



Moueix at a glance

Born 1946
Family Wife Cherise, and son Edouard (38), who has worked for JPM for 10 years, and Charlotte (36) a wildlife vet in South Africa.
How does he buy a vineyard? In winter, in the rain, to see what the drainage is like.
Interests Art, opera, architecture, literature, horse racing
Other companies Autres Rivages, developed by Edouard. It handles the classed growths of the Médoc, and imports Dominus.

Decanter interview

Christian Moueix

The man whose name has been synonymous with Pétrus for more than 40 years has, in fact, not worked at the estate since 2011. But that doesn't mean he hasn't been busy. Andrew Jefford meets him to talk about his properties, his obsession with drainage, and handing over the reins

WHO KNEW? I didn't. The names 'Christian Moueix' and 'Pétrus' seemed indissoluble. He oversaw 40 or more harvests, and claimed to talk to each vine individually; he teased the wine out of its famous 'buttonhole of clay', entrusting it to Jean-Claude Berrouet for vinification, and then taking it off by the hand to meet the world.

The Pétrus page on the website of wine merchant Corney & Barrow, formerly the exclusive UK agent (the agency is now shared with Berry Bros & Rudd and Justerini & Brooks), is still full of references to Moueix, and his family's company, Etablissements Jean-Pierre Moueix. True, it is stated at one point that 'Jean-Pierre's elder son Jean-François now owns Château Pétrus' (long on record for those who troubled to research the matter), but there is no mention of Jean-François' own negociant company Duclot or its holding company Videlot. Think Pétrus, think Christian Moueix.

But it's over; it's history. Has been for three years. 'Yes, it's true,' he replied, when I asked him if he no longer had anything to do with Pétrus. 'I managed Pétrus from 1970 to 2008; I remained as a consultant to train Olivier Berrouet [Jean-Claude's son]; but I have had nothing to do with Pétrus since 2011.'

Perhaps there is still an intermingling, I wondered; perhaps the brothers are major shareholders in each other's companies? Actually, no. 'Now we are completely separate. That was the purpose, in full agreement between my brother and myself. I knew from the beginning that Pétrus belonged to my brother, before I joined Pétrus. That was clear. I knew that I was going. I was honoured that my father put

me in charge of Pétrus, and that my brother left me in charge for so many years. I am still very close to my brother. But it was time for him and his son Jean to be fully in charge.' Meanwhile Moueix and his own son Edouard...

Well, this is where it gets interesting. Moueix-watchers and Pomerol lovers will have noticed a spate of activity from 54 Quai du Priourat, the Ets J-P Moueix headquarters in Libourne, over the past decade. Land has been bought; names have come and gone, mirage-like; a once-settled landscape of holdings has undergone orogenies and tectonic convulsions. It all begins to make sense when you understand that the good ship Pétrus was steaming off into the sunset, and the two branches of the Moueix family were bifurcating for an entirely separate future. Ets J-P Moueix needs a flagship for the new century, the post-Pétrus century. Who knows what the future holds?

Star-studded stable

As things are turning out, it might even have three flagships. The most straightforward fit for the Pétrus-shaped hole is Trotanoy. It's smaller still (7.2 hectares compared to the 11.5ha of Pétrus) and half of its parcels lie on clay, giving it a sturdy, truffley style, clearly akin to that of the old master. There is a pedigree of great vintages here (see box p39); recent vineyard work has fine-tuned its performance; and the arrival of a second wine from 2009, too, marked a new seriousness of intent.

Look, though, at what has happened to La Fleur-Pétrus in recent years. Back in 1995, it was >



Above: ploughing the vineyards at Château Magdelaine in St-Emilion, which has been united with Château Belair to form Château Bélair-Monange

Left: Christian Moueix cleans out one of the many drainage exits he has created throughout his Pomerol properties

just 9ha in extent; it has now more than doubled, to 18.7ha (see box p38). La Fleur-Pétrus has also been endowed with a strikingly restored chateau building and cellars in central Pomerol, where the Moueix family now receives guests in faultless style. The La Fleur-Pétrus flag flutters from atop a flagpole which might just be a little taller (though I haven't measured) than the pole on which one can spy the golden 'P' of Pétrus, not far away across the plateau.

La Fleur-Pétrus, though, will be a work in progress for some years: the Château Guillot parcels need some replanting and draining. The original La Fleur-Pétrus parcels, too, give wine of a very different and more graceful, aerial style to Pétrus itself, since they are profoundly gravelly. The two new additions have perhaps deepened its style a little (the 2009 La Fleur-Pétrus, for example, is lavishly textured), yet the ideal is for this to remain very much a wine of the Pomerol gravels.

And then there is the Bélair-Monange story. Even though it lies in St-Emilion, this now-unitary estate is, at 23.5ha, by some margin the biggest in the Ets J-P Moueix portfolio, and you only have to taste the creamy, chocolatey 2009 and sumptuously upholstered 2010 vintages here to sense just how fine it could eventually prove to be. It represents an elision of Bélair and Magdelaine which, Moueix told me, he had only intended to ask for in preparation for the 2022 St-Emilion classification; he simply alluded to a 'complementarity' between the two estates in his submission for the 2012 classification.

The extraordinary fact that the authorities went ahead and granted permission for a major change which Moueix himself wasn't aware of having asked for was 'a complete surprise. At first, a shock. Some people thought that Magdelaine had been demoted, and said it was justified'. He smiles. 'You find out who your friends are on such occasions.' There will



Top: is the flagpole at La Fleur-Pétrus just a little taller than the one at Pétrus since Christian Moueix left in 2011?

Above: Edouard Moueix is gradually taking over from his father as head of Ets J-P Moueix, which owns 48.3ha in Pomerol and 23.5ha in St-Emilion

be a second wine in due course at Bélair-Monange, too, and given that Edouard lives there with his wife and children, the bond between the family and the estate will doubtless be intensified. Moueix admits that the light, graceful Magdelaine might have been picked too early in the past. St-Emilion is cooler and later than Pomerol in general, and gathering the Magdelaine fruit was often the picking team's last job after the Pomerol properties had all been harvested. Last job – but perhaps still too soon. The new girth of Bélair-Monange means that it can justify a picking team of its own, and since Bélair was acquired (September 2008) picking has been much later than heretofore, hence the striking generosity of style of the 2009 and 2010.

Digging deep

Let's, though, return to Pomerol. Another aspect of the frenzy of the last past 10 years has been subterranean; Moueix has turned mole. Anyone

who studies the evolution of Bordeaux's terroirs over the past 400 years will know that drainage is critical to unleashing their potential – and anyone who has toured Pomerol after a rainy spell will know that drainage here is often inadequate, not least because of the profusion of small estates and parcels (Pomerol reminds me of a giant allotment).

'The plateau of Pomerol,' says Moueix, 'is just that – a plateau. Which means that it is flat. How do you drain something that is flat? It is not easy. And the only way to do it – which we did not have 20 years ago – is to have wells about 6m deep and to create drainage with a slope of at least 2% leading to those wells. Then you have to pump the water to a place where there is natural drainage. For that you have to bring electricity to the wells, and have submerged pumps in the wells.'

Over the past decade, the Moueix family has installed seven of these deep wells in the plateau, with the water eventually draining down to the little Barbanne river via streams like the one which lies in the fold of land between La Fleur-Pétrus and Le Gay. 'Most of the time we needed to run either the electricity or the drainage exit through somebody else's property, so we have been signing many complicated agreements for this. And we say "if you would like to send your drainage in our well, you are most welcome". So honestly, without wishing to be too pretentious, it has been quite a positive thing for the whole appellation.'

Indeed. In great vintages, of course, the wells will be inoperative, since Pomerol needs every drop of water it can hold (retained water in sub-gravel clays was a key reason why Pauillac and St-Estèphe outperformed the purer gravels of Margaux and Pomerol in the fierce heat of 2003). In less-than-perfect years, though, this network of new wells has the potential to raise quality for the Moueix

'I call him "Mr Drainage". He is always ringing me up from all over the world asking me how a drain is working' **Cherise Moueix**

properties and its plateau neighbours considerably. It's also won Moueix an unconventional term of endearment from his wife Cherise: 'I call him "Mr Drainage". He is always ringing me up from all over the world and asking me to look out of a window to tell me how a drain is working.'

Other hallmarks of the Moueix approach in the vineyards include deep inter-row ploughing, carried out four to six times a year, and fastidious crop-thinning over the summer to eliminate all the late clusters. 'People used to see that I harvested earlier, and criticise me for that, saying that Christian Moueix didn't want to take risks. But the reason was that we were riper earlier than the others, because we had eliminated all the late clusters.'

'The day of picking is incredibly important,' adds Edouard. 'At Hosanna, for example, if we pick it a day early, it's green. If we pick it a day late, it's prune. I exaggerate, but only a bit. We walk every parcel, every day. We subdivide parcels with red and white ribbon. And we unroll between 7km ➤

'Some thought Magdelaine had been demoted, and said it was justified. You find out who your friends are on such occasions'

Christian Moueix on the 'shock' approval to merge Châteaux Magdelaine and Bélair

and 8km of ribbon before every harvest.' Trotanoy itself has been the subject of special attention, especially for the parcel known as Le Hangar to the rear of the property which had consistently underperformed for many years and which Moueix and his son were contemplating uprooting. Following comprehensive re-trellising, modified pruning and further drainage work, it is now 'the heart of Trotanoy', according to Edouard.

Elegance and drinkability

It's been a decade of major effort in the vineyards, and fruit sorting is taken as seriously here as it is everywhere else in Bordeaux. Relatively little, though, has changed in the Moueix wineries, not least because the aesthetic ideals of the family – 'always towards elegance and drinkability', as Edouard puts it – require vinification of maximum restraint and limpidity. There's more use of steel tanks than in the past, principally because of the sub-parcel divisions; it's easier to make a small steel tank than a small concrete one. Extraction and the use of new oak remains restrained (a maximum



of 50% new oak is used at Trotanoy, for example, with 40% at Hosanna, La Fleur-Pétrus, Latour à Pomerol and Bélair-Monange, and about 25% at the other properties).

The Moueix vision of elegant, drinkable wines has sometimes been criticised as being austere in the velvety Pomerol context. The changes in viticultural and winemaking practice – in particular parcel selection, improved vine performance thanks to the drainage and trellising innovations, later harvesting at some properties and greater selectivity for the final blend – suggest that the Ets J-P Moueix wines will have greater aromatic

Above: half of the 7.2ha of vineyards that surround Château Trotanoy are on gravel soils; these are at the front of the château, with clay soils at the rear

Right: gleaming new steel tanks have joined older thermo-regulated concrete vats at Château Hosanna



Photograph: Jon Wyand

Anatomy of a portfolio

The fundamental distinction is between owned properties and those which are farmed, made and marketed on behalf of other owners. Total ownership of this branch of the Moueix family is 48.3ha in Pomerol, with 23.5ha in St Emilion. (Despite all the acquisitions, note that's still a much smaller total than the 112ha of Lafite, for example, or the 97ha of Léoville-Las Cases). A further 16.7ha of Pomerol are farmed.

Owned properties

La Fleur-Pétrus: 18.7ha, purchased 1950. Now comprises three parcels, all on the plateau: LFP1 (the original 7.5ha block of gravels over iron-rich clays, close to Lafleur and Pétrus); LFP2 (formerly 'La Providence', purchased 2005, and sold as 'Providence' from 2005 to 2012: a 5.9ha parcel of newly drained gravelly clays close to Hosanna); LFP3 (formerly Ch Guillot, purchased 2009: 5.3ha of gravelly clays requiring some replanting and further draining close to Le Pin and Trotanoy). Second wine envisaged.

Providence: (See previous) The name may return as a second wine for La Fleur-Pétrus.

Trotanoy: 7.2ha, purchased 1953. A single parcel around the château building, divided into six blocks:

newly drained gravels in front of the château and clays behind. Second wine: Espérance de Trotanoy (not produced every year). Jean-Antoine Moueix, the grandson of Jean-Pierre Moueix's elder brother Antoine, is an additional shareholder in addition to Ets J-P Moueix and Edouard Moueix.

Hosanna: 4.3ha, purchased 1999. Formerly the core of the Certan-Giraud estate, between the LFP1 and LFP2 parcels of La Fleur-Pétrus; newly drained; mainly older vines now needing replanting. Second wine: see 'Certan-Marzelle' (below).

Certan-Marzelle: this is a second wine produced from the younger vines of Hosanna in the 2000 to 2011 vintages, and perhaps again in the future.

Bélair-Monange: 23.5ha on both the côte and plateau of St-Emilion, culminating at

88m, formed of the former Ch Magdelaine, purchased 1952, and Château Bélair, purchased 2008, close to Ausone and Canon. Second wine envisaged.

La Grave à Pomerol: 8.9ha, purchased 1971, sited close to Latour-à-Pomerol; gravel and sand soils.

Lagrange (Pomerol): 9.2ha, purchased 1953, sited close to Ch Le Gay and Ch Rouget; gravels over clay.

Farmed properties

Lafleur-Gazin: 8.7ha, adjacent to Gazin. Owned by the heirs of Madame Delfour-Borderie; gravel and sand soils.

Latour à Pomerol: 8ha in two parcels, a recently drained clay-rich parcel close to the church and a more gravelly parcel close to La Grave à Pomerol. Bequeathed on her death by the final owner, Lily Lacoste, to the Foyer de Charité de Châteauneuf de Galaure, a Catholic institution close to Montélimar.

Trotanoy through the years

In general, Trotanoy does not begin life in opaque black style, but it's dark – and it remains tenaciously dark. That persistence of hue finds its echo in an impressively elongated drinking window; even the 2010 is not forbidding, while the 1982 still has at least a decade ahead of it. Vintage fidelity is another Trotanoy hallmark, and the style is always well-rounded, with truffle and tobacco two recurrent allusions. Expect greater depth and intensity and more aromatic finesse from future vintages, as the vineyard work pays further dividends and the existence of the second wine nudges quality of the grand vin further.

Ch Trotanoy 2010 19/20 (96/100) £200*

Truffley already, with vellum and bramble scents adding further subtlety. Masterful and complete: ample soft tannins and poised acidity carry the carpeting black fruits to the very bottom of the stairwell.

Drink 2018-2050 **Alcohol** 14.5%

Ch Trotanoy 2009 18.5 (95) £200

Black fruit is a hallmark of fresher years at Trotanoy, and the ripest years sing out with almost confit red fruits and cream. Cream: the apogee of ripeness, but backed by caressing tannins. Great Pomerol can exert an almost visceral, pheromonal appeal: this illustrates that perfectly. **Drink** 2015-2045 **Alc** 14.5%

Ch Trotanoy 2008 16.5 (88) £133

A more airy, open-pored style than its two younger siblings; classical and poised, yet complete and refined, too, with the ripe glow which is the land's birthright. **Drink** 2016-2028 **Alc** 14%

Ch Trotanoy 2005 18 (93) £145

A mushroomy note to begin with, then the classic truffle and tobacco after some time in the glass. Both red and black fruits in evidence here, and coiled energy, held in reserve; flavoury, chunky tannins calve from the fruit in the mouth. **Drink** 2018-2040 **Alc** 13.5%

Ch Trotanoy 2001 16 (86) £151 (ib) **Fine & Rare**

Poised, fresh, light, graceful and enchanting. The fruit is a little simpler than in the 'big' vintages, but the intrinsic balance of this wine and its sustaining tannic structure give it plenty of running power. **Drink** 2015-2030 **Alc** 13.5%

Ch Trotanoy 2000 18 (93) £175 (ib) **Bordeaux Index**

A glorious symphony of ripeness here: resonant tobacco, leather, Caribbean spice and soft chocolate combine in a seamless aroma-flavour continuum which fills nose and mouth. The tannins are soft and enrobing, combining with the low acidity to hugely sensual effect. **Drink** 2015-2040 **Alc** 13.5%

Ch Trotanoy 1998 18 (93) £272 (ib) **Fine & Rare**

The substantial 1998 has peak visceral appeal just now: truffle, cream and Havana leaf whirl together in a heady mix. On the palate, this wine remains dense, forthright, tightly layered and emphatic, with a little more supporting acidity than in the ripest years and a slightly earthier spectrum of flavours. **Drink** 2015-2035 **Alc** 13.5%

Ch Trotanoy 1989 17 (90) £198 (ib) **Fine & Rare**

A bubbling vat of cream here, with complexity coming from the notes of dried wild mushroom and wild flowers, too. The central palate is long, sweet, rich and graceful, drying just a little towards the finish. **Drink** 2015-2029 **Alc** 13.5%

Ch Trotanoy 1982 18.5 (95) £337 (ib) **Bordeaux Vintners**

Still deep red in colour, with a complete and disarmingly lovely nose in which fresh, graceful red fruits are still apparent. Its beguiling, slow-dropping, tongue-coating flavour still has a fresh fruit core, too, gently robed in chocolate and tobacco-leaf complexities. Grand, venerable Pomerol. **Drink** 2015-2025 **Alc** 13.5%



**Unless otherwise indicated, all prices are per bottle, in bond, as a case purchase from Corney & Barrow, correct as of December 2014*

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