

CHÂTEAU HAUT-BAGES LIBÉRAL

GRAND CRU CLASSÉ DE 1855, PAUILLAC





Château
Haut-Bages
LIBÉRAL
GRAND CRU CLASSÉ
PAUILLAC
CLAIRE VILLARS-LURTON



- **OWNER : CLAIRE VILLARS-LURTON (2ND GENERATION OF WOMAN AS THE OWNER OF THE CHÂTEAU HAUT-BAGES LIBÉRAL)**
- **CLASSIFIED GROWTH OF 1855 IN PAUILLAC**
- **ORGANICALLY CERTIFIED BY AB LABEL**



- **SIZE OF VINEYARD : 30 HECTARES**
- **SOIL : GRAVELS FROM THE GARONNE RIVER ON CLAY AND LIMESTONE**
- **GRAPE VARIETALS : 70% CABERNET SAUVIGNON, 30% MERLOT**
- **WINES : CHÂTEAU HAUT-BAGES LIBÉRAL, LA CHAPELLE DE HAUT-BAGES LIBÉRAL**



Château Haut-Bages Libéral benefits from its proximity to the Gironde estuary, but its history has nothing in common with that of a gently flowing river...

In the early 18th century, the Libéral family, the owners of the Château, attached their name to the property, and forever changed its destiny. Over time, these astute connoisseurs acquired some of the finest terroirs in the south of the Pauillac appellation.

Château Haut-Bages Libéral's 30-hectare vineyard thus consists of three separate areas. They are all neighbours with 1855 classified growths: Château Latour, Château Pichon Baron de Longueville and Château Grand-Puy Lacoste. The 1855 classification crowned this ascent with the obtaining of the title of Grand Cru Classé. Owners then followed one another, producing wines whose quality never seemed to be questioned. However, very few of them devoted sufficient energy and resources to enabling the property to reveal its true value. The vines were tended, Haut-Bages Libéral was managed, but no one ever gave the property the love it deserved!

Major investments tended to be made in the great estates: the Cruse family strived to restore the prestige of their main property Pontet Canet, then came the turn of the Merlaut family, whose attention was monopolized by Château Chasse Spleen.

And so, for several decades, Haut-Bages Libéral was put on the back burner.

It was not until the arrival of Claire in 2000, the third generation of the Merlaut family, that this situation finally changed to the property's advantage. With boundless energy, she replanted vineyard parcels with Cabernet Sauvignon to fully exploit the potential of Haut-Bages Libéral's terroir, and then undertook major renovation work on the winery and historic buildings. The challenge was met!

With its new winery, the property no longer had to blush alongside its impressive Pauillac neighbours, and can now devote itself to its *raison d'être*: the production of a great wine, that exceeded expectations, even for an 1855 Cru Classé.

JACQUES MERLAUT

Jacques Merlaut was unquestionably one of the greats of the Bordeaux wine world. A graduate of HEC at barely 20 years-old, he started his professional wine career at the end of the Second World War. Self-taught, Jacques consistently displayed ingenuity as he found his way in the business world, ultimately creating a veritable wine empire.

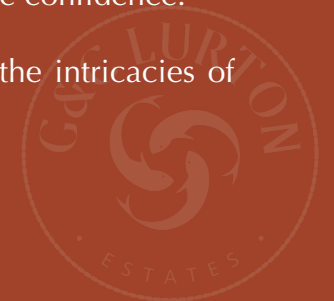
It was in Hérault, in the 1950s, that Jacques laid the foundations of his wine dynasty, accompanied by his brother-in-law Bernard Taillan. He began as a wine merchant, buying wines from the Rhone Valley and North Africa, which he stored in vats at his own facility in Sète. He then sold these wines all over France.

In 1961, he returned to his native region, with a view to including Bordeaux wines in his range. A few years later, he acquired Châteaux Chasse-Spleen and La Gurgue, at around the same time. Little by little, he constructed an empire with a dozen properties in the Bordeaux region, including several classified growths (Château Haut-Bages Libéral, Château Ferrière, Château Gruaud Larose, and Château Citran).

At the age of 60, Jacques completely lost his sight. He subsequently became known as the “blind magician” due to his unflinching memory and exceptional business acumen. At the time, Jacques acted as intermediary in many wine acquisitions. It was during one such occasion that he fell in love with Haut-Bages Libéral and took out a loan in order to become the happy owner.

In 1976, Jacques placed his daughter Bernadette in charge of the technical and commercial management of all his properties with absolute confidence.

After her tragic death, Jacques turned to Claire, Bernadette's eldest daughter. Under her grandfather's wing, Claire was introduced to the intricacies of Bordeaux wine properties by the best of teachers.





CLAIRE IS STILL FOND OF A STORY LINKING THE MERLAUT AND LURTON FAMILIES BEFORE SHE MARRIED GONZAGUE LURTON:

HER MOTHER BERNADETTE WOULD ASK LUCIEN LURTON FOR ADVICE IN VINEYARD MATTERS. LUCIEN LURTON IN TURN ADVISED HIS SON GONZAGUE TO ASK JACQUES MERLAUT FOR ADVICE IN COMMERCIAL MATTERS.



Château Haut-Bages Libéral benefits from a direct proximity to the Gironde estuary. This exceptional location greatly contributes to the quality of Haut-Bages Libéral's terroir. Indeed, a Médoc proverb declares, "great terroirs overlook the water". The key is to give expression to this magnificent terroir!

This was a challenge to which Claire, the third generation of the Merlaut family, applied herself with passion and conviction.

Barely a hundred metres separates the vineyard from the river. The estuary is a vector of energy, creating a microclimate, and biodiversity.

This was something Claire appreciated immediately, "the energy and light are different close to the river. There is a constant movement of air". This ensures optimal disease prevention in the vineyard. The presence of this substantial body of water near the property creates a beneficial microclimate. Climate extremes are reduced along the estuary.

The 1991 and 2017 vintages, when night frosts ravaged the vineyards, decimating production in some areas, remain an unpleasant memory for many Bordeaux properties. However, the Haut-Bages Libéral vineyard defied the destruction and maintained a normal level of production. Not a single grape was lost!

The proximity of the estuary also gives the Haut-Bages Libéral vineyard a unique character due to the clay-limestone soil. This lends Château Haut-Bages Libéral's wines a certain minerality, further adding to their distinctiveness.

Claire focused on expressing this terroir, revealing Haut-Bages Libéral's exceptional character and so ensuring its success. From 2007, she was aided by a biodynamic approach and agroforestry techniques, which gradually enabled her to give a voice to the Château and express its true nature.

This quest was crowned with the 2019 vintage, declared by Michel Bettane to be "the property's most accomplished and harmonious wine for at least half a century".



HAVING TAKEN UP THE TORCH FROM
HER MOTHER BERNADETTE,

**CLAIRE IS THE RESULT
OF THE 2ND
GENERATION OF
WOMAN OWNER**

OF CLASSIFIED GROWTH OF 1855.

THOMAS BONTEMPS, CHÂTEAU HAUT-BAGES LIBÉRAL TECHNICAL DIRECTOR

After graduating from Bordeaux Sciences Agro and a few years gaining experience working on estates in Bordeaux and abroad, Thomas was looking for a professional challenge. As luck would have it, Claire was looking for the right person to manage production at Haut-Bages Libéral.

In 2011, Thomas joined Claire and becomes the property's technical director.

With a very hands-on approach, open-minded and sensitive to his team, Thomas was a unifying force. Gradually, he gained their confidence and loyalty. A details fanatic, everything is meticulously managed, with nothing left to chance. Everything was finally in place to enable Château Haut-Bages Libéral to rise to the front ranks of the classified growths.

For Thomas, the battle was far from won! Cultivation of the vineyard had until then been under a dictatorship of intensive grassing, which undermined the balance and well-being of the vines. Growing practices needed to be completely rethought.

Guided by her convictions, Claire undertook an ambitious project to awaken the sleeping beauty: that of converting the entire vineyard to agroecology and biodynamic practices. Thomas had no experience of organic methods. He studied, learned, and analysed the approach down to the tiniest details. Thanks to his perseverance, courage and diligence, Thomas rose to the challenge! He also made changes in the winery, reviewing the vinification process to preserve the fruit and improve the tannic quality.

The results were soon apparent. The vineyard has never been so full of life, and Haut-Bages Libéral's new style has received praise from all the major wine critics.

In perfect complementarity, Claire provided a vision and Thomas found a way to achieve it.

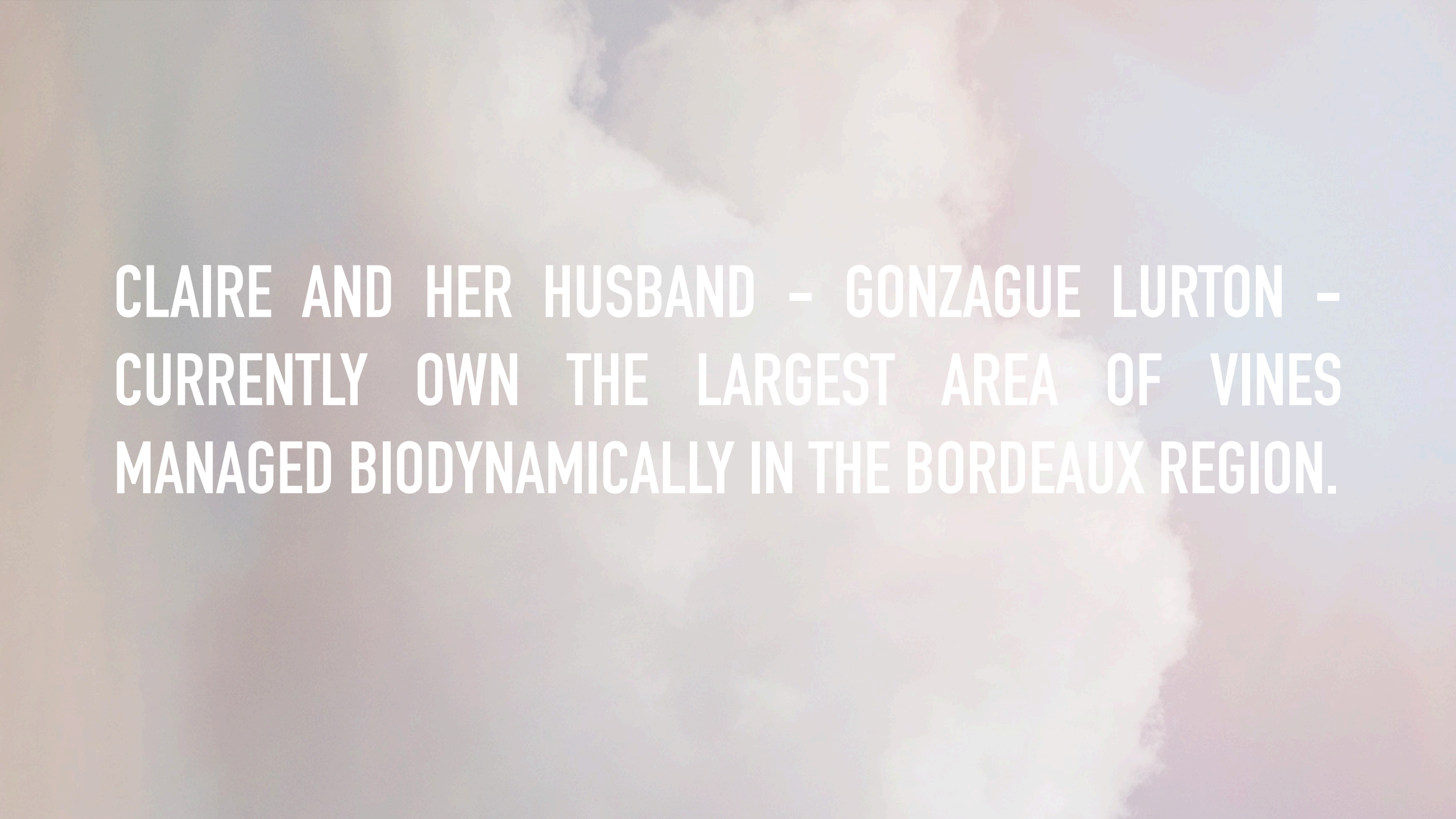


THOMAS IS PART OF THE COMMITTEE OF WINE GROWERS AND EXTERNAL SCIENTIFIC SPEAKERS CALLED "LA BELLE VIGNE". THIS BIMONTHLY GATHERING AIMS TO ENRICH AGRONOMIC THINKING AND THUS CONTINUE TO DEVELOP TECHNICAL ITINERARIES.





IN 2018, MAJOR RENOVATIONS TO THE CELLAR AND HISTORIC BUILDINGS HAVE BEEN UNDERTAKEN UNDER CLAIRE'S SUPERVISION. THE PROPERTY IS NOW NO LONGER TO BE ASHAMED ALONGSIDE ITS IMPRESSIVE PAUILLAC NEIGHBORS AND CAN DEVOTE ITSELF TO ITS PRIMARY ESSENCE, THE PRODUCTION OF A GREAT WINE.



**CLAIRE AND HER HUSBAND – GONZAGUE LURTON –
CURRENTLY OWN THE LARGEST AREA OF VINES
MANAGED BIODYNAMICALLY IN THE BORDEAUX REGION.**



Château
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CHÂTEAU HAUT-BAGES LIBÉRAL KEY POINTS

- Several ageing trials have been undertaken by Thomas, the operations manager, to highlight the fruity side of the wine. The Limoges porcelain jars were unanimous among the technical team. To date, Château Haut-Bages Liberal has the largest number of Limoges porcelain jars.
- The name Haut-Bages refers to the topographical designation at the “highest” point of the locality of “Bages”. Half of the Haut-Bages Liberal vineyard is located on this historic parcel which is among the most qualitative in the Pauillac appellation.
- Ideally located between the Atlantic Ocean and the vast estuary of the Gironde, the Haut-Bages Liberal vineyard is subject to a mild, humid, temperate oceanic climate regulated by these two large bodies of water. This microclimate protects the vines from frost and thus ensures a constant level of yield.
- The presence of limestone in the heart of the Château Haut-Bages Liberal vineyard brings freshness and elegance to the style of the wine. Limestone is very rare in the Pauillac appellation, only the Haut-Bages Liberal and Latour Châteaux benefit from it.
- The critic Michel Bettane described the 2019 vintage of Haut-Bages Liberal as follows: "certainly the most successful and harmonious wine for at least half a century".
- According to the Revue du Vin de France tasting team, the wine from Château Haut-Bages Liberal is "a Pauillac en dentelles". The wine goes wonderfully with dishes made with red meat, such as refined dishes of fish or white meat.
- Like the great Pauillac wines, the wine of Château Haut-Bages Liberal expresses itself with a frank and lively attack, setting the taste buds in turmoil. Then come the fruit aromas accompanied by a beautiful tannic power.