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The ultimate Burgundy reference

ADIEU LOUIS-FABRICE

Louis-Fabrice Latour, the 11th generation to run the firm of Maison Louis Latour, passed away at only 58 years of age from cerebral cancer complications on the night of September 5th. Born in 1964, he was the second of four children and the oldest of three sons, and studied at the prestigious Sciences Po Institute in Paris, graduating in 1985. He subsequently followed a brief career in finance for two years before joining his father, also named Louis, at chez Maison Louis Latour in 1988 at the tender age of 24. He worked there for 11 years before ascending to the directorship of the Maison in 1999, which by coincidence was also when I first met him.

Latour was whip smart and he knew it, yet he managed to hide the fact, whether by design or simple modesty is hard to say, by his infectious smile and disheveled, even ruffled, boyish charm. For years I suspected that it might have just been a façade but upon reflection, I never once saw him in a poor mood even in the darkest of periods such as the 2008 financial crisis or the Covid crisis. He seemed to always believe that there was a way forward. Moreover, he was always solicitous of those around him in a way that made it palpably clear he was sincerely interested when he asked how you were doing. He once showed me around the Latour cellars in Aloxe and I remember being quite struck by how every employee, no matter how gruff or stern-faced, offered warm hellos. Having been around any number of executive offices in my prior life, believe me when I say that I know the difference between perfunctory and genuine exchanges of acknowledgement. Unlike many bosses that patrol their workspaces, Latour engendered an earnest respect.

The esteem he enjoyed wasn't limited to those he employed but also extended to his professional colleagues. He served as the president of the



Fédération des Négociants-Eleveurs de Grande Bourgogne from 2003 to 2014 and as president of the Fédération des Exportateurs de vins et Spiritueux from 2011 to 2014. In perhaps his most influential role, he accepted the role of president of the highly influential BIVB (Bureau Interprofessionnel des Vins de Bourgogne) from 2013 until 2021 when health concerns finally forced his resignation.

It would be entirely reasonable to think that someone running a large négociant firm the size of Maison Louis Latour, heading such an important organization such as the BIVB and being a caring husband and father to his wife Patricia and their four children, might not be especially open to helping with yet another project. Yet several years



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ago when my co-author Doug Barzelay and I asked for assistance researching material for our book *Burgundy Vintages, A History from 1845 to 2015*, Louis-Fabrice could not have been more accommodating. He not only placed at our disposal unrestricted access to the Latour archives but spent hours with us while making many helpful suggestions as to where we could find information on certain subjects or vintages. He too shared an abiding interest in the history of Burgundy, and it was clear that he took our project to heart. That kind of help is invaluable and no amount of 'thank yous' can really repay his generous support.

I have over the years in these pages lionized many important vigneronns for their inestimable contributions to Burgundy. The names are many, and include such luminaries as Charles Rousseau, Michel Lafarge, Philippe Senard, Marquis d'Angerville and Henri Jayer among so many others. Yet Louis-Fabrice is the first during my professional tenure from the 'other side of the aisle' in the context of how Burgundy really works that merits inclusion with this august group. To be sure, he was a businessman first and foremost but refreshingly, he didn't pretend to be otherwise. Every wine region needs its strategists as well as its winemaking stars and Louis-Fabrice filled this role exceptionally well. I say this because he had a vision as to what

Burgundy should be, indeed how it needed to be, so that the region as a whole prospered.

This is no trivial undertaking in a wine region as contentious as Burgundy where the common thinking is that what is good for the négociant community is generally at odds for what is good for wine quality and for family domaines in general. Though only one among many examples of his strategic thinking, and one that I discussed with him upon numerous occasions, was his contention that the average vine age in Burgundy was too old because they weren't being replenished fast enough. Some accused him of wanting more productivity to the detriment of quality, but Latour insisted that Burgundy could not, and should not, become so expensive because of the lack of volume that it was no longer accessible to anyone who loved its wines. To conclude, I cannot overstate just how huge a loss his passing is for Burgundy. Louis-Fabrice was a force but a force for the good of all in Burgundy. It, structurally speaking, cannot survive and prosper going forward without the commercial cooperation of both sides of its producers and in this capacity, he was unequalled in bringing both sides together. Business acumen aside, his endearingly human warmth and manifest joie de vivre towards all will be sorely missed. I, for one, know that visiting Maison Louis Latour going forward will never be quite the same.

