

## Chateau Cheval Blanc

The new €13 million cellars, designed by French architect Christian de Portzamparc, opened in 2012 at Saint Emilion's Cheval Blanc. The 'winery under the hill', with its rooftop garden of wild flower and its pared-back design aesthetic, served to underline, if any underlining were necessary, that this estate continues to have the ambition, and the means, to rival the very best that Bordeaux has to offer. One of the only two Premier Grand Cru Classé A estates in the appellation, Cheval Blanc has been owned by Bernard Arnault of luxury goods house LVMH together with Belgian businessman and multimillionaire Albert Frere since 1998 (they bought it from the Fourcaus-Laussac family, whose ancestors founded the estate in the 19<sup>th</sup> century by purchasing 15 hectares of vines from neighbouring Chateau Figeac).

Technical director is Pierre-Olivier Clouet, working alongside oenologist Kees Van Leewan – with Pierre Lurton heading up the team, as he does at Chateau d'Yquem. The last few year's have seen a further refining of the vineyard management of the estate, with experiments on different root-stocks, and meticulous *terroir* mapping carried out, as well as continuing the approach of sustainable viticulture (no herbicide has ever been used). The vines, at an average age of 40 years, cover 33 hectares grown in a single block, and is planted to an unusually high proportion of cabernet franc, at 58%. The rest (42%) is merlot. Each part of the vineyard is treated to a different regime depending on needs – and this approach is continued into the new cellars (although even with the new look, the emphasis remains in the vines, with four times as many workers outside in the vines compared to inside the winery).

Designed by architect Pritzker-winning Portzamparc, the minimalist, wood, glass and cement building has 52 vats (for the 44 plots in the vineyard), in nine different sizes from 20 hectolitres to 110 hectolitres. It also prioritises green winemaking – built out of a breathable material called mashrabiya for the walls to facilitate natural ventilation, with underground ageing cellars to minimise the need for air-conditioning, and with a roof that is blanketed with grass and wild flowers (the architect has called it 'the cellar under the hill').

The estate produces on average 6,000 cases of the first wine. The second wine, Petit Cheval, has been produced since 1988 and in a typical vintage sees 2500 cases.

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