

WINE

## Wandering but grounded, he's 'a servant of the soil'

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Pierre Seillan seems a little too down-to-earth to be a globe-trotting, jet-setting "Flying Winemaker" -- one of those charismatic characters who flits about the world running winemaking operations at a dozen wineries in half a dozen countries.

But he seems like one to his wife, Monique, who says she seldom sees him at their homes in California and France.

"If his mistress were a woman, I could compete with that," she sighs. "But his mistress is his job. What can I do?"

Seillan began to wander in 1997 after 30 years of winemaking in France's Bordeaux region. That's when he met Jess Jackson, who, with his wife and fellow lawyer, Barbara Banke, has create a far-flung empire of wine operations in the United States, France, Italy, Chile and Australia, including notably Kendall-Jackson in California.

The winemaking styles of Jackson and Seillan proved sympathetic, and Seillan today oversees red wine operations at several of Jackson's wineries as consultant or winemaker.

He makes a red wine called "Le Désir," a blend of cabernet franc, cabernet sauvignon and merlot, at Jackson's Vérité winery near Healdsburg in California's Sonoma Valley. He makes the red wine called "Arcanum," of the same grapes, at Jackson's Tenuta di Arceno, in Italy's Tuscany region.

Now Jackson and Seillan have teamed up to buy Chteau Lassgue, a 60-acre grand cru vineyard and winery in Bordeaux's Saint-Emilion region.

"Saint-Emilion is the most serious appellation in Bordeaux," Seillan says. "It's not one of your generic Bordeaux areas."

Seillan and Jackson were impressed with the vineyard's limestone soils, which give wine that French hint of minerality, and its perfect southwest sun exposure, which is crucial to getting grapes fully ripe. There's also a beautiful old chteau on the property, where the Seillans live part of the year.

At the chteau, Seillan is turning out two wines from different plots with different soils. One is \$35, the second is \$50. Neither is a "second wine," he insists, simply "another wine."

Reflecting Seillan's style, both are subtle wines based on merlot, with a French restraint and minerality.

"I am a servant of the soil," he says. "It's not the other way around. I want wines that are fruity, with power but finesse and elegance, not too much tannic astringency."

Visiting Miami, Seillan also was showing off wines he has made at Jackson's Verité and Tenuta di Arceno wineries. Both show his subtle touch, his ability to create intensity and complexity without bombast.

And next year -- maybe later -- Monique hopes to slow down her flying winemaker and spend more time in France, fixing the plumbing and redoing the paint on their 18th century chteau.

"It needs repair, but all the money must go into the wine," she says, sighing again. "Someday . . ."

## **HIGHLY RECOMMENDED**

- **2003 Chteau Vignot**, Saint-Emilion Grand Cru: light, dry and aromatic with flavors of raspberry and cinnamon; soft tannins; intensely fruity; \$35.
- **2003 Chteau Lassgue**, Saint-Emilion Grand Cru: intense flavors and aromas of black cherries, minerals and spice; firm tannin; tart, fruity finish; \$50.

## **RECOMMENDED**

- **2000 Verité "Le Désir,"** Sonoma County (cabernet franc, cabernet sauvignon, merlot): cedar aromas; flavors of black cherries and black coffee; medium body; complex; shifting flavors; hugely rich; \$150.
- **2003 "Arcanum,"** by Tenuta di Arceno, Toscana (cabernet franc, cabernet sauvignon, merlot): black raspberries and black plums; big, rich, generous and spicy with tart finish; \$95.