

Jaboulet set to change hands

22 Sep 2005 by JR

John Livingstone-Learmonth, whose 750-page *The Wines of the Northern Rhône* is to be published by University of California Press (\$55/£35.95) in nov 05, writes:

Paul Jaboulet Aîné, for long the leading Rhône wine merchant and vineyard owner at Hermitage, is reported to have been sold to the Swiss financier Jean-Jacques Frey for an as yet undisclosed sum. A month-long audit of the company is not yet complete.

Established in 1834, Paul Jaboulet Aîné has been a family business run by sets of cousins that in recent years has struggled to maintain the high reputation that it enjoyed for decades post World War Two. The legendary Hermitage La Chapelle 1961 is the Rhône's most famous red wine, but recent vintages such as the 2000 showed that all was not well [see also [Jaboulet and Trimbach trounced by the likes of Jacobs Creek](#), [More comments on Jaboulet](#), [1998 Rhône's - not so glorious alas](#) and so on - JR]. The winemaker since the 1960s, Jacques Jaboulet, who has suffered from health problems, retired recently to Senegal, although his son Laurent, a qualified oenologist, has stayed at the business.

Jean-Jacques Frey is the owner of Château La Lagune in the Haut-Médoc, Champagne Ayala and a shareholder in Champagne Billecart-Salmon. His daughter Caroline, 27, is an oenologist and is already upgrading the vineyards and cellars of La Lagune with a large budget available. The La Lagune vineyards are being moved towards sustainable viticulture with a reduction in the use of agrochemicals.

Also interested in Paul Jaboulet Aîné were the Prats family of Château Cos d'Estournel, with whom the Jaboulets had worked in marketing alliances over some years, together with such families as the Torres and Huguels. Jean-Guillaume Prats commented that "huge quality changes were needed for the house, and it is with much regret that we have withdrawn from the deal."

The old Rhône practice of offering one's vineyards to neighbours and fellow growers has clearly not featured in this deal, so the Freys are presumably tempted by the company's prime sites in the northern Rhône: at Hermitage the Jaboulet vineyard dossier comprises 22 hectares of Syrah (the whole vineyard is 131 hectares), all but 0.6 ha of them their own vines. The most notable holding is their 6.8 hectares on Le Méal. There are also 4.77 hectares of white vines at Hermitage, over 62 hectares of Crozes-Hermitage and holdings at Cornas, Condrieu, St-Joseph and St-Péray.

The House of Paul Jaboulet Aîné has been in limbo for a while now, and this transaction may well be the spur needed to rebuild its profile and standing among informed drinkers everywhere.