



# BORDEAUX BRILLIANCE

**Bernard Magrez** owns 35 vineyards across the world but is famed for his micro-cuvée wines from Bordeaux. The wine magnate reveals the secret of his success to Richard Middleton.

**B**ernard Magrez is one of the wine industry's most successful businessmen, transforming companies and brands into highly profitable ventures. After a childhood in Nazi-occupied France, he proved himself in business and became a key figure in the wine world, employing tactics that have attracted attention, recognition and criticism.

Today, he owns more than 30 vineyards in South America, the US, Africa and Europe, but it is his limited production micro-cuvée wines from Bordeaux that have marked him out as one of the world's foremost producers.

A key innovator in his field, he has recently branched into luxury tourism, offering customers the opportunity to visit his estates and taste a selection of their products.

**Your childhood in Nazi-occupied France and the influence of your father's parenting during this time have been well documented. How do you think he has influenced your life and your subsequent business success?**

**Bernard Magrez:** My father was extremely strict – so much so that it would be deemed unacceptable today. He forced me to wear a sign reading 'I am a lazy boy' as I went to school. Discouraged, I left school at the age of 16, but I was determined and excited to show the world what I was capable of doing in life.

**You began your career in drinks by buying the William Pitters company and transforming it into a profitable venture. How did you go about changing the company's fortunes?**

I noticed William Pitters' potential as soon as we began to make good ground in the market. We were doing well in all sectors – including port, whisky, tequila and cocktails – and eventually made it to being the national market leader. It helped that I had enthusiasm and a good concept for each product. To this, I brought in a great sales team who understood the need to win, no matter what the cost.

**How did you develop an interest in wine?**

**BM:** Between the ages 19 and 21 I worked for a Bordeaux wine merchant. Ever since then it was my ultimate goal to succeed in this field.

**How many vineyards do you own and do you have a favourite?**

**BM:** I own 35 vineyards, and if I had to choose between them, I'd say I enjoy relaxing in Château La Tour Carnet the most. It has an immense history, dating back to the 13th century.

**What are the most important aspects you consider when purchasing a new estate?**

**BM:** The first thing I look for, above all else, has to be the terroir. I look at its potential and work towards an eight to ten-year plan, replanting the correct grape varieties in the appropriate soils. It is true that Bordeaux wines possess a certain elegance and finesse that stands them apart from others – and this is, of course, due to the terroir, in all its complexities.

**How has your relationship with oenology expert Michel Rolland developed over the years, and are you friends outside of the wine world?**

**BM:** I started working with Michel in 1993. I have complete

faith and confidence in him in the management of the vineyards and the vinification and blending of the wines. I have profound respect for these qualities, but our relationship remains purely professional.

**What do you think of the current crop of Bordeaux wines? How can the area improve its appeal?**

**BM:** There are some good quality products coming from Aquitaine; year on year they are making massive efforts, but unfortunately they are still not well known. It is up to each wine maker to target one or two countries and then present their wines to journalists at tasting events.

**Which countries excite you most in terms of wine consumption? And why have you so far avoided buying in Australia?**

**BM:** I have not chosen to buy in Australia for the simple reason that you can't be everywhere at once. In order to do well, I need to be able to direct what is going on, and Australia is just too far away to do that. The most exciting countries are Spain and Italy.

**Do you have any plans to begin producing larger-scale wines?**

**BM:** At Château La Tour Carnet and Château Fombrage we produce up to or over 30,000 cases worth. I think in this respect I have

shown that I am also capable of managing large production levels.

**How have the ways you produce and label your wines (every bottle features Magrez's face) differed from the more typical Bordeaux producers?**

**BM:** Wine lovers are crying out for labels that are easy to understand and recognisable. In this way, my labels are perhaps less cluttered than some of my fellow winemakers. I think that any success I have had is down to my determination to improve the quality of each of my wines, and also not to fall into the trap of thinking that just because I like a wine it means it will please everyone.

**Where do you see yourself in ten years?**

**BM:** I hope that I am still here in ten years' time! I also hope to have acquired two major Grands Cru Classés in the Medoc.

**If you found yourself on a desert island, what four bottles would you take?**

**BM:** I would take a Château Pape Clément white, a Château Pape Clément red 1995, a Herencia del Padri 2004 (Ppriorat, Spain) and finally an Excellence de mon Terroir (Collioure).

Visit [www.luxurywinetourism.fr](http://www.luxurywinetourism.fr) for more information on Bernard Magrez's wine tourism packages. ■

## FRENCH PERFECTION

As the French leader of varietal wines, Pays d'Oc PGI wines are definitely attractive. They benefit from the typical French character, with the sun-drenched Mediterranean touch that makes them instantly recognisable. With a wealth of expressions and aromas, they lend themselves to every moment and every desire, and are welcomed at every table.

Following a recent European reform, the French wine offer has taken a new form:

- Vins de Pays are now PGI wines – Protected Geographical Identification. As a result, Vins de Pays d'Oc is now Pays d'Oc PGI.
- Table wines have disappeared to become wines without Geographical Indication

Seen as a unique opportunity by Pays d'Oc PGI, measures have been put in place to continue

providing consumers with high-quality wines for the best price. Pays d'Oc PGI guarantees the wine quality and their distinctive flavours. The Bureau Véritas Certification France controls and confirms the traceability and safety of Pays d'Oc PGI wines.

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