

Seillans bring passion, history and winemaking.

NORTON HIRE

Museum names deputy director. **A2**



VINTAGE LOVE

A valentine for winemaking. **A12**



HERO DOG

Cancer-stricken Gabe put down. **A2**

SABBAN

Couple's love affair with wine — and each other — has lasted for 40 years

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ner's Reserve Chardonnay. He became a self-made billionaire and one of the most influential producers in the United States. Over three decades, Jackson launched or acquired more than 30 brands in California, Italy, South America, Australia and France producing more than 5 million cases annually in addition to Kendall-Jackson.

The couples discovered that they shared the same passion and vision for winemaking. Banke and Jackson persuaded the Seillans, who were living in France, to join them in Sonoma County, Calif., where Pierre would be in charge of making Verite, a new venture in the Mayacamas Mountains.

Over the next few years, the partnership flourished and Pierre became an important part of the company's top-tier wineries. When the group purchased Chateau Lassegue, it brought the Seillans back to their home country of France, at least for part of the year.

"My husband is a terroirist, he loves soil," said Monique Seillan, who was in town a few weeks ago to do a few wine tastings of the 2007 vintage.

"We looked at many properties but this estate had vines that averaged between 40 and 45 years old, grown with great precision and care. A specific regimen had been developed and followed for each block."

Pierre knows his vines. He was born in Lauzun, France, and winemaking roots run through generations of his family. His great-great grandfather, Jules Seillan, was a farmer, politician and author of books on viticulture. He conducted extensive research into methods to combat phylloxera (a pest that decimates vines), brought root stocks from the New World to the Old, and created an oenological map of Armagnac.

Much of his childhood was spent in Lavardac, where his father owned a cork factory. Eventually the business was sold and the family returned to Gascony in southwest France to work at Domaine de Bellevue, the estate owned by his maternal grandparents.

His grandparents instilled in him the importance of listening to the unique message of that message. He began producing his vin de pays, or table wines from Bordeaux varietals. His career path led to a few years in Saumur-Champigny in the Loire Valley as vineyard manager and winemaker of Chateau de Targe. He learned to work with cabernet franc and fell in love with the grape.

A trio of vines

Pierre Seillan has a unique approach to winemaking. He has planted the same varieties of grapes — merlot, cabernet franc and cabernet sauvignon — in Napa, St. Emilion and Tuscany. Although the conditions of the vineyards are different in each country, the one thing the properties have in common is soil that is extremely favorable to growing grapes.

Management of the vines is labor-intensive. His philosophy is that grapes are harvested block-by-block according to variety, soil type and sorted to ensure only the finest fruit is kept. The grapes — still separated by blocks — are then subjected to a cold soak pre-fermentation to encourage better extraction of color, aromatics and flavors. Once blended, wines are transferred into 225-liter barriques for aging.

Lassegue, Saint-Emilion Grand Cru, 2007 is made up of 68 percent merlot, 25 percent cabernet franc and 7 percent cabernet sauvignon. Old World values, New World technology in the hands of a gifted winemaker create a wine with depth and character that is ready to drink today and will age with grace.

The next generation

Monique Seillan says that she and her husband have had a love affair with winemaking and each other for the last 40 years. Their passion seems to have rubbed off on their children. Nicholas and Helene work with the Chateau Lassegue estate. Nicholas is on the financial side of the business and Helene is completing her studies in viticulture.

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Chateau Vignot, left, \$30, from Lassegue, and Lassegue 2007, \$80.99, are produced on the same property in France.



Above: Pistache's Steak Bordelaise with french fries. Left: Monique Seillan says her husband, Pierre, sticks to a philosophy of harvesting grapes block-by-block according to variety, soil type and sorted to ensure only the finest fruit is kept.



Photos by Meghan McCarthy / Daily News

Winemaker Monique Seillan was in town a few weeks ago to do wine tastings. When she, her husband, Pierre, and another couple purchased Chateau Lassegue in 2003, it brought the Seillans back to their home country of France, at least for part of the year.

DEEP ROOTS

Seillans bring passion, history to winemaking

It is Valentine's Day — the day couples express their love for one another.

For some, this means sharing a romantic dinner with a special wine. The ritual of selecting, opening, pouring and toasting sets the stage for an evening of intimate conversation. Wine, after all, is considered the elixir of love.

Vineyards are very romantic places. They are tenderly cared for by man with the help of Mother Nature. Some couples dream of living in a chateau surrounded by vines, others live the dream.

In the 17th century, The Belliquet family was given the estate through a land grant from Louis XIV. Jean

Tallade bought the property in 1738, built the main house and named it Chateau Lassegue. It is in Saint Emilion, named for an eighth-century Benedictine monk, in the Bordeaux region of France.

In 2003, Monique and Pierre Seillan and Barbara Banke and the late Jess Jackson, bought the estate. The house was in disrepair, but the soil and the old vines were in pristine condition.

Jackson built an empire around Kendall-Jackson Vint-



Roberta Sabban

The chateau

Wine production at Chateau Lassegue dates from at least the

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