

## Dry Wine Solution to Sauternes 'Crisis'

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*Domaine de Chevalier owner the Bernard family has unveiled its recently acquired Sauternes property Clos des Lunes, displaying a focus on dry wines to address the "huge crisis" facing this Bordeaux appellation.*



Adrien Bernard shows off Clos des Lunes, the latest addition to his family's Bordeaux portfolio.

Having taken control of the 12.5-hectare estate, formerly known as Château Haut Caplane from Castel in August 2011, the family renamed the property in honour of the Chinese festival of the moon, whose timing coincides with the grape harvest.

Overseen by the Domaine de Chevalier winemaking team, the property is now producing around 130,000 bottles of two main cuvées: Lune d'Argent and Lune d'Or, with a second tier offering, Lune Blanche, due to be introduced once some replanted vineyards come into production.

In addition, the property plans to produce around 2,000 bottles a year of Clair de la Lune, a sweet wine, which is not intended for commercial release, but will "keep the spirit of Sauternes", according to Shanghai-based brand ambassador Adrien Bernard, who was showing his family's new wines at last week's HKTDC fair.

"Sauternes, which is in a huge crisis, has to increase its quantities of dry white wines," argued Bernard as he explained the decision to focus on this style. "We are not here to break the Sauternes market", he insisted. "We're here to prove they need to look at dry wine until the crisis is over."

Alongside its replanting programme on the estate, the family is working with a number of growers within the appellation. "We rent their land for higher than the market price," confirmed Bernard, who added: "It's very easy to find people to buy grapes from Sauternes – business is difficult."

The challenging harvest this year is likely to put further pressure on the appellation's producers. "In 2012 we were pretty happy not to produce sweet Sauternes", commented Bernard, adding: "We almost didn't produce a *grand vin*."

Despite noting that the famous sweet wines from this appellation often receive positive feedback in tastings, Bernard pointed out the struggle to convert this

into sales.

On top of a tendency within the fine wine market to focus on red wines, Bernard blamed this commercial struggle on the fact that “people don’t know how to drink Sauternes. They call it a dessert wine, but it’s not – you have many possibilities.”

Despite the dry wine focus at Clos des Lunes, Bernard pointed to his family’s investment in sweet Sauternes as co-owner of organic estate [Château Guiraud](#), which it bought in 2006 in partnership with oenologist Xavier Planty, Canon La Gafflière owner Stephan von Neipperg, and industrialist Robert Peugeot.

In an effort to broaden the appeal of sweet Sauternes, Château Guiraud organises initiatives such as food pairing sessions in Asian markets with Jeannie Cho Lee MW.

Bernard also highlighted a stylistic shift within Sauternes during the last two decades as producers adapt to meet changing consumer tastes. “In the 90’s it was quite heavy, but now they’re trying to make it lighter,” he remarked.

The association of both estates with the moon festival – the idea for Clos des Lunes’ name came to Adrien’s father Olivier Bernard on his way home from Château Guiraud’s own *Fête de la Lune* – marks part of a wider effort to encourage consumers to associate Sauternes with different occasions.

Bernard also highlighted the particular suitability of the gold-coloured Lune D’Or label for China’s gifting market, confirming that there had been “good interest” in the wines from Chinese visitors during the fair.

Available at a negociant price of €8 per bottle, Clos des Lunes is also being targeted at more established markets, especially the US and the UK, where the wines were introduced at last month’s Bettane+Dessauve event in London.

Despite its recent acquisitions in Sauternes, the Bernard family is best known for its Pessac-Léognan expertise. After acquiring grand cru estate Domaine de Chevalier in 1983, the family added Domaine de la Solitude in 1993 and from the 2009 vintage took on responsibility for the management of the appellation’s Château Lespault-Martillac.