

Wine with a Conscience

With sustainable wine production on the rise, **Briony Key** takes a closer look at the award-winning vineyards leading the charge

We all know about the world's growing environmental concerns, but now a group of French wine producers have joined forces to give nature a helping hand. Château de La Dauphine, Château Fourcas Hosten and Château Couhins focus on sustainability and have found it's a rewarding process, with each gaining wine tourism awards. Their fine produce comes at very quaffable prices and you can visit some of their vineyards to find out more about them.

Château de La Dauphine

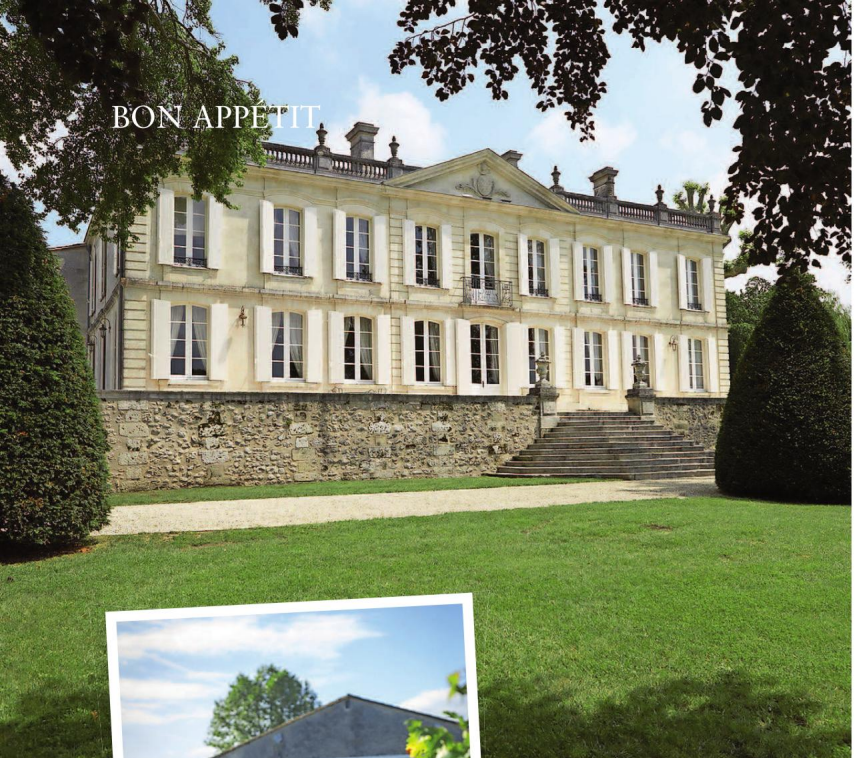
The vineyard dates back to 1744, when Jean-Baptiste de Richon started building the château. It was named after Marie Josèphe de Saxe, the Dauphine of France, and mother of Louis XVI, who visited the site and gave her title to the estate. Fast-forward to 2000 and some major investments were made. The 53-hectare estate started organic farming in 2012 and biodynamic farming in 2015 when the Labrune family purchased it. Biodynamic farming is very similar to organic farming with the main difference being that the former uses different principles to add vitality to plants, soil and livestock. It is an ecological approach based on the work of philosopher and scientist Dr Rudolf Steiner. Château de La Dauphine's current owners wish to conserve the environment using ethical means and to gain a better understanding of their vines so that they become healthier. They also aim to protect their staff



by choosing alternative methods to chemicals and pesticides. The vineyard currently produces 90 per cent Merlot and 10 per cent Cabernet Franc. It also has regular public tours to allow visitors a closer look at its work, with the Green Tour, developed in 2017, costing €15 per person. It is available from May to October and includes a visit to the vineyard, a biodynamic workshop, the kitchen and aroma gardens, and the cocoon – where visitors taste the organic wines, honey, Merlot and Cabernet Franc jelly. Themed and customised tours are also available, including the Classic Tour, the Tasting Tour and the Yummy Tour. The château has been awarded three gold awards for the quality of its wine tourism facilities. ➤➤

MAIN: A view of the hills of Château de La Dauphine

ABOVE: Château de La Dauphine amphora and cellar



Château Fourcas Hosten

Located in the heart of the quiet village of Listrac-Médoc, Château Fourcas Hosten extends to 50 hectares and contains a manor house, grounds and vineyards. It has been in the care of many different owners, with each contributing to its future growth.

Today this trend continues, with

the chateau making people, flora and fauna its top priorities, with a dedicated team committed to improving the quality of the vines. A major replanting campaign began in 2010 and is due to come to an end next year. By 2016 100 per cent of the white vines and almost 70 per cent of the red vines were being worked using organic techniques, with the aim to get the whole vineyard certified by 2022. The estate has been nominated for awards several times in the Best of Wine Tourism Competition, winning the Architecture and Landscapes category in 2014 and scooping the gold prize in 2017 in the Sustainable Wine Tourism Practices category. Château Fourcas Hosten offers group tours that include the 'Introduction to a Great Wine'. It costs €6 and sees guests tour the estate, hear an explanation of the wine making methods and visiting the vat rooms and cellars. The 'Discover Château Fourcas Hosten' includes a guided estate tour, costing €10, where visitors find out more about the property while tasting red wines. 'The Red and White Wine Experience' gives an overall view of the wine making process and the chance to taste both, costing €16. The 'At the Heart of Nature Tour' costs €10 and includes red wine tasting in the park.

Château Couhins

The French National institute for Agricultural Research (INRA) bought Château Couhins in 1968. The institute is Europe's leading agricultural research

institute and the world's number two centre for agricultural sciences. Its scientists focus on environmental preservation and sustainable methods around wine and the vine, and in 2015 Château Couhins won the Best of d'Or Wine Tourism award for environmental practices and joined the Great Wine Capitals Global Network. The network, which includes wine professionals and consumers, hosts technical schools to share agricultural research innovations and sustainable practices. In the 17th century Château Couhins belonged to the Banchereau family and produced mostly red wine. In the 1880s, the property was acquired by Bordeaux wine merchant, Constantin Hanappier, before becoming one of the wine properties owned by the Gasqueton family. It was at this time that white wines production began. Under their leadership, the property established itself as a producer of exceptional wines, reinforced by the purchase of Château Pont du Langon which, attached to Couhins, enabled the vineyard to be expanded to 60 hectares. In 1962 the death of Edouard Gasqueton brought an end to this golden era and saw the start of a difficult period, with its succession of poor vintages. By 1968, Couhins' vines had virtually been abandoned but then INRA bought the site, restructured the vineyard and developed new wine-making facilities that were completed in 1981. Today, Couhins has 25 hectares of vines and employs production techniques based on a combination of traditions and the results of INRA's research at the property. Marketed within INRA's extensive network for 25 years, Couhins' wines began to be sold through merchants in the Place de Bordeaux in 2007. A further step was completed in 2013 with the opening of a new building to present Cru Classé de Graves to professionals and wine enthusiasts. In 2017 Château Couhins was awarded a *médaille d'or* for excellence in sustainable wine growing.

As wine tourism becomes more and more popular, with people wanting to know more about the process of getting from vine to glass, as well as enjoying a quality product at the end, so 'green' wine tourism gains in popularity too. These producers are making great steps in sustainable wine production – a trend that is only likely to grow in 2019. I suspect it's going to be a good year. 🍷



PHOTOGRAPHS: CHATEAU DE LA DAUPHINE; VINEKIA; INRA