

Ham&High



Domaine de Valmoissine pinot noir vines in Provence

A wine house not resting on its laurels

What do you expect of an 11-generation family business? Traditional practices, defiant dedication to a single location? Not for 1797-founded Maison Louis Latour. This company is forward-looking and innovative, its interests ranging far beyond its homeland.

Louis Latour is Burgundy's oldest wine house still in original family hands and continues to make a lot of splendidly classic wine. But beyond Burgundy it has vineyards in Ardèche and Provence, and within its overall sales umbrella come bottles from elsewhere in France, from Australia, Chile, New Zealand and South Africa. So, let's look at two examples of the unexpected.

The first is high in Provence, close to the spectacular Verdon gorges, where action is under way to help sustain the international future of one of the world's greatest wine grapes.

Domaine de Valmoissine has broad swathes of pinot noir vineyards at altitudes of 500 to 700 metres, where cool nights counter hot summer days.

Wine culture had vanished here before Charles Maurisset-Latour, second cousin of the company's current head,

Liz Sagues is impressed that Burgundy's oldest winemaker Louis Latour is looking forward not back



Louis-Fabrice Latour, set to work 30 years ago.

Results drawn from meticulous recording of weather information, soil profiles, planting and pruning patterns, grape yields and more will prove an invaluable pathway as climate warms and conventional practice is forced to change.

Maurisset-Latour has had a free hand to plan and develop the initiative, an opportunity impossible without the resources of the family company.

But Maison Louis Latour is a business, not a research charity, so he must produce a present result as well as future potential.

Grapes go into a commercial wine, the elegant, silky and very good value Domaine de Valmoissine Pinot Noir.

Very much closer to the company's Beaune head office lie the Henry Fessy beaujolais vineyards. Fessy was in the founding family's hands from 1888

until the 2008 sale to Louis Latour, and MD/winemaker Laurent Chevalier firmly stresses it has been a switch of families rather than of ethos.

Plus expansion: vineyard area has quadrupled in the last decade, with holdings in nine of the 20 beaujolais cru villages, and access to good grapes in the tenth.

Thus Henry Fessy provides an intriguing and very pleasurable opportunity to see how the subtle variations of this under-respected region's granite-based soils reflect in the ten cru wines, from light and bright to dense, dark and spicy.

They're a very fine expression of the gamay grape, a world away from nouveau liquid bubble-gum.

Waitrose has Fessy **Fleurie Le Pavillon** and **Brouilly Les Brulées**.

mrwheelerwine.com has four more crus plus the excellent white