

Ancestors came from France during the Crusadors ~100 years ago. Father Gaston Hochar started winery in 1930, I took over in 1959. Major Ronald Barton (of Château Langoa-Barton and Leoville-Barton) stationed in Lebanon during World War II befriends Gaston Hochar, strengthening links with Bordeaux and influencing the Musar style, which is why when the war ended as I turned 18 I went to Chateau Leoville Barton (St Julien) and studied oenology under Jean Riberau and Emile Peynaud in 1964.

Story of Emile Peynaud: came to visit in 1970 to taste wines. "I'm impressed by the wine". My confession: I made the wines in the opposite way you taught us to. "We teach the tools, you figure out how to make the wine..."

LD: You returned to Bekka Valley in the late 1950s.

Our winery is not in Bekka Valley where vineyards are. Over time Lebanon became independent. Just after WWI Lebanon went into French mandate. Then there's some areas belonging to Syria eastern part of Bekka Valley. So father is afraid and established winery in the Ghasir - the mountain range bordering Bekka valley. That's why today most of our vineyards are in Bekka Valley - 180 hectares total - but the winery is in Mount Lebanon, 60 miles away.

When did you decide to do winemaking?

I never decided, I accepted - I asked father to leave so he did. Father left and I was stuck making wine - started making a bit of wine in 1959 before studying oenology in 1963. I made by wine by instinct.

Why told your dad to leave? I just graduated and wondered what to do. I wanted to be a civil engineer a builder while taking care of the winery. It took me 4-5 years to graduate from engineering then study in Bordeaux. I studied law ~30 years old and became a lawyer. Father was very young but smoked a lot and had a heart attack at 45 (thus the hand-off to Serge), passed away at 62. He taught me about quality - be the first/best one. Mother was clever founder of a school, red cross, really active, helped a lot in the winery business.

You never took your dad's name off the label - eldest son named after father too. 1959 when I took over I wanted to redesign the label the designer only modified/brushed up on the design. The concept of the family is important.

What was the wine like in 1959? My agents in US and 4 top sommeliers in US wanted to taste wine by my father. I opened a 1952 Chateau Musar red the quality was still there the wine was alive but they said it tastes great but not Ch. Musar. That's what I realized my imprints made Ch. Musar different. And I rarely talk about those wine ever since, except once for a birth year bottle for a client 1948 Ch. Musar.

How many wineries were working with vineyards in Bekka Valley in 1959? 4-5 producers till 1990... Now there are 50 wineries.

A culture 7000 years ago, a history invaded by many other countries. Last century early stages, very little was produced. ~Own vineyards. There was no market - Arak etc. were what people drank. Since French mandate - which introduced wine consumption. Since 1975 when war started we had been selling 97% within Lebanon to Lebanese and tourists, which disappeared with the war, which is why I started looking for markets outside Lebanon. I discovered UK market to be a connoisseur market I thought it was better than to be in UK than US where I was trying. I established my company in 1979 in UK and since 1999 we were selling most of our wines all over the world and very little in Lebanon. I was lucky I looked for markets outside Lebanon and after this I was not interested in Lebanese market at all.

Michael Broadbent started to champion your wine in late 1970s. How did you meet? By accident in a bistro he came by Christopher Tatomer?? Michael came by, tasted my wine and was impressed. Once he wrote in Decanter six months later 1979... His 1967 - memorable, 1959, 1961 - a bit of ?? a touch of Burgundy, great wines. His son is Ch. Musar's importer now, also the agent in US. Wine needs understanding and he knew the wine. Michael Broadbent ('s son??) served Ch. Musar 1988 at his wedding.

You didn't make any 1976 because of war, which started in 1975. There was no fuel, no electricity, no way to transport grapes to the winery. It was the only year when I couldn't harvest. In 1984 I was not able to harvest either but I harvested a little - 1000 cases.

It was said in 1977 you set your style: what's your style: I thought I'd want to plant new vines and would know everything when I started. But it'd be too time consuming. So I studied old vines/varieties already planted. It took me 18 years to find the best formula - Cab Sauv, Carignan, Cinsault. CS is the skeleton, backbone; Carignan is the flesh, muscle; Cinsault is the skin. In my wine, you can detect CS but you don't smell it. That's hidden by Carignan and sometimes Cinsault.

A touch of volatile acidity: is there a long élevage process? I'm addicted to VA, once you have grape juice at high density it ferments with simple yeast - many yeasts at the beginning. Once it reaches 13.5% there are new yeasts that finish the fermentation. Once you reach a complex wine a big wine higher acidity due to our climate in Bekka - a lot of rain, in harmony with sugar, and tannins because we have a lot of sunshine.

one vintage was so acidic that we couldn't release it - when we did release it became the top - 1995

we use only cement for fermenting all wines, some young whites are in stainless steel fermented, for chateau musar and hochar family wine I use concrete - more than cement [it makes sense because Romans helped...]

also wine from this region is mentioned in the Bible so is cedar. Noone has a history of aging wine in cedar? I dont know.. Good to bring up cedars - Lebanon is known for cedars, built a temple in Jerusalem for cedars of Lebanon. Just three cedar forests remaining. This is a symbol of Lebanese wine - because Lebanon is a country which has been perenity - something that ages very well just like the cedars.

Ferment in the concrete, racked eventually move into French oak after six months after the fermentation ended. So wines sit on lees in vat for six months then racked into French barrels for one year then back to concrete vat. But each varietal separately then two years after blend all wines together at 1/3 1/3 1/3 of CS, Carignan, Cinsault. Blend in the lots in the concrete, leave there for one more year, at the end of the 3rd year, then bottle. Then age in bottle in the cellar for at least 4 years. Wine released after 7-8 years. No cultured yeast, spontaneous ferment, no additives, no filtration, no fining, only thing now - little sulfur < 10mg - organic. Vintage 84 - a small harvest. We were not able to harvest and suddenly by accident on Oct 23 we could still bring grapes to the winery we went to the vineyard just 15 tons available due to war, unstable situation when Lebanon was invaded by Israel/Seria. On the road/vineyard just on one side sat the tanks. by accident i produced 2000 bottles. Detoured to get the grapes into winery after ~7 days after picking. 1984 was not supposed to be ever released - the grapes arrived fermenting. It was more like Madeira. US sommeliers Paul Grieco came tasting the wine and promised to list the wine in the restaurant - we took their offer just released 1984 to the market but I think the wine takes another 10 years. Once you taste it it might be a great wine - endless, has dimension, thrilling, very high sugar, high VA. on the nose like a Port - it should be drunk only by wine people, not by young people. Maybe they would be fascinated by the history/story/etc. Bekka Valley Lebanon is like no other places in the world producing a wine unlike any other. Land of Paradise. Harvests are conducted by ?Barowens? - mostly bc they come from Seria, bc Lebanon lacks man power and they come help us. Elevation - Lebanon has only mountains. Mount Lebanon - up to 10,000 feet high - is immediately by the sea. Bekka Valley at least 10k feet high, then Mount Lebanon ~10k feet high. We border Israel and Seria in south... that's all of Lebanon - 120 length X 30 width miles. So even though its called valley it's still at 3000 feet at elevation at Bekka, its between two mountains still very high despite being a valley. I was at Denver and discovered the elevation was >5000 feet, in Mexico its over 6000 feet but a plain. But Lebanon has many kinds of different soils where >200 plants in such a small territory. Thyme is like Za'atar... Za'atar combined with sumac (tangy and acidic) and with some oil is a very healthy food..

other crops in Bekka - olives, all kinds of fruits, etc.

each meter is different in mount lebanon - magnificent

bekka valley is mostly known for agriculture center

white vines indegenous grapes from Lebanon - ancient the oldest grapes many years before humanity seed discovered were dated 900 BC, "dates of Beirut" large long grapes not made to produce wine but table grapes

bush vines, just pruning. no stake.

white grapes are Obaideh, Merwah on original rootstock

Merwah is the ancestor of Semillon, Obaideh of Chasselas - same as Chardonnay/Rousanne/Marsanne family. They have been here for thousands of years and I've been using them since I made wine.

Its only 10 years ago we decided to show that we can be modern even though we are old - so planted Chardonnay - and made Musar Jeune Blanc from Chardonnay. But I dont think it is what bekka is about. but its important to showcase the modernity that evolves with consumers.

1959 white wine your first vintage - an incredible wine. If you can still get it, its thrilling - each time its a such different wine and even more thrilling each time. it matures two months later than Chardonnay, has less alcohol than Chardonnay picked in Aug (~14%) while this wine ~12%. thus never able to produce sweet wines. but over time it gets such sweetness. i discovered that as wines age they grow bigger and younger - bigger in the sense of dimension/taste/concentration/complexity. you served the whites after reds - because my whites are bigger than my reds. 2005 red is impressive, 2005 white is totally different but impressive then you go back to red you realize the white overwhelms it. Interesting fact: Bekka valley at 3000 feet high but the whites are in the lebanon mountains at 4000 feet high. soils are different too - soils in mount lebanon is different than bekka

oft i heard its limestone with gravel on top - but it changes in different areas? - yup you can find limestone, sand, gravel, stone, etc. because but bekka formed in 2nd millienia era alluvials washed down, up the mountains layers get thinner soils get gravelly/rocky; Cinsault can be like Syrah in one site, Pinot Noir in another... pinkish not deep red. speaks of the impressive biodiversity of bekka valley

so whites are aged in wood for 9 months, ferment the whites mostly in oak from oct - june, for always no skin contact - but it takes time to transport from vineyard to winery when skin contact might happen, in the vats after receipt, NO

once we receive we crush it destem press directly and send to the fermentation vats no stems just like the reds 60/40 O/M typically on average but sometimes 50/50 70/30 once racked from the vat into the concrete to blend in July

how old are barrels? 1/2/3 year old barrels usually, once had the war we had to stop for 3 months and resume, due to the situation of lebanon, we could not ship every day every month so we started to sell many wines in du-cay?? to make sure we have wines in du-cay to deliver to the world when we cannot ship from Lebanon, today the whole world gets shipment out of du-cay the only place receiving allocations directly from lebanon is US market but it takes extra 2 months to reach the US basically the same...

1981

we make a rose [jeune rose? ch. musar rose?] - Chateau Musar Rose, 45 years ago i produced some champagne and discovered chateau musar method champaneois and not allowed to be called it so i was upset - opened everything and stopped making it.

20 years ago I always dreamt of rose - so blended two drops of cinsault in chateau musar blanc. and it tasted totally different - in 1994 i bottled 100 cases of it since then i produced it not every year but last three years we produced them all. now at 2012 and we sold it out and are short of it. it will age too. can live forever.

interesting wine: chateau musar white + cinsault gives a differernt dimension

the other rose: rose jeune is made by just cinsault fermented with skin for 30 hours then racked then finishes fermentation - totally different wine than chateau musar rose. Reds are aged 7 years, whites are aged for 7 years too but roses are released yearly because it is not a year meant to be aged its always sold out before produced. if you want the value of musar - its not.

musar esp red: marked vintage variation: i dont care if they are the same or not - 97 so different than 99 because my no-touch philosophy made the wine develop the character without being affected by anything so they show what was the most important in the year and no year is ever alike! Gaston Hochar came to the winery in 1993 - its been 20 years, he manages the winery now, another winemaker Tarek Sakr has been at the winery since 1991 i trust him completely. Gaston/Marc much more serious than me. They dont have this fantasy of mine... They adopted the philosophy of Musar. They suggested bottling after 2 years not 3 years - much more efficient - i agreed so we bottled 98, 99, 00 a couple of bottles after two months right after the blending then also bottled after 3 years. in 2002/2003 we tasted the wines, the bottles that bottled after 2 years were great/impressive, the ones bottled after 3 years tasted signature of ch. musar - so they decided to keep the tradition of bottling after three years. Ch. Musar and Ch. Musar Hochar Pere et Fils are bottled after two years. CMH is made to be simpler than CM on purpose. CMH is meant to be widely liked, whereas CM is meant to be CMusar i dont care if people like or hate it. its important to me. complex/problematic. hochar is meant to showcase i can make a wine accepted by everyone.