

# SHERLOCK'S EXEC WINS FRENCH FAVOR



image credit: Mc Donald Media

Douglas “Doug” Bryant (left), owner and president of Sherlock’s Wine Merchant, was awarded the prestigious Le Mérite Agricole (Medal of Agriculture) Nov. 28 in a private ceremony at the residence of Philippe Ardanaz (right), the Consul General of France in Atlanta. Bryant is among a handful of Americans—and the only Georgian—selected to receive the Le Mérite Agricole in 2006.

“I’m extremely honored,” says Bryant of the award that is bestowed by the French Minister of Agriculture twice a year to individuals around the world who have contributed significantly to sustaining French agriculture. Jules Méline created the award in 1883; it is France’s oldest civil award and the agricultural equivalent of the military Légion d’Honneur award. Louis Pasteur was among its first recipients.

“The French are really good at recognizing people’s work and efforts over time,” says Bryant. To be eligible, candidates must have worked for at least 15 years in any industry related to the field of agriculture. Nominations by the Association Members of the Order of Le Mérite Agricole are submitted in a secret process, and the final decision goes through the Minister of Foreign Affairs to the French Minister of Agriculture.

Of the medal presentation ceremony, Bryant recalls, “The Consul General gave a brief yet wonderful talk about why I was there and what

my accomplishments had been over the past 20 years in helping build French wine awareness and business.”

Ardanaz recognized Bryant as “one of the great advocates and connoisseurs of French wines in the Atlanta region since 1986.” In addition to running Sherlock’s Wine Merchant, a chain of five wine retail stores, Bryant manages the selection process for the blending of the successful J. Sanders line of French wines and facilitates wine education through his partnership with Cook’s Warehouse. He travels to France each year to build and maintain relationships with wine growers and producers, and he often includes his staff on these trips in order to further their education and appreciation for French wines. “To you, wine is not something that can be truly appreciated without combining it with two essentials: food, which seems natural, but also, and maybe above all, people,” Ardanaz said to Bryant upon giving him the award.

“Wine is the fourth-largest class of products exported from France to the United States, with a value of over 750 million euros for the first nine months of this year,” Ardanaz said. “Wine is important in our foreign trade, but it is also an important part of the French economy, and this why your work on behalf of our products is particularly significant.”

In his comments, Ardanaz acknowledged Bryant’s heritage in the world of French wines: “You love to transmit your knowledge and passion, thereby ensuring that what you learned at your father’s knee will be transmitted and endure. In fact, it was your father, Dr. Milton Bryant, an avid collector of great Bordeaux and Burgundies, and a wine expert in his own right, who introduced you to the wonders of French wines, when you were but a young lad.” Ardanaz then pinned the medal on Bryant: an enameled white star suspended by a green and red ribbon.

Accepting the award, Bryant spoke in French. “I thanked people for being there, talked about how honored I am for receiving this medal, and then a little about how I got involved in wine,” he says.

Of the ceremony, Bryant recalls, “It was a wonderful evening. We had a private party at the Consul General’s residence with wines from France and a buffet prepared by a French chef.” Among the more than 60 attendees were Bryant’s wife, Nancy, and two of his children. “It truly was an honor for me and my family. It was an experience that I’ll remember and treasure for the rest of my life.”



The record setting cases of Mouton-Rothschild await their new owner.

## Million-Dollar Wine Sets Auction Record

Fifty cases of Château Mouton-Rothschild 1982 sold for a record \$1,051,600 at Aulden Cellars/Sotheby's in New York, a price that comes out to more than \$1,750 per bottle.

The lot sold on Nov. 18 for what Sotheby's reports is a new record for a single lot at auction. It was part of a consignment from Park B. Smith, a textiles entrepreneur and restaurateur as well as a major wine collector. Smith is donating the proceeds to his alma mater, the College of the Holy Cross in Worcester, Mass.

Smith bought the wine from Zachy's/Christie's New York for \$420,500 in April 1997, according to published reports. The cases had only had one previous owner.

## Argentine Exports Up

Argentine wine and must exports are up 20 percent for the year, reported the Instituto Nacional de Vitivinicultura, reaching \$347.3 million for the period from January to September.

In the Atlanta area, "Shipments are actually up by closer to 30-plus percent," says Rick Caudle, local representative for Frederick Wildman & Sons. He attributes the increase to Argentine wine's "quality and value."

## French Ban Wood Chips

France has banned the use of wood chips in wine production, except on an "experimental basis," just two months after the EU legalized them.

"The INAO [Institut National des Appellations d'Origine], and more precisely the Comité National des Vins et Eaux-de-Vie, decided against the decision of the European Union," says Josephine Neveux, a representative of the Wine & Spirits Division, Embassy of France, New York Trade Offices. The EU regulation was passed in July 2006; the French ban took effect in October. "This decision applies to AOC [Appellation d'Origine Contrôlée] wines only; the 'vins de tables' and 'vins de pays' categories are allowed to use wood chips in wine processing," Neveux says.

"This ban is supposed to protect the traditions in AOC wines," she says. "For the INAO, the use of oak wood chips would be in total contradiction with the AOC concept." More than half of all French wines produced are AOC wines.

There is one loophole: "This ban does not apply to AOC bench tests that aim to go into detail in the knowledge of tannins," says Neveux. "To date, seven AOC wines have already started these experimentations: Bordeaux, Bordeaux Supérieur, Médoc, Haut-Médoc, Côtes du Rhône, Muscadet and Anjou."



## NFL Halts Production of Bengals-Inspired Wine

Kentucky winery Elk Creek Vineyards has stopped production of its Jungle Juice wine after the NFL filed a legal complaint against the winery.

"It was a trademark issue," says Brian McCarthy, an NFL spokesman. "This office sent a cease-and-desist letter to that [wine] company advising that [wine] company that it was infringing on the rights of the Cincinnati Bengals with its labeling, which we believe contained the well-known colors, pattern and eyes of the Cincinnati Bengals. So it was a trademark dispute, and that's all we can say from here."

## Steroids Control Grape Ripening

A mechanism explaining how grape ripening is controlled and how it may be manipulated has been developed by a group of Australian scientists.

"During ripening grapes become softer, larger and less acidic but more importantly they accumulate high levels of hexoses and color, flavor and aroma producing compounds," the scientists write in a published summary. "The ripening transition is accompanied by large, apparently well coordinated change in gene transcription with many genes being 'turned off' and many others being 'turned on.' This change in gene transcription may well be coordinated by changes in hormone levels and/or perception."

The study focused on the effect of brassinosteroids, a group of steroidal plant hormones known to be essential for normal plant development. Cabernet Sauvignon vines were analyzed approximately eight weeks after flowering. The scientists concluded, "Brassinosteroid application has been shown to enhance ripening while the application of an inhibitor of BR synthesis delays ripening."

"The challenge is now to understand how brassinosteroids and abscisic acid interact to promote ripening in grape berries, and to investigate ways in which we may control the levels of these hormones such that we may gain greater control over the ripening process," says Dr. Gregory Symons of the School of Plant Science at the University of Tasmania. "Ultimately this knowledge could have significant implications for the improvement of fruit and wine quality."

## Aussie Water Worries

Australian winemakers working to find solutions to their water management problems

In an attempt to reduce the effects of one of Australia's worst droughts, that nation's premier organization of winemakers has formed a taskforce to make recommendations on how to manage the situation.

The Winemakers' Federation of Australia says wineries will have to find ways to work with less water as a result of the severe nationwide drought. The group will coordinate the wine industry's water use and water allocation data to help better understand the effects of water and future grape harvests, according to the federation's policy director, Doug Young.

"Like many other industries, (the wine industry) will need to find ways of working with less water," continued Young. "It's all about more effective resource management and good planning."