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MAGAZINE

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Q&A WITH STEPHANE DERENONCOURT

BORDEAUX LUMINARY AND GLOBAL WINEMAKER/CONSULTANT

The tireless wine expert reflects on consulting for 70 wineries, why you should pay attention to Virginia and making the perfect bottle of Bordeaux.

Winemaker and international wine consultant Stephane Derenoncourt originally made his name in Bordeaux, where he started working the vines almost 30 years ago. After moving from the field into the cellar, he produced two remarkable wines in succession—first with the highly regarded 1993 vintage at Château Pavie Maquin, an outstanding wine in a difficult year, and then again in 1996, at Château La Mondotte, which quickly became a highly prized collectible. He and his consulting team can now be found at any one of 70 wineries around the world, including Francis and Eleanor Coppola's Rubicon Estate in California, Château Massaya in Lebanon, and Temuta Argentiera in Bolgheri, Italy. Closer to his home, Derenoncourt is also working with both Château Smith Haute Lafitte and Château Priure-Lichine in Bordeaux. *Wine Enthusiast* chatted with him over dinner in New York, where he introduced the first vintage—2006—of Derenoncourt California, his first wine outside of France that bears his name on the label.

Wine Enthusiast: How long have you been making wine?

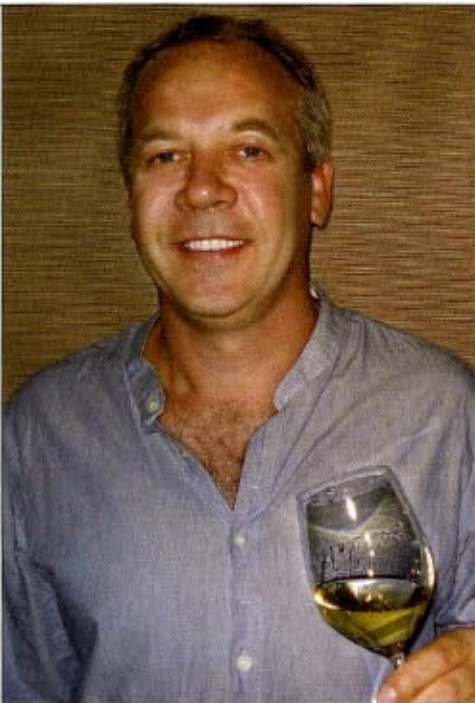
Stephane Derenoncourt: I started 27 years ago. I knew nothing about wine. It was a difficult time to find a job, and I left my home in the north of France to go to Bordeaux for the harvest. For three years I moved from estate to estate, and in '85 I started a true job. I started work on a new project, Château Pavie Maquin, in St. Emilion.

WE: And after that?

SD: It was a challenge, but it was a great success. Three years later, I was asked to create wine at another new estate, La Mandotte, which was also a great success. I stayed for three years, but I like a challenge and to travel. I decided to become a consultant.

WE: How would you describe the work of a consultant?

SD: As a consultant, for example, if you want to buy an estate, you call me, and I see the soil, I see the vineyard, and I see the possibility. I try to extract the good philosophy of production, close to the terroir, close to your feeling, close to your taste, and I organize the wine with the people of the estate.



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WE: How many different vineyards are you consulting on? How do you manage them?

SD: Today we consult for about 70 estates, but we have a very good team. I hire very young people, just after school, and they spend one year with me doing nothing but observe and taste. After one year, they start working, to help me. Now on each estate I have a consultant.

WE: What are some of the countries and regions you are working in?

SD: I work a lot in France: Bordeaux, Rhône Valley, Loire Valley, Sud-Ouest. But I am also in Ribera del Duero and Toro in Spain, In Italy I am in Bolgheri and Chianti, and I also work in Austria, Hungary, Lebanon, Syria, Turkey, California and Virginia.

WE: During harvest, what is your schedule like?

SD: I start to harvest whites in Turkey in early August, and from then until mid-December I work every day. I wake up at 6 a.m. every day, and I stop working at 10 p.m.

WE: Tell us about your project in Virginia.

SD: When I first met Rachel Martin in Bordeaux in '05, and she told me about Boxwoods, I didn't know there were vineyards in Virginia. I was interested in Boxwoods first because of the people. Rachel and John (Kent Cooke) are so excited about it. The soil is good, and they planted good quality grapes.

WE: What types of grapes are you growing there?

SD: The best grape in Virginia is Cab Franc—definitely. But we also have very good results with Merlot, which is easy to grow everywhere. We have some very good Cab Sauvignon, and a little bit of Malbec and Petit Verdot. John wanted to make two wines, a Right Bank style of Bordeaux, and a Left Bank. We are making something very elegant.

WE: And what are you doing in California?

SD: I am working in Napa. The winemakers of California have great respect for the grapes and style of Bordeaux. I am now there six times a year. Derenoncourt California 2006 is the first vintage of a wine with my name on

the label outside of France.

WE: Where will you work next?

SD: To be honest, it is not so much just about the place or the vineyard: I have to have a good feeling. Making wine, for me, is mostly about the people.

—MIKE DESIMONE AND JEFF JENSEN