

# **LA CONSEILLANTE** **THE VERTICAL**

**ROBERSON WINE**

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# LA CONSEILLANTE THE CHATEAU THE VERTICAL

## The history:

Château La Conseillante was founded back in the 1730s by a lady called Catherine Conseillan, a local iron merchant according to the town's records and by all reports she had a personality to match her profession. She built the modern château building on the estate that still stands today, and alongside her neighbours at Vieux-Château-Certain and Trotenoy she was one of the first to take viticulture very seriously, immediately establishing 'La Conseillante' (as she had called it) as one of the area's finest estates. In 1777 she passed away and left the estate to her favourite niece Marie Despujol on the agreement that her beloved property would not be broken up (Catherine herself had assembled it from a number of smaller properties). In the early 1800s the property was inherited by one of Marie's sons and over the next few decades a number of vineyard parcels were added, including some prime gravel land from Figeac. The property fell out of the family's hands during the 1840s and it was taken over by the Leperche-Princeteau family, who in turn sold it to Louis Nicolas in 1871 - it has remained in the Nicolas family ever since.

Unfortunately for Louis, his timing coincided with the dreaded rise of phylloxera and by 1875 many of the region's vineyards had succumbed. Louis was determined not to give up without a fight and he became the pioneer of a rather extreme treatment whereby he injected the roots of his vines with carbon disulphide. Somewhat remarkably, there were good initial results and production at the estate actually increased for a few years while the devastation went on around Pomerol. Just as people were starting to proclaim Louis a genius for finding a cure, the La Conseillante vineyards got struck down and phylloxera had its way with them too. The most likely scenario is that he had hitherto just been lucky in avoiding the arrival of the aphid but that couldn't go on forever.

The 20th century began with one of the Louis Nicolas' (there were three or four generations with the same name) founding the Pomerol syndicat in 1900 and serving as its president for many years. Then they endured the hardships of two world wars before the wines of Pomerol began to garner international acclaim in the 50s and 60s. By this time La Conseillante was well respected as one of the top estates in the appellation, but in 1971 the Nicolas family decided to undergo an overhaul of the property. Professor Emile Peynaud was called in to advise the Nicolas family and, at his behest, they completely upgraded the winemaking facilities by dispensing with their wooden casks and replacing them with stainless steel fermentation vessels. During the 80s they moved to 100% new oak barrels for their maturation and with '82, '85 and '89 they managed to produce some of the very best wines of those vintages. It was during this period that La Conseillante really arrived, but although it remains a property that is highly respected by Pomerol aficionados, it has never received the widespread recognition enjoyed by many of its neighbours. That said, the likes of Robert Parker are often very complimentary about the wines and they are renowned for their impeccable ability to improve with age. Today the team is headed by Dr Bertrand Nicolas and his estate manager Jean Michel Laporte.

## Viticulture and vinification:

The vineyards are all in one block, situated on the Pomerol side of the border with St Emilion. In fact, some of the vines (the parcel bought from Figeac) are actually inside the commune of St Emilion, but La Conseillante has had them long enough that the authorities don't mind them blending the fruit into their Pomerol wine (as is the situation in Pauillac with Pichon-Lalande at their St Julien vines). There is 12 hectares in total, with plantings of 80% Merlot and 20% Cabernet Franc at a density of 6500 - 7500 vines per hectare. The Cabernet vines are on the more gravelly soils near the border and the Merlot is planted on the clay rich soils further into the Pomerol appellation. There are parts of the vineyard with some of the famous iron deposits (*casse de fer*) that exist in this particular pocket of Pomerol and it is the fruit from here that forms the high quality backbone of the wines. Total yields average around 38hl/ha.

Following harvest, the fruit is rigorously sorted (they have four sorting tables) before being destemmed. Fermentation is done in stainless steel tank and managed with cultured yeasts before the wine is moved into 100% new oak barrels for 18 months. Egg white fining takes place before bottling and a total of 4500 cases are produced. A small proportion of this total is the second wine 'Duo de Conseillante', which has been in production since 2007.