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'All In' for the Rothschild Family

Three Branches Unite, for the First Time Ever, to Create Superlative Champagne

BY W. R. TISH

Luxury branding in any product category is never a simple function of pricing. And image alone cannot prevail without quality. True luxury, in wine especially, hinges both on product and pedigree. In Champagne Barons de Rothschild, the wine world now has a remarkable brand that not only epitomizes the famously high standards of the world's greatest sparkling wine, it also manages to add a fresh chapter to one of Europe's most renowned family legacies.

It would not be quite right to characterize Champagne Barons de Rothschild as "new." The idea was hatched, fittingly at a gathering of the family, in 2003. It debuted quietly in France, Australia, Japan and Germany in 2009; extended to 10 more markets in 2010; and reached the U.S. in tiny quantities in late 2011. But that is all part of the brand vision, which has been anything but fast and flashy—and rooted firmly in family. Indeed, the Champagne marks the first-ever collaborative wine venture for the three branches of the Rothschild tree (which dates back to 1743). Knowing that they would be layering this project on top of three distinct business entities and a collective reputation, it is no surprise that they chose to follow a patient course of development unswerving in the pursuit of top-of-the-class excellence.

Why Champagne? Start with the fact that they all love it. Secondly, with its emphasis both on terroir and blending in

creating wine of the highest quality, Champagne parallels Bordeaux, an established area of Rothschild expertise. Upon this foundation, the family aimed to ensure that the wine fit seamlessly into the Champagne tradition and community, and reflected the family's motto, represented by the coat of arms on the bottles reading "Concordia—Industria—Integritas."

Highest Standards

Development of Champagne Barons de Rothschild began, quite naturally in the vineyards, and with a clear vision of house style. The family teamed with growers in Côtes des Blancs and Montagne de Reims, securing fruit exclusively from Premier Cru and Grand Cru rated vineyards. The grape sourcing coincided with the decision to make a Chardonnay-driven house style; while only 28% of the total vineyard acreage in Champagne, the family's cuvées each contain 60% or more of Chardonnay—widely acknowledged as the varietal heart of the region's most elegant wines.

Other keys to ensuring top quality from the very start: for purity of character, an extremely low *dosage*—between 5 and 8 grams/liter of sugar (most houses use 10 grams or more); an unusually high percent-



The Champagne Barons de Rothschild trio includes, from left: Blanc de Blancs (100% Chardonnay; SRP \$125); Rosé (made with 5% red wine; \$125); and Brut (60% Chardonnay; \$100).

age (40%) of reserve wines; and long aging in bottle—about four years, including four to nine months after disgorgement. Specially selected yeasts, small fermentation tanks (30 and 60 hl capacity as opposed to the 200-300 hl norm) and a dedicated operation just for the Verzenay red wine used in blending of the rosé also speak to the meticulous production process.

While Philippe Sereys de Rothschild (son of Philippine) has assumed the role of the family's Champagne spokesperson, to ensure that the project maximized resources and achieved their exceptional goals, the family hired two industry veterans to oversee day-to-day operations. Frédéric Mairesse, the managing director, previously worked at Domaines Paul Jaboulet Aîné in the Rhône, at Ch. La Lagune in Bordeaux and for a dozen years at leading Champagne houses. Jean-Philippe Moulin, chief winemaker, was previously the cellar master at Perrier-Jouët, Mumm and Ruinart.

Among the recent tasks undertaken by Mairesse is the establishment of the brand's headquarters in Reims (which, fittingly, has been furnished with items contributed by each family branch) and a guest house by the production facility in Montagne de Reims. His greatest challenge ahead will be to guide the trickle of bottles to a global market, and gauging the optimum retail, restaurant and resort outlets. Here in the U.S., distribution is being handled exclusively by Pasternak Wine Imports. ■

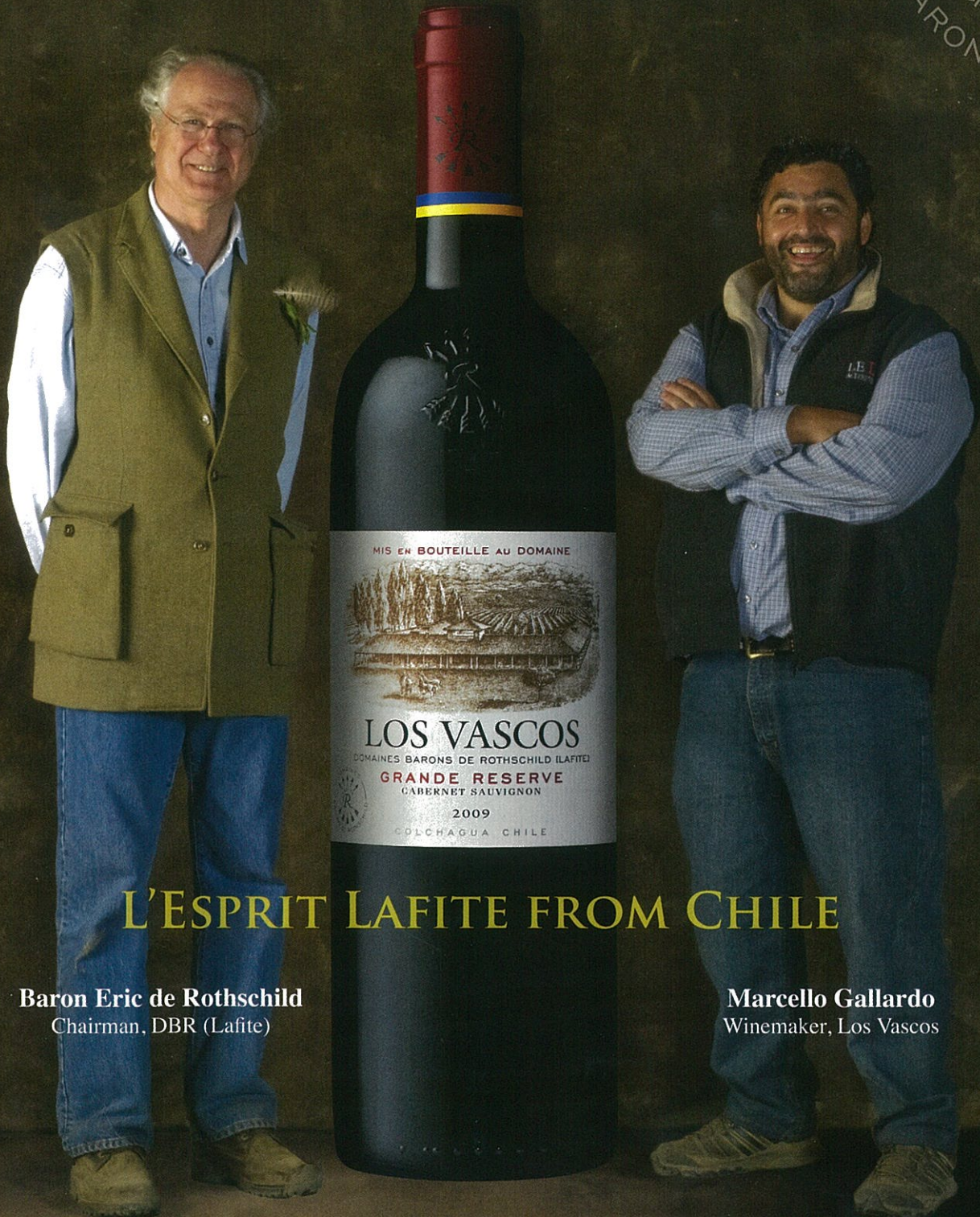
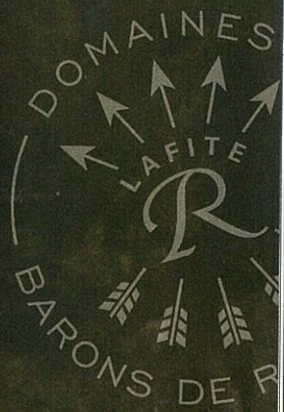
The three branches of the Rothschild family, all descended from Mayer Amschel Rothschild (1743-1818): Baron Éric de Rothschild (Ch. Lafite); Baronne Ariane, wife of Baron Benjamin de Rothschild, far right (Ch. Clarke, Edmond de Rothschild Group); in center, Philippe Sereys de Rothschild, and Baronne Philippine de Rothschild (Ch. Mouton).



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