

BOOK AND FILM REVIEWS

## Jean-Michel Cazes (translated by Jane Anson): *From Bordeaux to the Stars: The Reawakening of a Wine Legend*

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The world of wine lost one of its finest, Jean-Michel Cazes, on June 28, 2023, just 28 days after the publication of his book, *From Bordeaux to the Stars*. The story, written in his own words, takes the reader on an adventure not only through his entire life but also through his ancestors' journey into Bordeaux. Living to the age of 88, Jean-Michel Cazes enjoyed a long and full life. His book grabs the reader from the beginning, telling his narrative while also educating along the way. Unpretentious, well-written, laugh-out-loud funny at times, Cazes' autobiography is a worthy read for wine lovers of any level.

Most people reading this review are no doubt aware of Château Lynch-Bages, one of the Bordeaux 1855 classification Fifth Growths from Pauillac. It is one of my personal favorites and delivers well above its classification. But Jean-Michel Cazes' family was not always landed gentry—quite the opposite. They moved to Bordeaux in 1875 as farm workers. Jean-Charles Cazes, Jean-Michel's grandfather, was born in Pauillac in 1877. Through hard work and significant funding from Credit Agricole, Jean-Charles Cazes became the owner of the family's first Château, Lynch-Bages, in 1939. The following year, they were able to acquire Chateau Ormes de Pez in Saint-Estephe. The book explores the history of the Lynch family and their construction of Domaine de Bages leading up to the Cazes' takeover.

Jean-Michel's studies took him to Paris and then to Texas to earn his Masters in Petroleum Engineering at the University of Texas. As a Rotary Scholar, he traveled throughout the United States. Jean-Michel makes some poignant observations about segregation around 1960. Jean-Michel then served in the French Air Force before joining the private sector in 1963, working for IBM in Paris. What was surprising to me was that his studies and career for so long had nothing to do with viticulture or enology. But by 1973, the gravity that was Pauillac finally took hold of him, bringing him home.

By the time Jean-Michel returned to Pauillac, Jean-Charles had passed away, and Jean-Michel's father, André, was running the estate. The book devotes time to

describing in detail the style of wine making, and the decisions made, from fermentation vessels to choices of oak. As Jean-Michel gets more involved in the wine making, he adds new wines, makes improvements in techniques, and upgrades equipment. The wine making sections are well explained so that a novice could understand them, and even an established professional would obtain some worthy takeaways.

Throughout the book, the reader enjoys little side adventures and learns Jean-Michel's views on myriad topics. He speaks highly of Robert Parker but acknowledges some of the other views of Parker and his ratings. Dealing with French bureaucracy and the Société d'aménagement foncier et d'établissement rural (SAFER) seems to cause more headaches than it is worth. There is also ample entertainment for the reader, including a section about a *Los Angeles Times* columnist's poor etiquette. For all the success Jean-Michel has, he is not afraid to talk about his failures, such as his joint venture in Argentina with a long-lost cousin of the Lynch family who one day randomly knocked on the front door to Château Lynch-Bages.

In addition to Château Lynch Bages and Château Ormes de Pez, the Domaines Jean-Michel Cazes now include Château Haut-Batailley (acquired 2017), Domaine Des Senechaux Chateneuf-de-Pape (acquired 2006), Domaine de L'Ostal Minervois (acquired 2001), Roquette & Cazes Douro (partnership started 2002), and Château Cordeillan-Bages. The book delves into every project, with each bringing unique challenges and opportunities.

My wife and I traveled to France for our honeymoon in our early 30s, and we were fortunate to stay several days in Pauillac at the Cordeillan-Bages property. The hotel was beautiful, the pool relaxing, the restaurant fantastic, and the rooms luxurious. Cordeillan-Bages was a personal project of Jean-Michel that started in 1986 and was completed in 1989. If you ever wish to visit Bordeaux, staying at Cordeillan-Bages is highly recommended. The village of Bages was essentially resurrected by Jean-Michel and his team and is a must-stop for visitors in the Medoc. The book dives into Jean-Michel's vision, his inspiration, and the execution of the entire project. Cordeillan-Bages and the village of Bages will always hold a special place in my heart, and reading this book and learning so much more about the history has brought me back to that special time. I hope readers of this review will read the book and perhaps one day visit the incredible place that Jean-Michel Cazes helped build, and for which he will always be remembered.