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Domaine Chanzy aims to enchant the party set

Lucy Colback



Jean-Baptiste Jessiaume: at 25 he is unusually young to be heading a domaine

In a cellar in Burgundy, the strains of Mozart's *Eine Kleine Nachtmusik* roll out over the rows of oak barrels. Earlier in the month, the fermentation process began with the ringing of a Tibetan bowl; the juices have also been "hypnotised".

An unusual approach for a Burgundy domaine, perhaps, but veteran winemaker Marc Jessiaume insists it has a noticeably positive effect on the quality of the wine. His son, Jean-Baptiste Jessiaume, chief operating officer and chief vintner of Domaine Chanzy, agrees. They are not playing with such methods lightly: their reputation — and that of the domaine — resides in those barrels.



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Bought out of bankruptcy in 2012 by Paris-based private equity fund Olma, Domaine Chanzy has big ambitions. It wants to turn the Chanzy brand into one synonymous with luxury, as well as develop a range of "festive" reds and whites that can achieve the same universal recognition as champagne.

For the luxury offering, the domaine is aiming to broaden the appeal of wines from a region that Chanzy chief executive Philippe der Megreditchian describes as "inaccessible".

One of the challenges lies in demystifying the appellation system. Mr der Megreditchian, who is also managing partner of Olma, explains that Burgundy has 40 of the top 50 most expensive brands in the world but "no one understands how to read the labels".

Burgundy winemaker Alex Gambal concurs. "It's a totally confusing system. You automatically think just because you've got a grand cru or a premier cru you've got a good wine — but it is just a ranking of the potential of the land." The quality of wine produced from a similar piece of land will vary greatly according to who has made it, he says. "The key word," Mr Gambal stresses, "is potential."

Chanzy will rely on winemaking family Jessiaume, spearheaded by sixth generation Jean-Baptiste, to develop luxury wines of consistent quality across Chanzy's 40 appellations. At 25, Jean-Baptiste is young to be heading a domaine. When Olma recruited him to run Chanzy in 2013, people in the industry said it was "absolutely crazy". Mr der Megreditchian, however, was confident of Jean-Baptiste's pedigree: in 2012, the first year he took solo responsibility for the red vintage at the family's old domaine, [Jean-Baptiste won Burgundy's young winemaker of the year award](#).

Olma also knew that it could rely on the family — Jean-Baptiste's father Marc and uncle Pascal — to give him support. The three work together — Pascal on the vines, Marc on the whites and Jean-Baptiste on the reds.

Still, as Mr Gambal observes: "Making the wine is the easy part. Selling it and developing a brand is the hard part. It takes so long to make a name."

Called simply "B", Chanzy's festive wines come in bottles encased in sleek opaque sleeves: white for white wine and black for red.

B is aimed squarely at the party set: a promotional video playing in the tasting room alternates between shots of poolside DJs and bikini clad revellers. It was launched this year in St Tropez, retailing at €80 a bottle. The company is in advanced discussions to sign a contract supplying 30,000 bottles to a global drinks company.

A challenge to scaling the business is securing volumes — especially in Burgundy. From the hillside overlooking the Côte de Beaune's Meursault appellation, the autumnal patchwork of tiny squares marking out individual land holdings illustrates the difficulty for any one winemaker of making a product in volume. The appellation system exacerbates the situation. With premier and grand cru at the top of the pecking order, those with access to even a small slice are reluctant to give it up.

Adding to the problem are poor harvests; since the bumper year of 2009, weather conditions have resulted in low yields. And as prices have risen for Burgundy wines, more grape growers have opted to make their own, leaving less surplus for other domaines to buy in to supplement volumes.

Still, in the Côte Chalonnaise, where Chanzy is located, volume contracts are easier to obtain. It may help, too, that Chanzy has used less sought-after aligoté grapes for its first offering of white wine under the B brand.

The domaine has other plans to grow B, by incorporating new wines from a sister vineyard in the Côtes du Rhône. With nearly 100ha to Chanzy's 30 or so, the southern stable mate — the two are due to finalise a union in December — will add another region to the line-up, as well as new grape varieties.

Investors will have to wait a bit longer to buy into this new Burgundy story. This year Chanzy cancelled plans to list on London's AIM pending completion of the Côtes du Rhône deal. Now, the company wants to increase revenues fourfold, to €10m, before it tries to float on a stock exchange.

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- Alex Gambal