

# Tradition and sustainability in a Bordeaux bottle

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**“W**e’re in a globalized world. Our red wine is competing against every other red wine,” Mario Rios, of Château Larose Trintaudon told the *QCT*. Amélie Durand of Château Doms heartily agreed, saying, “Just having an AOC [*appellation d’origine contrôlée*] doesn’t sell your wine. You have to actually market your brand.” Both Rios and Durand were in Quebec City this past weekend doing exactly that.

At the Bordeaux fête le vin à Québec, they shared their wines with amateurs and connoisseurs alike. Among them were Durand’s award-winning Château Doms labels, all of which are available as private imports through Quebec City native Kenneth Gunn’s company, Marchands des Amériques, Inc. ([www.marchandsdesameriques.com](http://www.marchandsdesameriques.com)). Gunn also represents Rios’s labels, which will be available in SAQ stores and as private imports this autumn.

Over crêpes at Le Billig, the only place in the city where her wines are publicly available, Durand disclosed that she is the fifth generation of women to run her family

estate ([www.chateau-doms.fr](http://www.chateau-doms.fr)). “We are run by women because, in each generation there was only one child, every time a daughter,” Durand explained. She never had any doubt she would carry on the work. She recalled, “Since I was a young girl, maybe five years old, I always wanted to make wine. I wanted to do what my grandmother did.”

Years later, following university degrees focused on agriculture and wine-making, she joined her mother, now at the Château’s helm. Thinking back, Durand giggled and admitted, “It took us two or three years to figure out a balance. Now, I look after the wines – from harvest onward, it is my job. And my mother looks after the vines and everything before the harvest.”

As a young woman, fresh out of school, though, Durand faced challenges as a woman in business. She said, “You have to be good. You can’t hesitate. It is too easy for people to say, ‘Oh, you are just a girl.’” Now, with years of experience and training from her mother and grandparents, she can say, “I face the same challenges as a man. Every year, you have to make good wine. You have to



Photo by Bethann Merkle

**Surrounded by wines from the Médoc-Graves region, Amélie Durand pours samples of her award-winning wines.**

sell your wine, too. You have to keep your vineyard as perfect as you can.”

Although tradition is deeply rooted in Bordeaux, time moves on. Improved technology, combined with centuries-old cellars, her personal finesse, the soil that grows only “vines and pines” as she put it, and the wisdom of generations resulted in a

great honour earlier this year. Her *Cuvée Amélie*, named not for herself but for her great-great-grandmother, was awarded the prestigious 2013 prix Raisin. Established by Olivier Dauga and Jean-Pierre Xiradakis, formidable forces in the French wine and restaurant industry, the career-making honour recognizes young, little-known

Bordeaux winemakers who produce high-quality vintages.

Equally important, Durand notes, “We are more protective of the environment than when my grandmother was in charge. We know it is better for the vines, too.” At that, Rios chimed in, stressing the importance his company places on sustainability at their numerous châteaux. As an export sales manager for Château Larose Trintaudon ([www.vignoblesdelarose.com](http://www.vignoblesdelarose.com)), it is his responsibility to sell, not just a bottle of wine, but a brand. For Alliance Insurance, the parent company, this brand is predicated on sustainability.

Although he speaks French fluently, Rios grew up in the Adirondack mountains in upstate New York. He made his way to France to complete an MBA, began working in the wine industry, and never looked back. The Château Larose Trintaudon and their sustainability practices suit his style. Rios described their perspective, saying, “This goes beyond regular organic farming. We also look at waste management, bottle and barrel suppliers, our relationship to the communities

where we are based, and how we treat our employees.”

“Social ethics,” as Rios refers to the approach, includes tracking where their wine goes once it is sold. Each bottle is etched with a reference number, enabling the company to verify that their wines are sold to customers whose ethics meet company standards. Rios recalled, “We actually declined a major sale once, because we weren’t able to verify the source of the funds offered by the prospective client.”

The three of them, Rios, Durand, and Gunn, represent the past, present, and future of Bordeaux wines. Their youth, passion, and focus on marketing their wines directly to consumers stands in contrast to the historic *négociants* (wine traders). Events such as the Bordeaux fête le vin à Québec offer the best possible hook – the sound of corks popping out of bottles, the wine’s burst of colour swirling into glasses, and the taste of wines not yet available at the SAQ. Above all, the festival enables these entrepreneurs to tell their stories, sustaining the traditions as they do.

## Bordeaux-Quebec connection gets personal

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**Q**uebec City and Bordeaux, France, have been “twin” or “sister” cities since 1962. For one local family, the connection goes almost as far back. In 1963, Louise Gunn (née Bernier), found herself harvesting grapes for the Perromat family south of Bordeaux. Decades later, at the first Bordeaux fête le vin à Québec, hosted here last year, Louise Gunn and her relations resumed their friendship on Canadian soil.

Louise explained the rediscovery, saying, “Over time, I had lost contact with them until last year when I went to the [festival] and found out that there was a Guillaume Perromat present. He turned out to be a nephew of Jean Perromat!” It was an unexpected and deeply meaningful reunion, as Louise had worked for his uncle 50 years before.

This past weekend, Guillaume Perromat was in Quebec City again, for the second annual Bordeaux wine festival. Louise’s son Kenneth Gunn, a private imports wine and spirits dealer, introduced this reporter to him, and he in turn shared the sweeter side of Bordeaux. Perromat’s Château d’Armajan Des



Photo by Bethann Merkle

**Thanks to a relationship their elders established 50 years ago, Guillaume Perromat (left) and Kenneth Gunn (right) now epitomize the modern Bordeaux-Quebec connection.**

Ormes (available at the SAQ) is a luscious example of what he and other sweet-wine producers are trying to tell the world. “To call these wines mere dessert wines is to do them a great injustice,” he told the *QCT*. “We drink them as *appétitifs* but also with our meals. It is a tradition we are trying to share.”

Perromat recommends pairing these liquid-gold wines with blue cheese, or main dishes that are meaty or crunchy, with flavours that are creamy, salty, buttery or even spicy. Though expanding consumers’ horizons is serious business, the Bordeaux-based joint marketing initiative for this type of wine is having great fun doing so. At the wine festival, quirky yellow buttons and stylish sunglasses proclaiming “Sweet

Bordeaux – soft and sweet” were jovially distributed by producers and volunteers clad in chic black and yellow “Sweet Bordeaux” attire.

In a logical continuation of the family connection, Perromat and Kenneth Gunn, through his company Marchands des Amériques, Inc. ([www.marchandsdesameriques.com](http://www.marchandsdesameriques.com)), may be partnering to take the award-winning wine farther east, to the discriminating palates of LCBO customers in Ontario. Gunn affirmed, “I think of myself as much more than an agent. I try to build relationships with the producers, and work closely with them.”

Perromat sees the wine festival as an excellent way to extend that approach even further, to include the customers. With a characteristic twinkle in his eye,

he shared his appreciation for the festival format. “We get to meet the public, and you get to meet us. It is not often the public gets to

meet the winemakers, particularly when you are here in Quebec. The public here is well-educated about our wines, too. We are happy to

be here. We are even happier you are here.”



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