

## **Preserving Tradition:**

### **Libération Tardive Foundation Redefines Global Perceptions of Aged Wines**

Five MWs, along with leading wine writers including John Livingstone-Learmonth and Matt Walls plus devoted connoisseurs celebrated the launch of the Libération Tardive Foundation, at 67 Pall Mall in London in June. The exclusive tasting featured four verticals from the esteemed Château Grillet, spanning from 2001 to 2018, including the final flight tasted blind.

Founded on the enduring principle that 'Great wines take time', this global non-profit organisation is on a mission to ensure that the market delivers an abundant supply of age-worthy wines, allowing enthusiasts to savour the full potential of expertly crafted vintages. The Foundation contends that a deeper appreciation of aged wines stands to benefit every link in the supply chain from growers and producers to exporters, importers, wholesalers, storage companies, merchants and ultimately the consumer.

Spearheaded by passionate wine experts from the UK and across Europe, Libération Tardive aims to educate and inspire all stakeholders about the transformative power of time on fine wines. This initiative comes at a crucial time when contemporary consumption trends and financial motivations risk eclipsing the unparalleled rewards of patience and meticulous ageing.

#### **Grand Debut at 67 Pall Mall**

In the Lutyens Room at 67 Pall Mall on Tuesday 25<sup>th</sup> June, wine writer Dominic Buckwell (a director of the Foundation) presented ten vintages of Château Grillet from his club cellar. Three wines were served blind, sparking a spirited debate among experts. Consensus emerged that while terroir and winemaking are pivotal, an extra decade or more in the bottle allows distinguished wines such as Château Grillet to fully reveal their potential.

Jancis Robinson MW OBE found the 2015 vintage particularly intriguing with its 15.5% alcohol content, describing it as "oxidative but not oxidised, sui generis, though not a template for other vintages." John Livingstone-Learmonth, of Drink Rhône acclaim, lauded the 2009 vintage, calling it "a benchmark Château Grillet, structured and linear with intricate construction and notes of le bon Sud on the palate. It will just keep on going for another twenty years, easily." Anne McHale MW highlighted the 2009's "remarkably youthful" appearance and nose, praising its "elegant notes of peach, honeysuckle and exotic fruits" and "cushiony texture balanced by subtle acidity."

#### **Libération Tardive Leads the Charge**

The event heralded the inaugural tasting for the Libération Tardive Foundation, where Christopher Burr MW outlining the challenge: "While winemaking skills have improved markedly to allow so many wines to be enjoyed young, there's a growing concern that maturing great wine is becoming increasingly less fashionable. Producers, merchants and collectors seem to be in a perpetual race for the latest vintages!" He added "Perhaps less understood is the fact that wines which rate less well at release can later become sublime, and even a great surprise, with maturity."

### Showcasing Age-worthy Wines

The wine flights ranged from the 2018 vintage back to 2001 (in-bond market prices), vividly illustrating the transformative power of ageing:

- Stephane Ogier, Les Vieille Vignes de Jacques Vernay, Condrieu 2018 at 13.5% abv: £60
- Côtes du Rhône du Grillet 2018 (2nd wine) at 14% abv: £120
- Château Grillet 2018 at 14.5% abv: £300
- Château Grillet 2017 at 15.5% abv: £290
- Château Grillet 2016 at 14% abv: £270
- Château Grillet 2015 at 15.5% abv: £270
- Château Grillet 2014 at 14% abv: £280
- Château Grillet 2009 at 14% abv: £270
- Château Grillet 2007 at 14% abv: £250
- Château Grillet 2006 at 14% abv: £230
- Château Grillet 2004 at 14% abv: £250
- Château Grillet 2001 at 13.5% abv: £270

John Stimpfig of The Wine Conversation added “This tasting validates raison d’être of Libération Tardive. Truly great, age-worthy wines need time in the bottle to show their best.” Meanwhile, Richard Bampffield MW, a self-confessed Château Grillet novice, noted the wines' delicacy and finesse, discovering profound character in the more mature vintages.

### Château Grillet’s Legacy

To set the scene, Château Grillet is a diminutive yet historic monopole nestled in the northern Rhône Valley, just south of Vienne. Here the Rhône River cuts into the granitic Massif Central, forming an extraordinary steep, south-facing natural amphitheatre. As one of the world’s most iconic vineyard sites, Château Grillet’s exclusivity is underscored by its dedication within the AOC to crafting solely 100% Viognier wines. The vineyard’s celebrated past includes visits by Thomas Jefferson and favour at the court of Napoleon Bonaparte. Reinvigorated in 2011 by Groupe Artémis under François Pinault, the estate saw substantial enhancements in vineyard practices and winemaking techniques.

Christopher Burr MW elaborated “Among the most significant enhancements were the lowering of yields and retraining vines with Selection Massale for replanting. They built a new winery and limited new oak usage to less than 10% to allow the complexity of the wine to predominate. Nowadays they are vinifying in small, distinct parcels with meticulous selection, even declassifying more for a second wine, Côtes du Rhône Blanc. Moreover, the new winemaker Chu Jaeok is steadfastly committed to restoring Château Grillet to its esteemed position among the wine elite.”

### Impact of the Inaugural Event

The event ignited passionate discussions among participants on effective strategies to advance the appreciation of aged wines among newer generations. Attendees delved into diverse approaches aimed at highlighting the significance of mature vintages and enhancing the logistical and marketing support for such wines worldwide.

Matt Walls, author of *Wines of the Rhône*, emphasised “It's worth reminding ourselves – and fellow wine lovers – that so many of the world's greatest wines only truly reveal themselves and fulfil their potential with time.”

Pauline Vicard of ARENI Global summarised the market dynamics for these legacy bottles: “Fine wine is an expression of time. These wines express the vision of their winemakers, who only get one chance a year to turn this vision into tangible reality. Fine wine also evolves and transforms over the years, making it something magical – a connection through time and place. More prosaically, this capacity to age is what makes these fine wines so desirable on the secondary market. The desirability of a wine can only increase if the quality of the wine improves while its availability decreases.”

### **Envisioning the Future**

The mandate of the Libération Tardive Foundation is to enhance the availability and visibility of aged wines (10 years plus) on a global scale and to build a community that values the interplay of time and terroir. This goal will be pursued through a combination of educational and research programmes, promotional campaigns and championing the appreciation of mature vintages across all communications. To shift perceptions, the Foundation believes that all stakeholders share the responsibility of enhancing end consumers' understanding and appreciation of aged wines.

The core objective is to stimulate the market by helping consumers understand why 'great wines take time' and the rationale behind their pricing, thereby inspiring confidence in purchasing such vintages. Libération Tardive envisions a future where producers and merchants are financially incentivised to hold stocks of wine for five to ten years or more, releasing them only at the beginning of their prized 'drinking window.' This approach aligns with the insights of Hugh Johnson OBE on optimal drinking windows and aims to ensure that consumers experience wines at their peak.

This Autumn, the Foundation plans to introduce a new initiative featuring specially designed Libération Tardive stickers to denote the aged provenance of certain wines, backed by a comprehensive social media campaign. These stickers, prominently displayed on bottles, will be available to merchants with the aim of helping consumers to easily identify wines that have been well-aged (more than 10 years), reinforcing the value and allure of matured vintages in the market.

Further initiatives include tailored membership options for wine enthusiasts, the trade and sponsors set to roll out in the coming months. Additionally, a pivotal trade-oriented scheme is the #onebarrel campaign, advocating for producers to reserve a portion of their wine for ageing between five to ten years. By allowing the wines to mature more fully, enhancing their depth and character, these select barrels will command premium prices due to their market scarcity.

John Livingstone-Learmonth eloquently concluded the evening, stating "Defending la culture du vin is essential for ensuring new generations understand the glory, history and mystery of mature wine. I am thrilled that Libération Tardive will play a pivotal role in preserving this rich cultural heritage."

## APPENDICES:

**Tasting Guests:** Jancis Robinson MW OBE, John Livingstone-Learmonth, Richard Bampfield MW, Anne McHale MW, Andy Howard MW, Christopher Burr MW, Pauline Vicard, John Stimpfig, and Matt Walls.

Although unable to attend on this occasion, Hugh Johnson OBE commented in characteristic style “I’ve hardly ever tasted Château Grillet, as it doesn’t generally come into basic training!”

### **About Château Grillet**

Originally established as a vineyard at the time of the Roman Empire, with the first plots said to have been planted by Emperor Probus in the third century, Château Grillet has a legacy that spans millennia. However, not until the 18th century did the estate gain prominence for its winemaking prowess. Under the ownership of the Neyret-Gachet family since the 1820’s, Grillet was awarded its own appellation in 1936 by the precursor to INAO. Today it remains a Designation of Origin protected under EU law and international treaties and the purchase of the property by François Pinault in the summer of 2011 marked a significant new chapter in Grillet’s renaissance.

The vineyard is perched on steep granite terraces overlooking the Rhône River, for optimal sun exposure and drainage. The vines are low yielding with an average age of 45 years and the soils are a complex combination of clay and decomposed granite, with quartz, feldspar and some mica deposits. Divided into 76 dry-stone wall terraces, known locally as ‘chaillées’, the vineyard is characterised by crescent-shaped slopes that rise dramatically 300 feet above the river, providing shelter from the cold north wind of La Bise.

Château Grillet wines are renowned for their remarkable aromatic intensity and exceptional ageing potential, consistently maturing with grace and complexity over a decade or more.

As one of the smallest and oldest appellations in France, the Château Grillet AOC is used exclusively dedicated to the production of still white wines made from Viognier. By law, the planting density must be at least 8,000 vines per hectare, with yields capped at 37 hectolitres per hectare. The grapes, all picked by hand, need to reach a maturity providing at least 178 grams per litre of sugar in the must (corresponding to minimum 10.5% potential alcohol) and the finished wines must have an alcohol content between 11.5% and 14%, with a maximum of 4 grams per litre of sugar.

Despite its modest 3.5-hectare expanse, Château Grillet stands as a timeless classic in the illustrious world of fine wines, its name whispered with reverence among oenophiles across the globe.

### **For additional detail, comment and imagery:**

- Fran Bridgewater FCIM: [fran@drinksnetwork.com](mailto:fran@drinksnetwork.com) +44 (0)7736 184124
- Christopher Burr MW: [info@Liberation-Tardive.org](mailto:info@Liberation-Tardive.org)
- Media downloads including hi-res imagery: <https://liberation-tardive.org/media/>