

Laurence Berlemont and the amazing story of a vineyard in Saint-Tropez

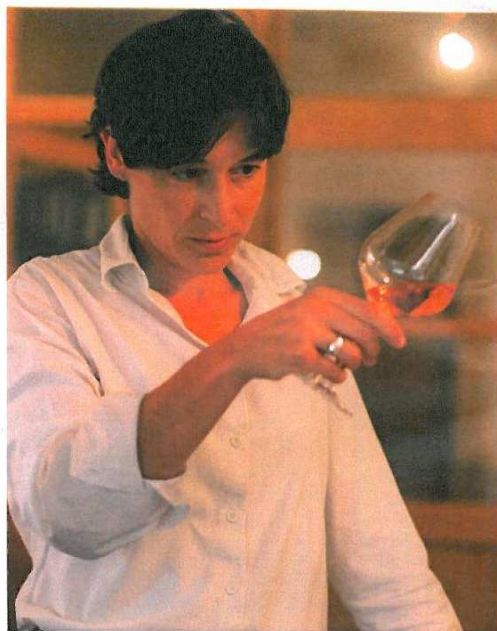
When Laurence Berlemont set up as a consultant in Brignolles, Provence in 1995, she had no idea that some seven years later she would be in charge of a unique vineyard - La Ferme des Lices - in Saint Tropez.

Berlemont trained as an agronomist specialising in viticulture and oenology at the Institut National Agronomique Paris-Grignon, one of France's *grandes écoles*. "I was inspired to specialise in oenology by the late Denis Boubals, one of France's great wine consultants."

After work experience at Château Lafite during the very good 1995 harvest, Berlemont came to Brignolles at the end of that year. "As I spoke reasonably good English I soon established a niche market with foreign investors. As you know many foreigners are attracted by Provence - its climate etc. Initially I just gave advice - acting as a consultant. However, this soon developed further as many of my foreign clients were only here occasionally, so they needed someone to look after their estate - the vineyard etc. We began to be the administrators for several *domaines*: where we are given the keys to the estate and we manage everything putting in a vineyard manager and staff as well as supplying tractors etc. I started with two *domaines* in 1995 - today we look after 30 and we are now a team of four consultants."

Among their projects are Château Miraval (www.miraval.com) at Correns, made famous by Angelina Jolie and Brad Pitt, and Château Margüi at Châteauevert.

"How I came to be the only independent producer in Saint-Tropez is a remarkable tale. One day about 12 or 13 years ago an Englishwoman, who was interested in buying a vineyard, contacted me. We visited a number of properties but she did not buy on this occasion. However, in 2001 she contacted me again and explained



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that she had now bought a property in Saint-Tropez. She hadn't contacted me before buying because the vines were in such a dreadful state she was worried that I would advise her against buying! She had fallen in love with the house, which had some two hectares of vines.

"She wanted me to rent the vines and run the vineyard. Although it wasn't my intention to be a wine producer, it was such an



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opportunity and a challenge that I accepted. Then about a year later a friend of a friend contacted me and asked me to look after some vines in Saint-Tropez. Amazingly it turned out that he was the next-door neighbour, so I agreed to look after the two plots. It transpired that some 50 years ago that there had been a wine estate here, whose owner had divided into eight and sold the plots off for holiday homes with seven of the eight retaining some vines. Now I look after six of the plots totalling about 8 hectares of vines. Rolle is planted for the whites and then we have Grenache, Syrah, Cabernet Sauvignon and Tibouren for rosé and red."

Later the plot that included the *domaine's* old, tiny cellar came up for sale and they were able to purchase it.

"I only sell wine labelled La Ferme des Lices if I'm satisfied with its quality. 2002 was the first vintage when I only made rosé. 2003 there was both red and rosé, while 2006 I made all three colours. In 2009 we extended the old cellar and now we can keep bottled wine there and we have a small shop where people can buy the wines but only by appointment."

Jim Budd

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