



### **China gambling exec vows to honour French wine heritage**



*The Gevrey Chambertin castle in Burgundy, eastern France, on August 23. Chinese businessman Louis Ng, who sparked uproar in France when he bought the historic Burgundy vineyard, pledged Tuesday to respect local traditions and restore the chateau to its former glory.*

A Chinese businessman who sparked uproar in France when he bought a historic Burgundy vineyard pledged Tuesday to respect local traditions and restore the chateau to its former glory.



*Mr. Louis Ng*

Louis Ng has been targeted by the far-right National Front and disgruntled winegrowers since paying \$10 million for Chateau de Gevrey-Chambertin earlier this year, over fears he will destroy the estate's 900-year-old heritage.

But in an attempt to allay such concerns, the 60-year-old Hong Kong-based casino executive said he planned to work with French architects and winegrowers to ensure the historic chateau remains a source of premium wine.

"It is our goal to bring this enchanted property to its full former glory," he said in a statement sent to AFP.

"In time, I hope my new Burgundy neighbours will also come to appreciate my sincere passion for great wines as will be reflected in the positive improvements I hope to bring to Chateau de Gevrey-Chambertin."

The estate includes two hectares (five acres) of vineyards in one of Burgundy's top appellations, where growers follow strict rules in order to market their wines under legally protected names.

"It is my intention to use all the resources at my disposal to ensure that this land continues to produce world-class wines for wine lovers all around the world for generations to come," Ng said.

He said he had appointed French architect Christian Laporte to repair the chateau, which is listed on a registry of historic Burgundy monuments.

Along with certain unnamed "friends", he had signed a long-term lease with Burgundy winemaker Eric Rousseau, of Domaine Armand Rousseau, to look after the chateau's wine production.

"As a long-time wine lover over the past 30 years, I am thrilled to have this excellent opportunity to re-energise and reinvigorate this amazing piece of land," Ng said.

"Our architect will help us to restore this monumental chateau to its original beauty and preserve, as a primary goal, the great historical significance of this remarkable building.

"I am also extremely happy to have Eric's immense skills and expertise to see that the chateau's vineyards again produce some of the best wines in Burgundy."

Ng described himself as a serious wine lover and an ambassador of French wines in Hong Kong and Macau, where he is the long-serving chief operating officer of gambling tycoon's Stanley Ho's SJM Holdings.

Hong Kong-based wine expert and author **Jeannie Cho Lee**, who is friends with Ng, said the businessman could be trusted to manage the estate.

"I am sure that given his genuine love for wine and for Burgundy, he will lovingly restore Chateau de Gevrey-Chambertin to its former glory," she told AFP.

Unlike its rival Bordeaux, Burgundy remains dominated by relatively small estates run by winemakers who, regardless of how prosperous they may have become in recent years, regard themselves as farmers first and foremost.

Properties generally get passed down from generation to generation, making foreign ownership relatively rare, again in contrast to Bordeaux where Chinese investors have established a strong presence.

Lee said Chinese investors were always going to branch out into Burgundy.

"If you look back at the period when Japanese first became enamoured with wine in the 1980s and 1990s, there was quite a stir because Japanese started buying Bordeaux properties and investing in Burgundy domaines," she said.

"It is the same thing now with the Chinese."

Davis Fong, director of the Institute for the Study of Commercial Gaming at University of Macau, said Ng was a very senior and long-term associate of Ho, whose SJM Holdings operates 17 casinos in the former Portuguese colony of Macau.

"He is very senior but the information about him in the public literature is quite limited. I only know that he's a very important guy and a decision maker," he said.

In Macau's glitzy casino business, it is sometimes wise to stay below the radar, he added.

"He is very low-profile. Keeping a low profile is a good thing," he said.