

■ THE SOMMELIER JOURNAL

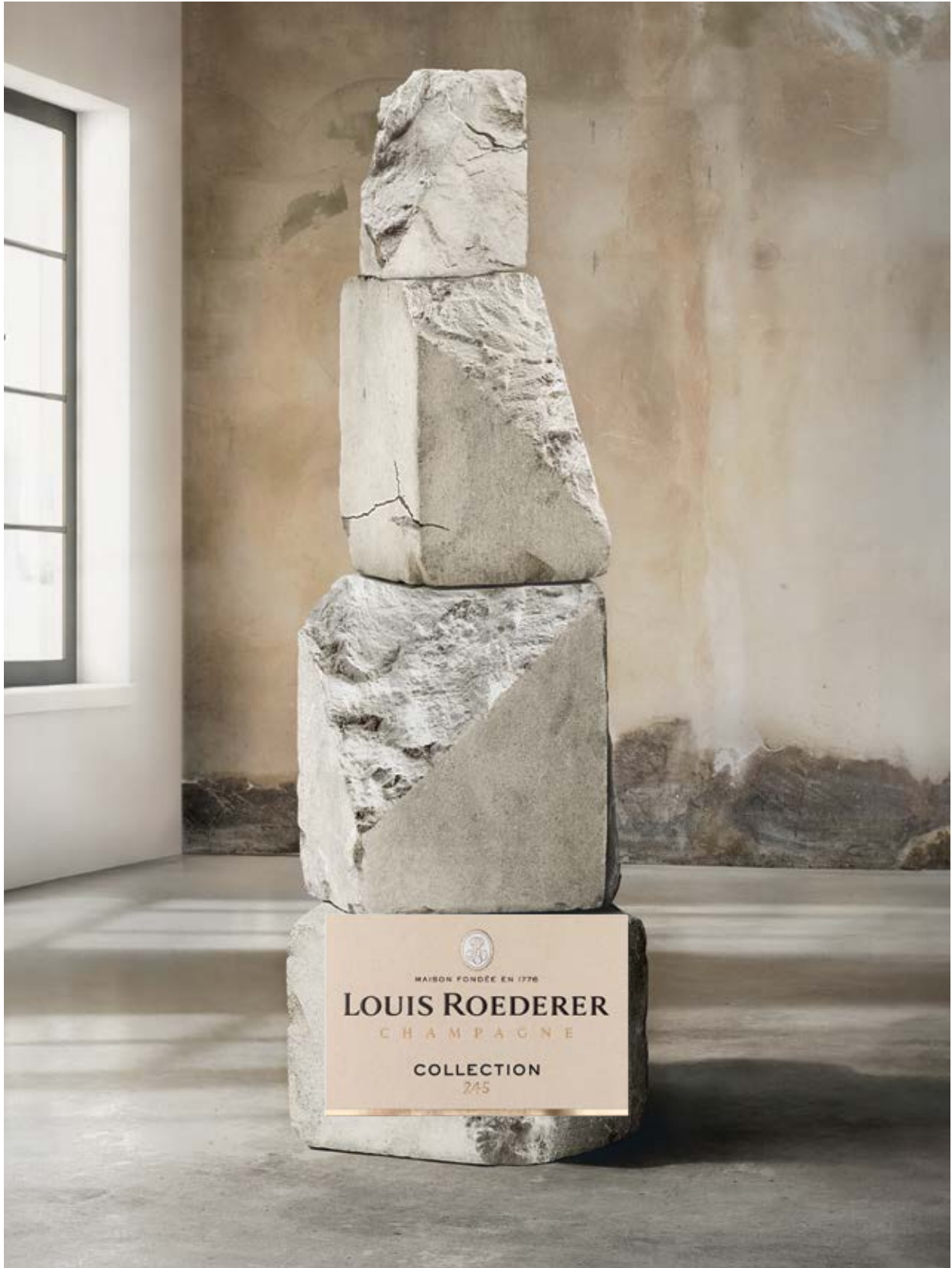
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THE SOMM JOURNAL

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HAND IN HAND WITH NATURE



Counting on Time

IN CONVERSATION WITH **MARQUÉS DE MURRIETA'S VICENTE DALMAU CEBRIÁN-SAGARRIGA**

WHEN HE ISN'T traversing the globe, Vicente Dalmau Cebrián-Sagarriga divides his time between Marqués de Murrieta Estates & Wines' two historic estates in Rioja and Galicia, Spain. But the dapper Count of Creixell is a jet-setter with a cause: harnessing the power of time to make wines that defy expectations. "I really think to create special wines you need time," he says. "Time and wine are good friends."

741 acres of vineyards at the southerly limit of Rioja Alta, Cebrián-Sagarriga said, "We are [among] the largest producers in Rioja, and we are the only one producing wines just from our grapes." Approximately 80% of the estate is planted to Tempranillo, the heart and soul of Rioja, in addition to Mazuelo, Graciano, Garnacha, Viura, and "a very small percentage of Cabernet Sauvignon," which is technically verboten in Rioja because it's not a native

touch: In 2020, *Wine Spectator* recognized the Marqués de Murrieta 2010 Rioja Castillo Ygay Gran Reserva Especial as the number-one wine of the year. "The meaning of this wine, the concept, is time. We're in 2024; we just released 2012," noted Cebrián-Sagarriga. Why wait 12 years? To achieve "roundness, elegance, finesse, we need time," he added.

Time is also a factor in the production of the top-tier Albariños the family produces at Pazo de Barrantes, their 16th-century estate in Rías Baixas, Galicia. Given that "Albariño, for me, is one of the top grapes in the world because of the quality, the structure, and the acidity," in his words, Cebrián-Sagarriga wanted to challenge the perception that Albariño should always be simple, fresh, and inexpensive, so he made a radical departure from the standard approach to its vinification eight years ago, extending aging times and exploring materials beyond stainless steel, including acacia, French oak, and concrete. The ultra-luxurious 2019 La Comtesse de Pazo Barrantes is a tribute to the matriarch of the family, the Countess of Creixell, who hailed from Galicia. "She passed away five years ago, but I dedicated the wine [to her]," said Cebrián-Sagarriga. "The wine is very delicate, very elegant, the same as my mother." To build its complexity, fermentation took place in large French oak vats for approximately 85 days, followed by three months of lees contact and 12 months of aging in wooden vats plus an additional 12 months in concrete tanks. The result is an Albariño with impressive nuance, depth, and drinkability at a suggested retail price of \$179. Cebrián-Sagarriga confidently predicts that "Spain will have the best white wines in the world" in the future.

Time waits for no one, not even a count. But the superb quality of the Cebrián-Sagarriga family's wines makes a compelling case for the importance of embracing time as a winemaking partner. **WJ**



PHOTO COURTESY OF MARQUÉS DE MURRIETA

Time was indeed a recurring theme in my conversation with Cebrián-Sagarriga during his recent visit to New York City. In 1996, time's precious and fleeting nature manifested itself when his father, also named Vicente, died unexpectedly at 47 years old. As the oldest of the elder Vicente's four children and the only son, Cebrián-Sagarriga assumed leadership of Marqués de Murrieta—a pioneer in Rioja, the winery was established in 1852 and has been owned by his family since 1983—at the tender age of 26.

Describing Ygay Estate, consisting of

grape—"but we are allowed to maintain it because the appellation was created after Marqués de Murrieta," he explained.

While the producer's history is impressive, its wines have reached new levels of quality and acclaim under Cebrián-Sagarriga's leadership. "We are a classic house, but what we're doing now is really updating our style," he asserted. María Vargas, who joined the team as assistant winemaker in 1995 and became head winemaker in 2000, has been integral to the process of honing the Marqués de Murrieta style. She clearly has the magic

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