

PATRICK LÉON BIOGRAPHY



From an early age, flowers and plants always roused his curiosity ... Ultimately Patrick Léon chose vines stocks and their creeping tendrils to blend and proportion with infinite care, between past and present, tradition and modernity, his passion for seeking perfect balance and harmony: quite a magical talent...

Informative and detailed, this article recounts the career of an epicurean perfectly in tune with winegrowing terroirs ...

Patrick Leon in fact spent his entire professional life, almost forty years, working with the world's finest vineyards. For eighteen years he worked for one of the world's most famous and prestigious wine companies, Baron Philippe de Rothschild, S.A. Whether managing the Bordeaux vineyards that produce the renowned wines of Chateau Mouton Rothschild, or busy perfecting the blend of the company's rising star from the Languedoc area, "Baron'arques", or providing his expertise for the production of "Escudo Rojo" in Chile, or working as Co-Technical Manager for Baron Philippe de Rothschild's joint ventures, "Opus One" and "Almaviva", Patrick Léon's obvious passion for vine growing always shone through.

After obtaining a degree in Oenology and Ampelography (the study of grape varieties) at the Institute of Oenology of Bordeaux University, this self-effacing winemaker began his career in the mid-1960s as Laboratory Manager at the Department of Agriculture for the Gironde. His talents were rapidly discovered by Alexis Lichine, a legendary personality of the wine world, with whom he collaborated for thirteen years, rising to the position of Production Manager for the group "Chateaux Viticoles" (which included Chateau Lascombes and Chateau Castera).

In addition to his work with Bordeaux wines, by acting as a consultant during the early 1980s to well-known wine companies such as Georges Duboeuf in France and Beringer, Jordan and Souverain in California he continued to broaden his wine experience and knowledge.

It was this unparalleled skill with vineyards and winemaking techniques in France and abroad that eventually brought him to the attention of Baron Philippe de Rothschild, for whom he began working as Technical Services Manager and Winemaker in 1985.

Between 1985 and 2003, he was directly responsible for making some of the finest vintages of Chateau Mouton, including the 2000 vintage which received a rating of +99 from Robert Parker, Jr., who described it as being “possibly a perfect wine.”

From Mouton Cadet to Chateau Mouton, each wine in the Baron Philippe de Rothschild range, from varietals of the Languedoc-Rousillon area to Reserva varietals from Chile, had to receive Patrick Léon’s approval before being bottled. His dedication to drawing the finest expression from each vineyard under his management and his ability to adapt the vast technical resources available to the various vineyards owned by Baron Philippe de Rothschild worldwide were sufficient merits for him to win the title of “Winemaker of the Year” (*awarded by the “Wine enthusiast” magazine in 2002*)...making one of the world’s finest wines was “icing on the cake.”

This discreet and amiable man was also involved in collectively defending AOC Bordeaux wines. He was a member of the Board of the Bordeaux Wine Trade Council and President of the Technical Committee at the CIVB, which is responsible for carrying out research and guaranteeing the quality of AOC wines. Member of the INAO (French Institute of Appellations of Origin), he was also formerly Regional President of the Union of French Oenologists.

Since 2003 Patrick Léon has been enjoying an active retirement in Fronsac where, with his youngest son, Bernard, he purchased the fifteen-hectare estate of Château Les Trois Croix in 1995. “Three Crosses”, like the three bell towers of Fronsac, Saillans and Saint-Aignan, piously gazed upon by visitors to this historical site of religious processions. These days, those who make their pilgrimage here are of a quite different sort. Wine lovers and leading personalities of the Bordeaux wine world rush here to glean a few precious secrets brought by Patrick Léon from Mouton-Rothschild: meticulous vine growing methods, harvests gathered in small crates each containing no more than 10 kilos, extremely thorough sorting
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But there’s no question of regretting the Médoc, since “Fronsac has an exceptional terroir, where solidarity remains one of the finest assets for ensuring rich crops!”

Valérie Meyer