one to brag, so few know his story beyond the public details. In this interview, he answers questions he says he’s never answered before • *Marvin R. Shanken*

44 The Vines and Wines A look at the major vineyards and brands under the direction of the firm Établissements Jean-Pierre Moueix, with tasting notes for recent vintages

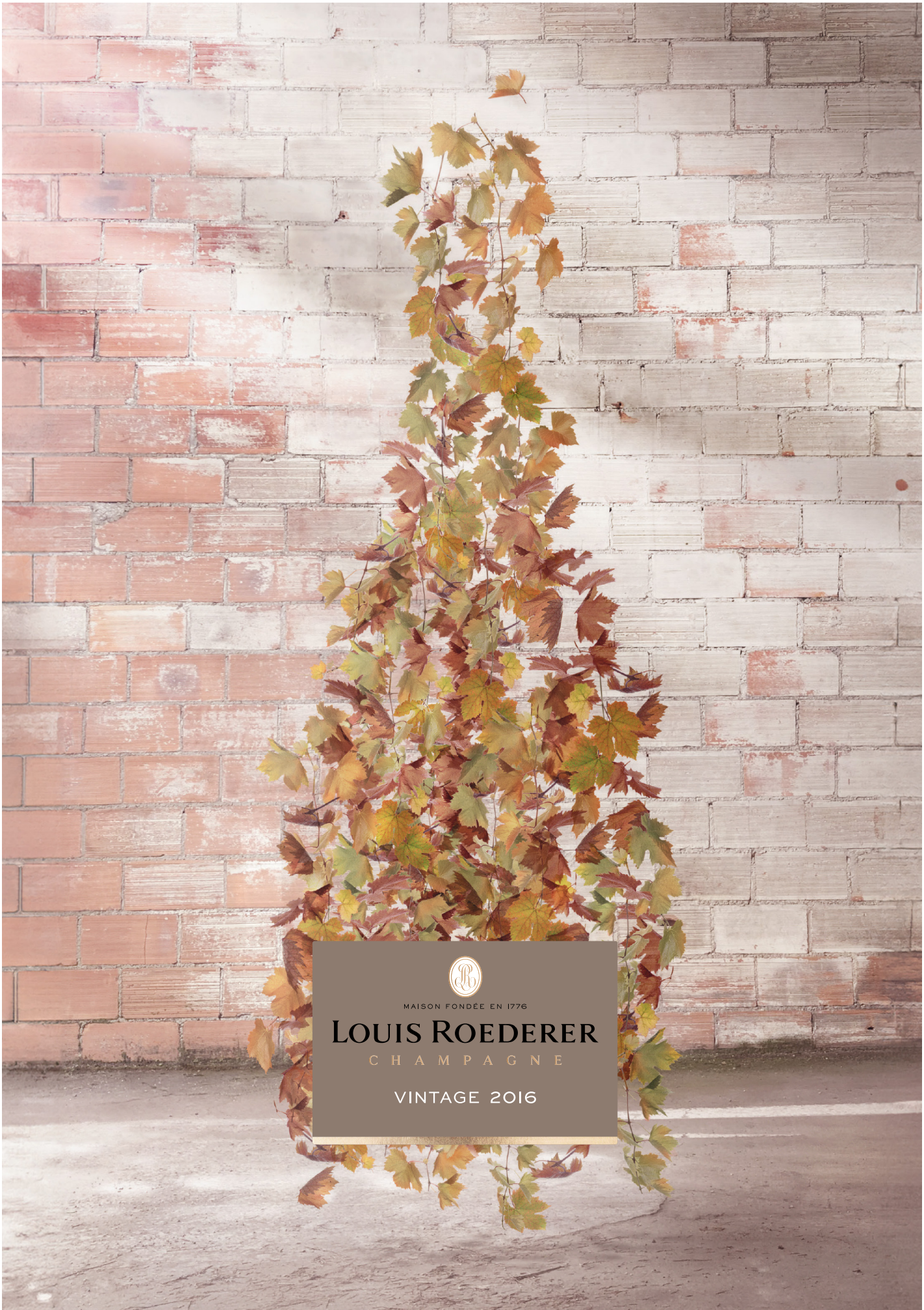
Features

TASTING REPORTS

60 Napa Cabernet Classic A cooler-than-usual growing season in 2021 converged with a stylistic trend on the part of vintners to make fresher, more energetic wines. The result is dozens of classic-scoring bottles • *James Molesworth*

73 Dynamic Directions A mix of new projects and advances at established wineries shapes today’s California Cabernet scene • *James Molesworth, MaryAnn Worobiec*

83 Cabernet Retrospective 2014 A tasting of 70 wines finds the 10-year-old bottlings are still fresh and rich in fruit flavors • *James Molesworth*



LOUIS ROEDERER
HAND IN HAND WITH NATURE

Christian Moueix Talks Bordeaux, Napa and More

In my July 31 editor's letter, I shared with you my experience tasting two very special California Cabernets: 1941 Inglenook estate-bottled Cabernet Sauvignon and 1958 Beaulieu Vineyard.

I opened these rare wines on the occasion of a visit from Christian Moueix, an icon of both Bordeaux and Napa Valley, home to his Dominus Estate. As I promised then, the time has come to share the fascinating conversation that preceded our tasting of these wines.

My sit-down with Moueix represents the latest in a series of interviews I have conducted with friends who are living legends of wine. As Moueix is considered by many to be a very private individual, I was impressed with his candor. Our discussion, spanning his early years stewarding Pétrus to his ambitious adventures in Napa, was filled with revelations. We spoke in detail about his family heritage, the current state of Bordeaux, the wines he enjoys drinking, and so much more. I think you will find it enlightening.

As you will read, Moueix is a man of great talent and great patience, born to a family deeply rooted in wine. Few vintners ever achieve his level of success on one continent—much less two. *Wine Spectator* declared his Dominus Estate 2018 our Wine of the Year for 2021. The current release, from the 2021 vintage, continues to impress, earning 96 points from senior editor and lead taster on the wines, James Molesworth, in our blind tastings.

There is much more good news to be found in our annual California Cabernet tasting report, beginning on page 60. The 2021 vintage proved to be stellar overall, earning a classic rating of 97 points from Molesworth. He notes that cooler-than-usual conditions in the growing season resulted in wines of great freshness and energy, a welcome return to form following the challenging 2020 vintage. Molesworth's list of high-scoring 2021s includes four wines scoring 98 points. It is crowned by MacDonald Cabernet Sauvignon Oakville at 99 points (\$225).

If there is a downside to this success, it's in the price of the wines. The top scorers are nearly all priced at more than \$200, with many costing \$500 or more. However, in a vintage like 2021, quality runs deep. Molesworth's list of Smart Buys (page 71) includes nearly 40 Napa Cabernets at less than \$100 a bottle and rating as high as 94 points.

Beyond the benevolence of Mother Nature, Molesworth credits a broader stylistic evolution in Napa Cabernet for the abundance of delicious wines. The world of Napa Cabernet is newly energized, with both veteran and new producers embracing a drive toward freshness and subtlety over pure power, he



explains. You can read our insider updates on a dozen wineries that are contributing to the dynamism of the category, including Burgess, Schrader, Diamond Creek, Larkmead and Stony Hill, beginning on page 73. Some of these Napa Cabernets may yet prove worthy successors to the 1941 Inglenook that I found to be rich, velvety and delicious at 83 years of age. Only time and careful cellaring will tell. The future appears bright.

Marvin R. Shanken
Editor and Publisher

CHRISTIAN

IN AN EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW, *Wine Spectator* editor and publisher Marvin R. Shanken talks with legendary but very private vintner Christian Moueix about his life and accomplishments in both Bordeaux and Napa



MOUEIX



INTERVIEW
PHOTOGRAPHS BY
RICK WENNER

“Let’s start at the beginning. I must say: You’re not easy. I realized that while doing research for this interview. For all that you’ve accomplished, you’ve led a very private life.”

As president of his family’s Établissements Jean-Pierre Moueix in Libourne, Bordeaux, since 1991, Christian Moueix could have easily coasted through a comfortable career in the wine industry. Moueix handled both production, with longtime winemaker Jean-Claude Berrouet, and distribution for the legendary Pétrus, while his own holdings include A-list Right Bank châteaux Trotanoy, La Fleur-Pétrus, Hosanna, Clos La Madeleine and Bélair-Monange, the latter of which just christened a striking new facility.

But on a trip to California in the 1960s, encounters with Robert Mondavi and André Tchelistcheff inspired him to explore what was at the time California’s blank canvas of a wine industry. After discovering a vineyard to his liking in Yountville, Moueix adopted a dry-farming approach. With



California now experiencing drought conditions regularly, his decision looks particularly prescient. That vineyard became Dominus, which debuted in the early 1980s and went on to achieve Wine of the Year honor from *Wine Spectator* in 2021 for its 2018 vintage.

Back in Bordeaux, Moueix brought his innovative thinking to bear, too. Generally credited with being the first producer to green harvest, Moueix began by culling bunches of grapes at night, discarding them into the nearby river so that his fellow vignerons would not criticize him for sacrificing crop. This viticultural technique is now de rigueur for any quality-driven producer in the wine world.

With over 50 vintages of experience, Moueix is regarded as a titan of fine wine. He sat down for an exclusive interview with *Wine Spectator* editor and publisher Marvin R. Shanken to recap his lengthy and impressive career.

MARVIN R. SHANKEN: Do you remember when we first met?

CHRISTIAN MOUEIX: I’m not 100% sure. It must have been at the very first Wine Experience, which I attended. Unless your memory is more precise than mine.

SHANKEN: We’re talking about a long time ago, the ’70s, but I think I ran into you in the Seagram Building when I was visiting with Ab Simon, Seagram’s Château & Estate Wines chairman. This only occurred to me last night. You happened to be either walking in or walking out of his office, and he introduced us. I didn’t know who you were, and you didn’t know who I was. I was new to the industry. You had been around for a while, but you were from Bordeaux. That’s my recollection. The Wine Experience started in 1981, so I’m guessing that would’ve been the late ’70s.

MOUEIX: That makes sense. Dear Ab was such a great friend for all of us. We miss him terribly.

SHANKEN: He was a great mentor of mine, and I know that you and he were very close. He was a great supporter of Bordeaux wine in America, and very special.

MOUEIX: Ab and Francine, his darling wife, were a wonderful couple. A great example for all of us.

SHANKEN: Let’s start at the beginning. I must say: You’re not easy. I realized that while doing research for this interview. For all that you’ve accomplished, you’ve led a very private life. I’d like to start before you were born. I understand that your grandfather was a peasant. Do you have memories of him? Obviously, in the next generation, your father became a huge success, and you were born into wine.

MOUEIX: Very much so.

SHANKEN: Tell me about your childhood and the history of your family.



“ I returned from my early life, including my time in California, in 1970. My father put me in charge of the vineyards, including Pétrus. For a man of 24, that was an incredible honor. ”

MOUEIX: My grandfather was a strong, smart peasant, with a big mustache in those years. He arrived in St.-Emilion in 1929 in the midst of a big crisis. He purchased Château Fonroque, a good Grand Cru Classé of St.-Emilion today, producing wines of good quality, but no more. My father, Jean-Pierre, as a young man in the 1930s, began to sell the wine his father was producing. He was very successful, and he began to sell the wines of the neighbors. In 1937, he began as a wine merchant, Établissements Jean-Pierre Moueix, in the small town of Libourne, where my office still is today.

My father was extremely talented. A very smart man. Very silent. He had the vision, after WWII, that the balance between the wine merchant and the estates was going to change. I remember that, in my youth, we, the merchants, were dictating the prices to the top estates. And there was a reaction from 1970 on, when the estates began to decide on the price, and the wine merchants had to accept their prices or not.

That changed the prices of the estates themselves, because they made more money at that time. In the '50s, my father had great foresight. The owners of the estates, which were worth nothing at the time because people were losing money year after year, were ready to give them up. He began to invest in estates even with his small means. He bought Château Magdelaine in St.-Emilion, and Trotanoy and La Fleur-Pétrus in Pomerol. These have always been surprising to me. I said, 'But Dad, you didn't have very much money. How did you purchase those estates?' He said, '*Petit*, they were worth nothing at the time.'

All his life he balanced a very beautiful business life with being a producer. But mostly he was a wine merchant.

SHANKEN: Selling in bulk or selling in bottles?

MOUEIX: Selling mostly in bottles from châteaux, as well as some small bulk activity selling minor wines of Bordeaux. I also developed that business in the '70s. But his forte was really château-bottled wines.

SHANKEN: What was Bordeaux like in the '70s when you really started? Were the first-growths famous then, or did they become

famous as first-growths later? Was there a pecking order of any consequence? Was the economy good for them, or were they struggling as well?

MOUEIX: We should not forget that we faced many crises in the '70s. The gas crisis was very severe, and it combined with major problems in Bordeaux. Many places were for sale for nothing. The best example is Château Margaux. Finally, it found a buyer with André Mentzelopoulos in 1977. But it had been on the market for years, and there was no buyer except National Distillers & Chemical Corporation—but that's another story.

The main crisis was in the '70s. We began to recover in '75 or '76, and from '80, and especially with the '82 vintage, Bordeaux was flourishing again—the top châteaux, at least, were flourishing.

SHANKEN: You mentioned the year 1970. Isn't that the year you really became the manager in charge of Pétrus?

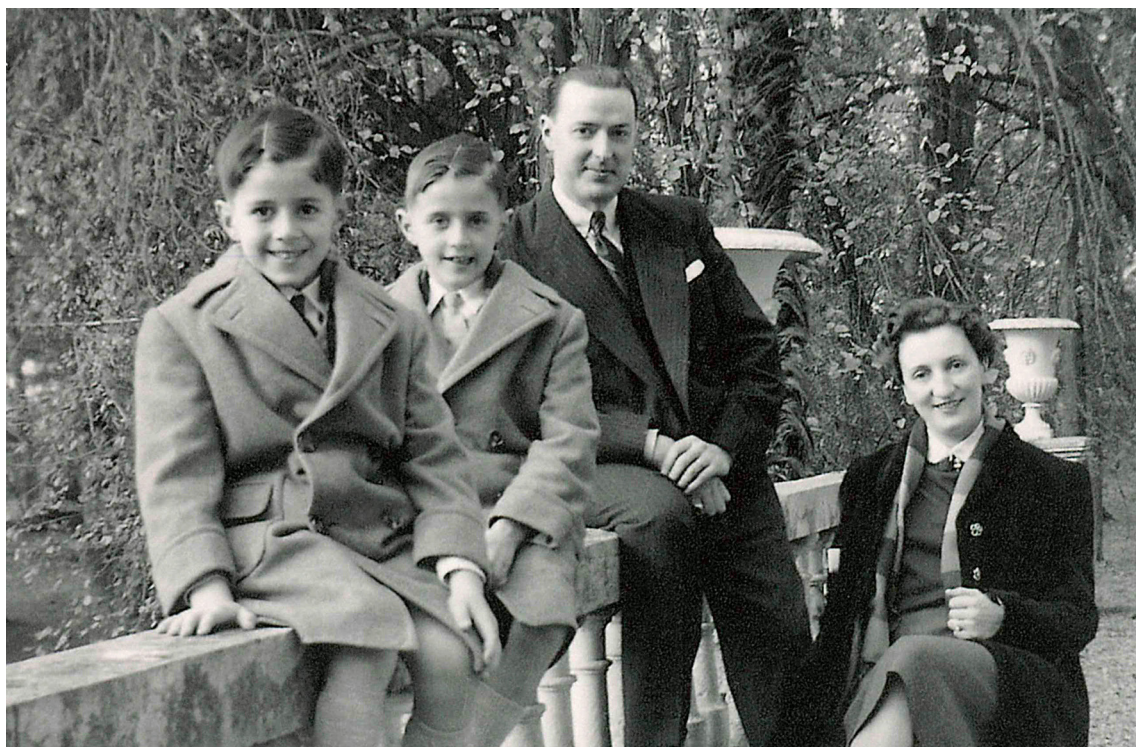
MOUEIX: It is true. I returned from my early life, including my time in California, in 1970. My father put me in charge of the vineyards, including Pétrus. For a man of 24, that was an incredible honor. Probably Pétrus was not as well-known as it is today, but still it was important.

SHANKEN: When I grew up in the wine world, there were always the first-growths, which are written about in all the books. And then there's Pétrus all by itself, but iconic, just as much as the first-growths. When you were put in charge of it, did you realize what you were dealing with? Did Pétrus have a recognition then anywhere near what it enjoys today?

MOUEIX: No. First, the Right Bank was a little forgotten by the wine merchants in general. My father made the Right Bank better known as a wine merchant. Pétrus, as well as Cheval Blanc and



CHRISTIAN MOUEIX INTERVIEW ONLINE
Check out interview highlights and watch the full video!
[WineSpectator.com/ChristianMoueixVideo](https://www.WineSpectator.com/ChristianMoueixVideo)



Christian, age 10 (left), with older brother Jean-François and their parents, Jean-Pierre and Colette, in 1956.

Ausone—the three Right Bank equivalents of the first-growths—were not considered at all the equivalent of the five top châteaux of the Médoc. You would be surprised that in the mid-'70s, especially after the crisis, we had no visitors at Pétrus. There was almost no interest in visiting Pétrus at the time.

But I must say that, being in charge of Pétrus, I was conscious of its exceptional potential, which had been proved by many top wines of the '20s. The *terroir* is unique, with a specific type of clay that is well-adapted to Merlot.

SHANKEN: When you took it over at 24, did you understand that what your father was giving you to manage was an extraordinary and singular opportunity to do something with an iconic wine that, career-wise, you hadn't earned the privilege of even managing at that time?

MOUEIX: No, I was not clearly conscious of that. In '71, I spent the whole year working physically, myself, at Pétrus. I thought that I should be able to do the job of anybody working in the vineyard. Which means I wasn't only on the tractor, but I also did the work of the women, which is the most important in viticulture and most of agriculture—the men are on the tractor, which is much easier. By working with a full vintage in the vineyard with my boots on the ground at Pétrus, I came to understand its fantastic potential.

In the '70s as well, I made a decision the importance of which I didn't realize at the time. One morning in June '73, arriving at Pétrus, I was shocked by the bloom, the potential quantity of the vintage. I said, 'With that many clusters, we cannot produce a top vintage.'

That's when I began to crop-thin, which was a scandal at the time—beyond what you could believe today. At a church in St.-Emilion, the priest condemned me for throwing onto the soil what God has given. Fifty years later, I can say there is no top vineyard that does not crop-thin, or green harvest. That was the main decision I made at that time. My father was always supportive. He was

a thinker, and he didn't come to Pétrus often. He would come two or three times a year.

SHANKEN: I assume he understood what he was doing and had trust and faith in you. He gave you a portfolio of properties, but among them was one of the truly great properties in the world. And you ran it for 38 years.

When did you learn that someday Pétrus would be inherited by your brother? I'm assuming that when you heard the news, after giving half your life to the property, it's something that broke your heart.

MOUEIX: Not actually. Very few people know, but the truth is—maybe you'll be the first one to know it officially—Pétrus had

been given to my brother before I began to work there in 1970.

SHANKEN: Oh my God. I didn't know that. But then, were you working for your brother or your father?

MOUEIX: I was working for both, actually. They each owned half at that time.

SHANKEN: Your brother is older?

MOUEIX: He's one year older. People thought it was terrible for me when my father passed away in 2003. But my brother and I had a very open discussion. He said, 'Why don't you keep it for a few more years?' I think we had a contract for nine years.

In a way, I was most happy to retire. I had my time, and I think I did my best.

SHANKEN: You've just rocked my boat. You and your brother each knew early on what you each were getting?

MOUEIX: Yes.

SHANKEN: What else was he getting, besides Pétrus, and what were you getting?

MOUEIX: He was getting the Groupe Duclot, which was a good, small wine merchant of top quality in Bordeaux at that time. My brother, who I would dare say is as talented as my father in business, developed it into a major Bordeaux company.

I got Établissements Jean-Pierre Moueix, which is a good wine merchant in Libourne, significant in the Right Bank at least. And I got the other estates: part of Trotanoy, La Fleur-Pétrus and others. And a few I purchased myself.

SHANKEN: Were you treated equally in terms of your inheritance?

MOUEIX: That's a difficult question because the value of things has changed so much. At that time, in those poor families, to protect the small estate, the right of the first-born was always applied. So I knew it was coming.

SHANKEN: Especially in France.

MOUEIX: Especially in England, but in France as well. If today, Pétrus were split between all the cousins, it would not be positive. I think my father made a good decision.

SHANKEN: That speaks volumes. I could never understand why, if you had all that you had in Bordeaux, in Pomerol, why the hell you bothered, after school in Paris, to go to school at the University of California, Davis. I can get why you'd want to go.

But then to come back and start a career all over again building a new enterprise halfway around the world. What did you need it for? What drove you to go to school there and then to come back 10 years later?

MOUEIX: After school at U.C., Davis, in '68 and '69—those were great years in California, the most incredible—my father called me back and said, 'It's about time to work.' I was determined, when I registered at Davis, to see something else. I had the best time, I have to say, in California. And that opened me up to the world, because in those years we didn't travel that much.

SHANKEN: Did you spend that much time in Napa?

MOUEIX: Not that much time in Napa. I visited all the top estates; I even worked for a time at Beaulieu Vineyard, with André Tchelistcheff, during the harvest of '68.

SHANKEN: You went back to France. You've got all this going on. More than most people could handle. And then, in the early '80s, you go back to Napa. What were you thinking?

MOUEIX: To be honest, after living in Davis, which was a little pretentious, I thought that the winemaking approach in California was becoming too technical. And I got the idea that with a European, or more specifically, a Bordeaux approach, we could produce wines with more refinement. It's a little tricky to say such a thing, because I had many very beautiful wines from California from the '40s and '50s, from Inglenook and Beaulieu Vineyard especially. In the '70s, the approach was very technical.

I asked Bob Mondavi, who had been so friendly to me from the beginning. I said, 'Bob, will you help me find a vineyard?' I went to visit many vineyards during my business trips to California, where I was trying to sell wines from Bordeaux.

Margrit Mondavi, who was such a wonderful lady, called me and said, 'Christian, we may have something for you in California.' I flew to California the next day and met the vineyard, in a manner of speaking. I visited Napanook Vineyard in Yountville, and the next day I met Robin Lail, who was the co-owner. We established the joint venture within a few weeks.

SHANKEN: I knew Robin because she, in the early years, worked with Bob Mondavi very closely. She always had a great personality and a great attitude. She was very friendly and welcoming.

What was the nature of the arrangement? They had a vineyard, she and her sister, that they inherited.

MOUEIX: Napanook was part of Inglenook, originally.

SHANKEN: What was she looking to do with the vineyard? What was her motivation for getting into the joint venture with you?

MOUEIX: Like many vineyard owners in California, she sold the grapes—to Bob Mondavi, by the way. She wanted to produce wine from those grapes.

SHANKEN: She was interested in going into the wine business—the bottled wine business. What was the makeup of the vineyard in those days? I understand there was Chardonnay.

MOUEIX: Yes, there was a lot of Chardonnay, Syrah, all kinds of varieties.

SHANKEN: Did it have any Cabernet?

MOUEIX: It had a little bit of Cabernet Sauvignon, and even a little bit of Merlot.

SHANKEN: But most of the grapes went into Inglenook Chardonnay. You did the joint venture, and then what did you do, rip out the vines that were there and plant Cabernet?

MOUEIX: I tasted the wines from all around and interviewed Bob Mondavi, Joe Heitz, my teacher at Davis Maynard Amerine. I asked them for advice. They gave me some good advice. It was clear that Cabernet Sauvignon was the varietal for Napa Valley, so I replanted mostly to Cabernet Sauvignon.

SHANKEN: What about your baby, Merlot?

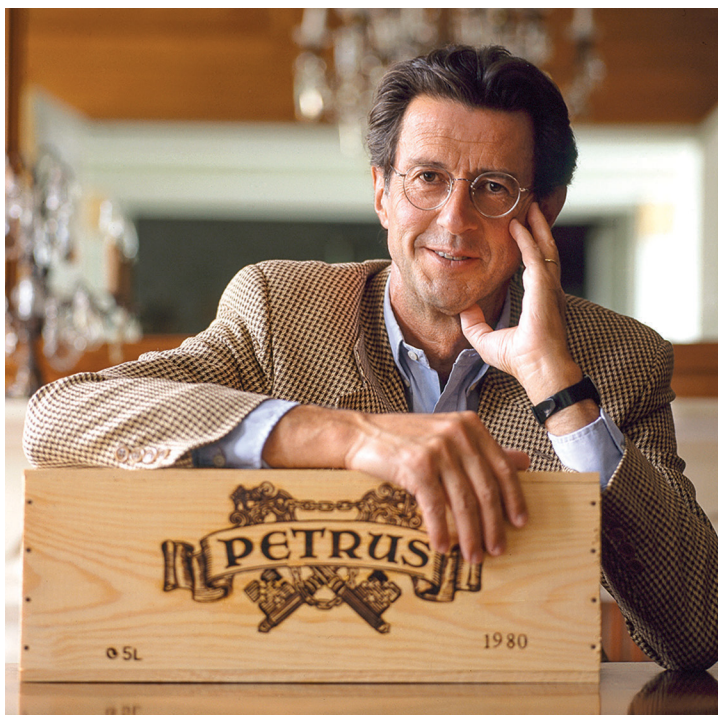
MOUEIX: I brought some Merlot and planted some vines. It's difficult to say, overall, that the climate in Napa is too hot for Merlot. But at least at our ranch, Merlot did not do well. We planted

some Malbec, and it didn't do well. After many mistakes, we are 90% Cabernet Sauvignon, 5% Cabernet Franc, which brings finesse, and 5% Petit Verdot, which brings spiciness.

SHANKEN: At some point, you bought Robin Lail out. What caused you to buy, and what caused her to sell?

MOUEIX: Well, I like to be honest. There were two different events. I didn't like the '93 vintage, and I declassified it completely. It was my decision, and I had the right in our contract to make any technical decision. And I must say it was brutal for them.

Then, we had a small disagreement—I'm still on very good terms



Moueix, at Pétrus in 1989, ran the estate for his family for decades, through 2008.

Christian Moueix's Properties in Bordeaux and Napa

ÉTABLISSEMENTS JEAN-PIERRE MOUEIX: ESTATE DETAILS AND RECENT WINE REVIEWS



Château La Fleur-Pétrus

POMEROL

Château La Fleur-Pétrus • acquired 1950 • 45.8 acres

(planted to Merlot, Cabernet Franc, Petit Verdot)

93 Château La Fleur-Pétrus Pomerol 2021 \$235 This shows layers of dark currant and blackberry puree, plus ample notes of sweet tobacco, bay leaf, warm earth and singed alder. Long and refined through the finish, this tilts toward savory overall but offers ample fruit notes in reserve. Best from 2026 through 2040.—*James Molesworth*

Château Lagrange • acquired 1953 • 22.2 acres

(planted to Merlot)

92 Château Lagrange Pomerol 2017 \$60 Rounded and fleshy, with warmed plum sauce, raspberry coulis and cherry compote flavors taking the lead, backed by subtle tobacco and incense notes. A flash of warm iron keeps the finish grounded. Drink now through 2035.—*J.M.*

Château Trotanoy • acquired 1953 • 17.8 acres

(planted to Merlot)

93 Château Trotanoy Pomerol 2021 \$361 This is silky at first, offering alluring blood orange and raspberry notes laced with rooibos tea, with a subtle mineral hint peeking through. Showing latent length, this puts on weight as it airs in the glass, with dark earth and roasted tobacco notes expanding along with the fruit. Best from 2026 through 2040.—*J.M.*

Château La Grave à Pomerol • acquired 1971 • 19.8 acres

(planted to Merlot, Cabernet Franc)

90 Château La Grave à Pomerol Pomerol 2021 \$41 Shows a note of kirsch, along with light licorice, black tea and earth hints. Nicely focused and with good cut too, as a graphite hint checks in on the finish. Drink now through 2031.—*J.M.*

Château Hosanna • acquired 1999 • 11.1 acres

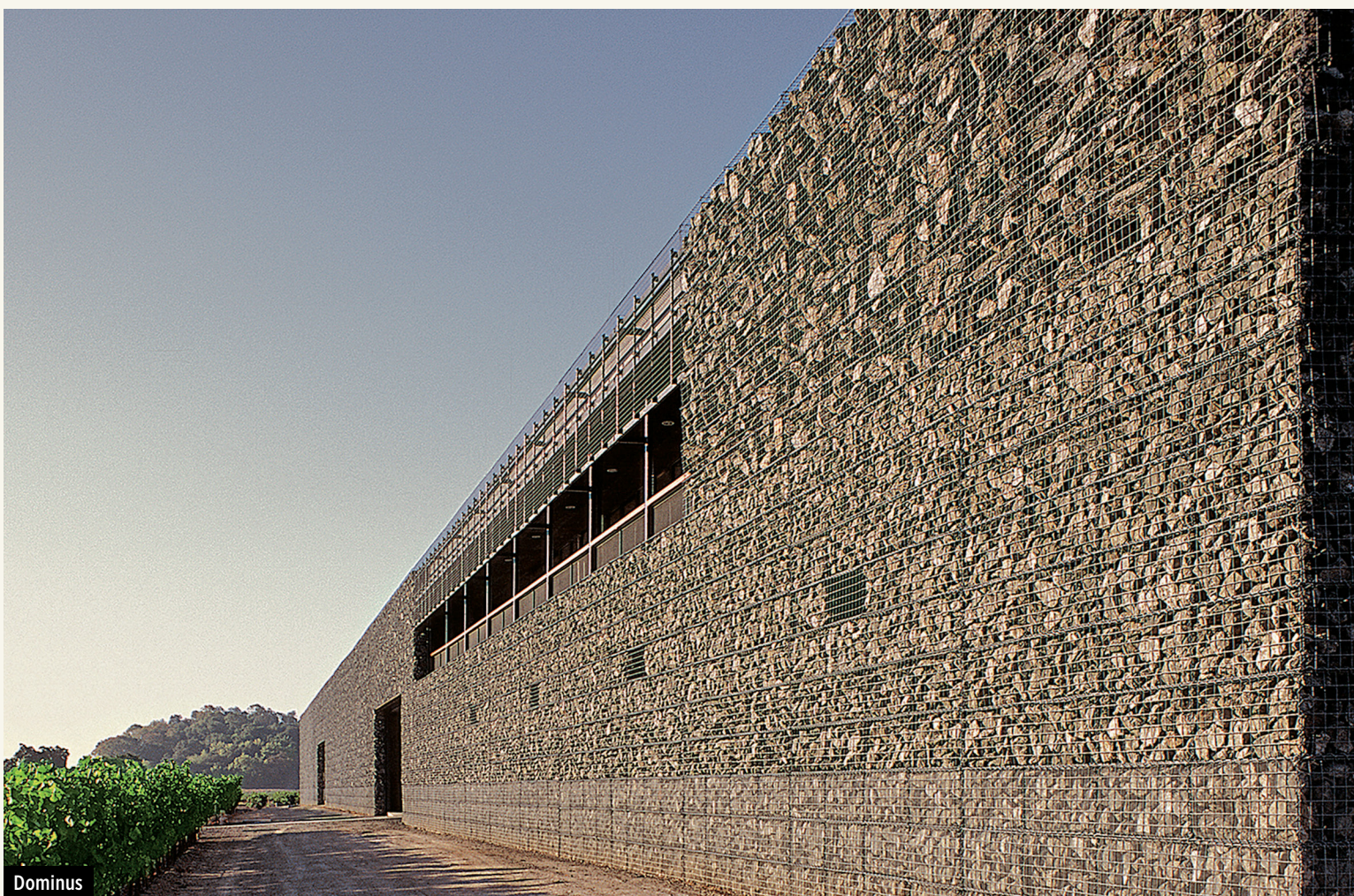
(planted to Merlot, Cabernet Franc)

93 Château Hosanna Pomerol 2021 \$140 Solidly built, this has an abundant but fine-grained structure, which supports a core of steeped plum, sweet bay leaf, red and black tea and singed sandalwood notes. The long finish offers a lingering mineral note and savory echo. A terrific effort for the vintage. Best from 2026 through 2038.—*J.M.*

Note: *Établissements Jean-Pierre Moueix has long-term farming, management or distribution agreements with Pomerol châteaux Lafleur-Gazin (since 1976; 21 acres; Merlot) and Latour à Pomerol (since 1962; 20 acres; Merlot).*

91 Château Lafleur-Gazin Pomerol 2021 \$50 Modest in scale, but fresh and focused, with a pretty beam of cassis and blackberry fruit speckled with a savory edge. Ends with light floral and red tea notes, showing sneaky overall length. Drink now through 2035.—*J.M.*

90 Château Latour à Pomerol Pomerol 2021 \$90 A bit reserved in style, with black cherry and currant notes woven with earth and singed alder accents. Ends with a cool cast iron echo. Solid for the vintage. Drink now through 2031.—*J.M.*



Dominus

ST.-EMILION

Château Bélair-Monange • created 2008* • 64 acres

(planted to Merlot, Cabernet Franc)

92 Château Bélair-Monange St.-Emilion 2021 \$180 On the trim side (the hallmark of the vintage), with damson plum and bitter cherry fruit flecked liberally with savory and dried violet hints. Shows refinement, rather than the grainy aspect typical in this vintage, gracefully revealing notes of chalk and potpourri through the finish. Drink now through 2036.—J.M. (*by combining Château Magdelaine, acquired 1952, and Château Bélair, acquired 2008)

Clos La Madeleine* • acquired 2017 • 5.6 acres

(planted to Merlot, Cabernet Franc)

91 Clos La Madeleine St.-Emilion 2017 \$NA A bright, floral style, with high-pitched red currant, pomegranate and damson plum notes, backed by racy acidity and well-buried chalky minerality. A flash of savory adds detail. Drink now through 2029.—J.M. (*Clos La Madeleine was integrated into Bélair-Monange in 2022.)

NAPA VALLEY

Dominus • created 1983 • 103 acres

(planted to Cabernet Sauvignon, Cabernet Franc, Petit Verdot)

96 Dominus Estate Napa Valley 2021 \$329

A restrained style, this offers a focused beam of red and black currant lined with warm stone, tobacco and savory accents and allied to a long iron spine. Marries density

and freshness through the finish. A wine of precision that feels as if it will expand with time in the cellar. Cabernet Sauvignon and Cabernet Franc. Best from 2026 through 2042.—J.M.

Ulysses • created 2008 • 31.5 acres

(planted to Cabernet Sauvignon, Cabernet Franc, Petit Verdot)

93 Ulysses Cabernet Sauvignon Oakville 2020 \$229 On the sedate side in terms of energy, this offers a slow-moving core of gently mulled black cherry and black currant fruit, backed by hints of tobacco, roasted cedar and warm earth. Shows a hint of the vintage's rusticity, but the fruit is generous enough to easily compensate for that. A late violet echo offers a pretty hint of purity. Drink now through 2038.—J.M.



Château Bélair-Monange

“I asked Bob Mondavi to help me find a vineyard. I flew to California, visited Napanook and met Robin Lail, the co-owner. We established a joint venture within a few weeks.”

—CHRISTIAN MOUEIX

with them. Robin is a very special lady, and don't forget that she has a sister, Marcia, who was very neutral in the business and very sweet. She loves poetry and we got along very well.

SHANKEN: By the way, Robin was on the cover of *Wine Spectator*, in 2020.

MOUEIX: Yes, she's fantastic.

We needed to build a winery. We were contract crushing for many years with Rombauer, but we needed a winery. And that's where we had a small disagreement. John, Robin's husband, was a very nice man and a classical architect from Napa. I had really envisioned modern beauty. So, declassifying the '93, which was my decision, and again a brutal one, and my desire to have a younger architect.

SHANKEN: It would have required a significant investment from her to maintain her interest going forward if you were going to build the winery on the footsteps of '93, when there was basically no crop and no cash flow.

MOUEIX: Yes, probably so. I think she was also dreaming of producing her own wine—she had good vineyard and winemaking experience, and she took a young winemaker whom we had trained ourselves, and she started making her own wine.

SHANKEN: When did you go from being a visitor, a tourist flying back and forth, to establishing roots in California? I understand you have a beautiful home in Napa Valley now. When did you decide you needed to be there for extensive periods of time, and how did that affect your responsibilities in Bordeaux?

MOUEIX: First, let me say that we have great teams in Bordeaux and in California. That's essential. I was flying between the two teams. I am a hard worker—that's really the only quality I'll accept as a compliment. I am a

micromanager, which means, for instance, today, in New York, I'm following what's happening in Bordeaux. And when I'm in Bordeaux, I follow what's happening in California, and I call them in the evening. I have a kind of double life.

SHANKEN: Obviously, you have to have very talented, dedicated people on both sides or you couldn't do what you do.

MOUEIX: Very much so, and they work together and get along well.

SHANKEN: When did you more or less officially move to Napa?

MOUEIX: The big step was when I bought out my partners, and then we built the winery in '97 with the Swiss architects Jacques Herzog and Pierre de Meuron, who were advised by my wife, Cherise. Even if it was not very expensive at the time, it was a statement, and it signified taking a position in the valley. That's when I began to spend more time. But I was still spending most of my time in France. About two-thirds in France, one-third in California. That's still true today.

SHANKEN: What months do you spend in France vs. California?

MOUEIX: It varies a little bit, depending on the season and the holidays in France. In May, in France, we're on holiday half the month, so I'm always in California in May, then I return in July, then just before the harvest in early September, and after the Wine Experience in October. I commute five to six times a year.

SHANKEN: You mention the Wine Experience. This October will be our 43rd event. I don't think you've ever missed a year.

MOUEIX: That's right. We love it. We see old friends.

SHANKEN: Let's jump back to Bordeaux for a few minutes. Where is the Bordeaux wine industry today? It's been through a lot of change. Some of the châteaux came out with prices for the 2023 vintage that are substantially down. Economy, demand, what's going on?

MOUEIX: Had you asked me that question a year ago, when we had the great 2022 vintage with crazy prices, I would have been unhappy. Today I am at ease. Why? For the past five years, there's been lots of Bordeaux bashing. Partly it's the fault of Bordeaux. But Bordeaux bashing has been exaggerated by lots of people, including some wine writers.

SHANKEN: What is 'Bordeaux bashing'?

MOUEIX: Criticizing everything Bordeaux does—the wines are too expensive, not as good, polluted by the chemicals we use—all of this is wrong. Except, probably, that we were too expensive. For me, the wines are too expensive. Today, we're told, the young people don't drink red wine anymore. Why? The wines are too expensive! In any restaurant, you cannot get a top wine for less than \$800; I saw it just last night. Difficult for anyone already, but impossible for young people. The



Wine Spectator's July 1986 issue marked Moueix's debut cover appearance, announcing his first release of Dominus, a Napa Cabernet that has gone on to achieve cult status. Its 2018 vintage was *Wine Spectator's* Wine of the Year in 2021.

problem for wine, and especially Bordeaux, is prices. That's why we're so happy that we became conscious of that in Bordeaux, especially this year, with the more difficult market.

SHANKEN: You think that lowering the price significantly, roughly 25% to 30%, will open the market to more people who can afford the wines and yield positive results?

MOUEIX: I'm convinced of that. It will take a few years, until the 2023 vintage arrives on the market. But I think the interest will be renewed. I'm really optimistic about that. There's no wine like Bordeaux in the world—the refinement of the top châteaux in Bordeaux cannot be achieved anywhere else. I try my best in Napa to get more refinement, but the climate is a limiting factor.

SHANKEN: The producers of Bordeaux are actively engaged in supporting and developing the world market for Bordeaux, which has been extraordinarily successful for many, many years. What do they need to do to regain the position and put demand ahead of supply, as it always used to be?

MOUEIX: The big move we're just starting today should be enough, as long as next year, the market is a little bit better and doesn't decrease by another 20%. We have been unreasonable for many years, partly due to the fact that we have produced great vintages in eight years out of 10. Global warming was probably to thank for that. But Bordeaux has exaggerated its prices, and by reducing prices drastically, I think we should be able to conquer the market again.

SHANKEN: Let me be a bit of a devil's advocate. Burgundy's prices are crazy.

MOUEIX: They will pay.

SHANKEN: Italy has many estates that sell their wine for \$700 to \$1,000 or more. To say nothing of California! What do you think of the pricing of the cult wines of California, of which there are a wide number—and their productions are not tiny anymore.

MOUEIX: They are small, let's say. I think any château that produces, reasonably, 5,000 cases cannot afford those crazy prices. They're really boutique wines, those very expensive wines. I'm not critical of quality, but the prices ...

SHANKEN: Looking at the band of luxury wines, let's say all wines over \$500 a bottle, no matter what country they're from, are they all equally faced with pushback from the consumer, from the collector, or is it a very selective situation?



At the 1987 New York Wine Experience, Moueix shared fine Bordeaux to the delight of attendees.



Moueix received *Wine Spectator's* Distinguished Service Award in 2011 at the New York Wine Experience banquet.

MOUEIX: \$500 in the stores or in the restaurant?

SHANKEN: Either. I mean, the person who's buying a \$25 bottle isn't the same person who goes to a restaurant or store and pays \$500 or \$1,000 for a bottle of Masseto or Harlan or Romanée-Conti.

MOUEIX: I was recently in Belgium. I went to a restaurant that multiplies wine prices by two. The restaurant was full, and there were one or two bottles of wine on each table. When the restaurants multiply by five, I don't expect them to sell wine like that. We should all, along those lines, correct our margins. That's essential.

SHANKEN: It's on the minds of lots of people. Most wine lovers, once they've had a great bottle of wine, they get hooked! The question is, at some point, there are a certain number of collectors, but beyond that, you go out to dinner and look at a wine list, and it doesn't matter how rich you are, but you gasp.

Let's talk about Merlot. Obviously, you have achieved much with that grape. Tell me about Merlot in California. Has it lost its



Christian and his wife, Cherise, at Dominus Estate. Moueix is typically on site in Napa in parts of May, July, September and October.

way? Did it never have its way? Will the climate and soil never produce great Merlot? Is it not being vinified correctly? What is the problem with Merlot in California, from your perspective as a Merlot expert from Pomerol?

MOUEIX: It's a very delicate question. I can honestly judge Merlot at Napanook Ranch, which I know well. I tried the different soils of the ranch, and Merlot was not a good fit. I've tasted a few good Merlots from California and Napa. Sometimes in the past, there was confusion between Merlot and Cabernet Franc, including at U.C., Davis. Some of those Merlots, are they pure Merlots? The famous Merlots, like Three Palms, for instance.

SHANKEN: Who would you recommend people try, a Merlot that

you think has been produced successfully in California?

MOUEIX: I would avoid Merlot from California. I never drink California Merlot. I'm sorry to say it, but I don't.

SHANKEN: Who were your mentors in Bordeaux? Obviously your father. Was your father a businessman or a winemaker? Did he know how to make wine?

MOUEIX: Yes, but he knew how to find good winemakers to do it for him. My father was a rather distant man, and as you probably know, he was a big art collector. He had two passions in his life: wine and art, especially antiques. That took at least half his time.

SHANKEN: What inspired him? He obviously got into wine because



he thought he could make money, and he saw an opportunity to build a business. What caused him to get interested in wine? And to become an avid collector of art?

MOUEIX: It's a pity you didn't meet him. He was a very impressive man. He was very generous and warm, even if he looked a little distant at first. He had a sense of quality. If he looked at two works of art, he could say, 'This is better than that one.' He had an eye, and an aptitude for wine. He had a sense of the potential of aging.

SHANKEN: What caused him to be so interested in art?

MOUEIX: My grandparents were very modest in their lifestyle. My father bought a Monet when he was 18 years old.

“I think the interest in Bordeaux will be renewed. The refinement of the top châteaux cannot be achieved anywhere else. I try my best in Napa to get more refinement, but the climate is a limiting factor.”
—C.M.

SHANKEN: How'd he know to buy it?

MOUEIX: He had a feeling.

SHANKEN: Back to mentors. Who were your mentors in Bordeaux?

MOUEIX: My father. Philippe de Rothschild and Philippine. Alexis Lichine—he was a character as well. Emile Peynaud at a certain level, though I knew him a little too late. Probably we don't have the same caliber of people today in Bordeaux—or maybe people are less communicative in a way. But in the end, my mentors were mostly in California. I have wonderful memories of my time with them.

SHANKEN: How did you meet Bob Mondavi? Did you meet André Tchelistcheff or Bob first?

MOUEIX: I met them at the same time, when I was at Davis.

SHANKEN: But André gave you a job, and Bob didn't!

MOUEIX: The day before I signed with my partners, May 7, 1982, I had lunch with André and his charming wife, Dorothy. It's a wonderful story. I said, 'André, would you go into a joint venture in Napa, if you were in my position?' He said, 'Yes, Christian, you will be successful—under one condition.' He grabbed a little toy, which had two little rubber plastic shoes. He said, 'If you move slowly, you will have success.' That was his advice, and very precious advice, I can tell you.

The night before I signed, I had dinner with Maynard Amerine. We had become very good friends. We weren't great friends at first, because he was very California-minded, and I was defending Bordeaux. And he put Inglenook against Pétrus: '52, '53, '55 vintages, in a blind tasting. There were six of us tasting. It ended equally.

SHANKEN: What was the outcome?

MOUEIX: If I remember correctly, Pétrus won in '52, lost in '53 and tied in '55.

SHANKEN: Amerine I got to know well—there was a whole crew from Davis. Albert Winkler, Bob, André. Maynard, Bob and

André were all Distinguished Service Award winners over the years from *Wine Spectator*. Alexis Lichine and I spent a week together in Napa Valley in 1974. Don't ask me about it, but it was one of the funniest weeks of my life.

MOUEIX: No surprise. He had such a sense of humor.

SHANKEN: He was such a character. He really was a bon vivant. When you were with him, all you did was laugh.

Tell me about Dominus. When was your first release?

MOUEIX: The first vintage was '83. I made a few mistakes, because in France with the Merlot, we frequently add press wine. I did the same thing in California in '83, which was already a tannic vintage. The wine was so tannic. When we were supposed to release it in '86, the wine was so hard, and I was embarrassed. At the last minute, I decided to launch the '84 rather than the '83. That was a very poor start. But that was the first time I made the cover of *Wine Spectator*. I'm pictured with the '83 vintage, but in fact it's not true—I released the '84 first. That was a very bad start.

SHANKEN: My recollection was that for the genius of Pétrus to launch this wine from Napa, it didn't get off to a very positive start. What was going on? The first three, four, five years, did you say to yourself, 'What a mistake I made. What am I doing? Am I going to lose my investment?'

MOUEIX: No. I don't like the word 'investment.' For me, it was a love story. I'm not in a hurry. You need 20 years to understand a vineyard.

SHANKEN: You've said it takes 20 years to make a great wine.

MOUEIX: Absolutely. I'm not in a hurry. I have no recipe. So many wines are made with a recipe. That's not my approach. Each vintage is different.

SHANKEN: You didn't lose heart.

MOUEIX: Not at all.



Moueix at Dominus with Tod Mostero, director of viticulture and winemaking at the estate since 2007.

SHANKEN: But you knew you were struggling. Around what year did you think you were finally getting it right, getting closer and closer to where you want to go?

MOUEIX: 1991. I was so happy, because it took just 10 years, not 20. Literally, when I entered into the joint venture with my partners, the first thing I said was, 'I need 20 years to make a good wine.' And the second thing I said was, 'I will produce wine without irrigation.' That was essential for me. And I admire my partners for being considerate to the young man who said, 'I need 20 years.'

SHANKEN: When did you feel that Dominus had achieved your goal?

MOUEIX: Much more recently. Probably the best vintage we've produced was 2013. Now I'm confident, except the climate is changing. Maybe we're past the peak, I don't know. I'm not in a hurry, not at all, even at my age.

SHANKEN: How many cases do you produce today?

MOUEIX: We produce an average of 5,000 to 7,000 cases. We peak, in big vintages, at 10,000.

SHANKEN: And what is the recommended retail price?

MOUEIX: In recent years, it's been around \$300. I'm happy at that level. Each time we discuss the matter with our distributor, I ask them, 'Should we lower the price?'

SHANKEN: In 2021, you got Wine of the Year for the 2018 Dominus. One of the things that was in your favor was the price, because it was not only a great wine but a great value at under \$300. For a Napa Cabernet that scored 97 points, that's quite spectacular.

MOUEIX: It's reasonable. I know at one point there were 100 wines in Napa more expensive than Dominus. That makes me happy. It proves that normal people can afford Dominus. That's my goal.

SHANKEN: Who told you that you had won Wine of the Year, and where were you?

MOUEIX: That came as a huge surprise. I was in France. I got a call from our great manager in California, Julie Levitan. She told me we had received many calls that morning, and we were wondering why. And then we learned that we were named Wine of the Year. We opened a good bottle to celebrate.

SHANKEN: What was it like the first week?

MOUEIX: We were happy, of course. But we were not bragging about it.

SHANKEN: You don't brag about anything—you're one of the most low-key people I've ever met in my life!

MOUEIX: We told our team in France, and on the first occasion when we were in California, we celebrated. We celebrated with our workers, which is so essential. We have very good teams in France. And in California, they are



From left: Jean-François, Jean-Pierre, Colette and Christian in 1989. Christian would eventually take over the family company his father founded in 1937. Under his leadership, the firm has gone on to acquire additional properties and grow its portfolio of Right Bank holdings, which are now considered among the elite in Bordeaux.

sensational. They work so well. We always share the good news, share the good wines. I like the people who work for us to be happy. That's essential. That would be my philosophy about producing wine. Wine should make people happy. That's why I don't like wines that are too expensive. At that point, it's not about happiness anymore. I think the '21 Dominus you and I are drinking, which you selected this morning, is showing pretty well and will make a lot of people happy. Wine is a message.

SHANKEN: I'm sure you've had a lot of great older Bordeaux wines. Do you have any recollections of California Cabernets that you've had over the years?

MOUEIX: Yes. I've been lucky to have had many old Inglenooks, either with Robin or previously. I've had some Louis M. Martini.

SHANKEN: Does any vintage stand out?

MOUEIX: I have a soft spot for BV '68, because I was there.

SHANKEN: You picked the grapes! What's the oldest Inglenook you've had?

MOUEIX: 1941.

SHANKEN: You had '41? How was it?

MOUEIX: The wines from the '40s were beautiful. The vines were not irrigated at the time, and that changes everything. The roots have to go deeper, and they express the *terroir* much more.

SHANKEN: I wasn't going to tell you, because I assumed you'd never had one, but I'm going to serve you a '41 at lunch today.

MOUEIX: No! Unbelievable.

SHANKEN: But it's 83 years old. I'm not promising that it's going to be alive, but I thought, what a great experiment to share it. I'm assuming—correct me if I'm wrong—that the grapes from that wine may be partly from Napanook, the vineyard you own.

MOUEIX: I'm sorry to disappoint you, but from what I understand, John Daniel bought Napanook in 1943.

SHANKEN: Ah, well, maybe I won't serve you the wine! I do have old BVs too. I don't think I have '68s here. I haven't had a '41 in something like 30 years. I have a few bottles directly from Inglenook. Over the past 20 years, have you had any important mentors or buddies in Napa, in the wine world?

MOUEIX: Probably I don't go out much. I was longtime friends with the late Warren Winiarski. I love Paul Draper, though he's not in Napa.

SHANKEN: Paul's an incredible guy, and also a Distinguished Service Award winner, as you are.

MOUEIX: I have a good relationship with most people, I think. But we live a quiet life.

SHANKEN: What wines do you like to drink at home?

MOUEIX: In California, we drink Stag's Leap, sometimes Opus One, sometimes some of those big wines.

SHANKEN: You drink mainly Cabernet? How about Pinot Noir?

MOUEIX: Mainly Cabernet.

SHANKEN: What do you drink in Bordeaux?

MOUEIX: In Bordeaux, I drink Montrose from the Médoc. And I love Cheval Blanc and Haut-Brion.

SHANKEN: Do you drink any white wines?

MOUEIX: Yes. Haut-Brion Blanc, of course, and a lot of whites from Burgundy. But very few whites from Bordeaux.

SHANKEN: What else should I ask you about?

MOUEIX: The important thing is that Bordeaux is back. That's a very important message. And we need more support from *Wine Spectator*. I know there are difficulties, but forget the difficulties.

SHANKEN: We do cover Bordeaux quite extensively, but we have had issues with the first-growths. They used to send us their wines, but now they want us to go to the château to taste their wines, and we tell them we can't do that because we wouldn't be tasting blind. We don't do that for anybody else, and we're at an impasse. I've spoken privately to them, and I told them that that's not our charter—we only taste blind. They're being stubborn, and I don't mind saying that publicly.

But we cover Bordeaux extensively. Senior editor James Molesworth spends a few weeks there each year. We cover the region and different producers very comprehensively. We don't include the first-growths in our tastings anymore because they're not cooperating with us. I've told one of the owners that it's not going to change in my lifetime, so you have to make a decision. We want to taste your wine very much. I don't know what caused you to change your mind, but you're not helping yourselves, and you're not helping our readers. Bordeaux remains a very important wine region to us as journalists. And that's reflected by the fact that many consumers enjoy drinking Bordeaux.

MOUEIX: I know. It's a difficult situation. But there may be an opening. I think they may be more receptive.

SHANKEN: I've spoken to them, and the ball is really in their court. I called them; I've been on the phone extensively to try sorting this out. It's the only pocket of resistance that we have in the wine world, and there's no reason for it. It's not of our making. We had a great working relationship that they changed around three years ago. What was behind that change, I can't tell you, but it is what it is.

I didn't expect to be talking about this, but I'm not going to shy away from the topic. If they read this interview, they should know that *Wine Spectator* would love to taste the first-growths of Bordeaux. But we're only going to taste them blind, and they have to go back to the prior procedures and understand that they put us in a difficult position. After over 40 years, we're not going to start to taste wines non-blind. It's just not going to happen.

But let's move on to something more positive. I want to talk about your son, Edouard, who I don't think I've ever met. I understand he's your right hand in Bordeaux.

MOUEIX: Very much so.

SHANKEN: Is he also involved in California?

MOUEIX: Not currently, because we have a large team there and it's just one vineyard.

SHANKEN: Tell me about him.

MOUEIX: Edouard was born in 1977, so he's not really a young man anymore. He's 47. He loves business more than I do. Under my management, the company was developing vineyards but not developing the business itself. He likes to joke. He says, 'Dad, you purchase only the wines you like!' And since I don't like all wines, there was a limit. He's developed the business very seriously the past few years. We are now among the big players of Bordeaux. He's doing very well. He pays a lot of attention to the wines of the Médoc. He visits wineries.

SHANKEN: And you have a daughter?

MOUEIX: I do. She's 45, and she lives in South Africa, where she's a wildlife veterinarian. She's based in Bloemfontein, which is more central for her work all around the country. She's become a quite famous vet, and now she has missions all over the place. She loves her life. I hope I will attract her to California. I don't see her coming back to Bordeaux, but I hope to get her there.

SHANKEN: And what about your wife, Cherise?

MOUEIX: Ah, Cherise. We've been married for 30 years. She's played a very important role in my life. She's our art advisor. She was the one who introduced me to Herzog & de Meuron, who built the winery at Dominus, then our private residence in California, then a little cabin in France, a refectory for the harvesters. And very recently, a big winery for Bélair-Monange.

SHANKEN: I was told it's very modern and quite spectacular. I've heard it's quite extraordinary.

MOUEIX: It took seven years to build, and the wines are promising as well. They're very classic wines of St.-Emilion.

SHANKEN: I've known Cherise for many years, and she seems to me a charming and supportive partner to you.

MOUEIX: She's definitely a great support for me.

SHANKEN: I always ask this final question, and I even put this to Ernest Gallo many years ago. When the "Great Book of Wine" is written and published 50 or 100 years from now, it will have an alphabetical list of people who've made a mark on the wine world. Under the name Christian Moueix, what would you like it to say?

MOUEIX: He tried to get the best of two worlds.

SHANKEN: I'm so grateful you took the time to speak with me. I was a little skeptical because you are so private and an extremely humble man I have had nothing but the utmost respect for in the 50 or so years we've known each other. I had no idea how forthcoming you would be, and you've been open. I learned a great deal, and I know that our readers are going to enjoy hearing your story. This is the stuff you don't really get to know just from reading about you.

MOUEIX: Some of these questions I've never answered before.

SHANKEN: Anything else you'd like to say?

MOUEIX: Wine is wonderful. To do a job like this—it's not a job. It's a passion. To make people happy, even people we've never met, over a bottle of wine in the evening? What a joy. □



Christian and his son, Edouard, at the new winery designed by Herzog & de Meuron for Château Bélair-Monange in St.-Emilion. Edouard has followed his father into the family business.