

## **This French winemaker thinks Singapore's wine consumers have become more mature and adventurous.**

To be able to deliver wines to homes really helped Singapore's wine market, says Basile Guibert, French winemaker at Languedoc's 'grand cru' winery, who called Singapore for almost seven years.



Seven years ago, Basil Guibert moved to Asia and dropped anchor in Singapore, a long way from his home in the [south of France](#).

Having travelled the world, the 38-year-old was attracted to the buzz of the Orient. His first visit to [Hong Kong](#) for Vinexpo 2010 – the largest wine tradeshow – left a deep impression.

“I was 24 when I first visited Hong Kong, and I remember the smell, the air. It was just amazing,” he recollected. Guibert is the co-owner and head of Asia export at Mas de Daumas Gassac, a French winery based in Languedoc which he shares with his three brothers. The family estate, often called the ‘Lafite of Languedoc’ produces incredibly age-worthy wines and his job was to develop a network of clients and distributors in the region.



But in 2017, when he and his private banker wife Marie-Alix decided to move to Asia, they chose Singapore as their base. It was the place for us to live, he said, even more than Hong Kong.

“I wanted to start my family, and between Singapore and Hongkong, I felt Singapore would be a better ‘nest’. It is calmer, green with a lower density of buildings, and I loved the diversity of influences.”

We spoke on a Zoom call a few weeks after our last meeting in Singapore at a dinner at three-Michelin-starred [Odette](#). On the eve of Singapore’s first Vinexpo in May 2023, he hosted a number of Mas de Daumas Gassac’s trusted clients and distributors from all over Asia. The idea was to trace Mas de Daumas Gassac’s 40 years of wine history with his Asian clientele.

It was a momentous occasion and, inadvertently, a farewell to his beloved city, Singapore. Over seven years, he accomplished his goal with aplomb. Mas’s wines pour at top Asian establishments like Odette and [Les Amis](#) in Singapore as well as Petrus and Caprice in Hong Kong. Also, he established an exclusive distributor in each Asian city under his purview. It was time to return to the valley of Gassac, where the winery is based.

On cue, Basile choked when he addressed his guests to express his gratitude.

## A FINE WINE FROM LANGUEDOC

Selling a fine wine from Languedoc in Asia – a region enamoured with the classed growths of [Bordeaux](#) and the fine drops of [Burgundy](#) – was never going to be easy.



After all, as Guibert said “Languedoc is a region more famous for elevator music, rather than a Mozart concerto”, meaning that the flatland region tucked in the south of France is known for volume rather than the fine wine.

But Mas is different, and its success story is celebrated in the wine world.

The family-owned estate was discovered in 1970 by Basile’s parents, who came across a bedraggled farmhouse near the abbey of Anaine. Without any farming background, they weren’t sure what to grow on the land and engaged experts to conduct a soil analysis. When the soils were declared equivalent to the best found in Cote d’Or, Burgundy and the couple knew they had to plant grapes. In 1978, they released the first vintage under the guidance of France’s top-brass winemaking consultant Emile Peynaud.



Word got around, and the winery gained recognition for its stellar quality. Today, Mas de Daumas Gassac, often referred to as ‘the grand cru of Languedoc’, produces a stable of wines, including an age-worthy red wine with cabernet

sauvignon and its stablemates, merlot, cabernet franc and native varieties; a seductive white wine led by viognier and a charming rose frizant from cabernet sauvignon and mourvedre.

## A JOB CUT OUT FOR HIM

The youngest of four brothers is the first to admit he underestimated the Asian markets. He found it 'uneven'. "I thought, if I work hard, I will sell the wines," he shared. "But you look at all the markets that represent Asia, and they are all at different maturity levels and have different custom rules. Those define the markets."

And then came brand and taste awareness which differed across the cities. "There was only one solution for me. It was to make myself known," said Guibert. "I decided to create connections with people, which took me four to five years."



He opened bottle after bottle of his wines and shared Mas's story. "I invited private customers to my home and tried to build a relationship with so many communities – Indian, Chinese and expats," he said and let the wine do the talking.

Finding the right distributor is the key to success. For instance, in Singapore, he found like-minded people at Vintage Wine Club, his new wine stockist, who supported him with optimal services like WhatsApp orders and next-day deliveries.

Those two things – connecting with people and distributor efficiency – helped Mas de Daumas Gassac, he concluded. "From 2017 to 2022, we increased eight times in value and 12 times in volume."

## THE EVOLVING MARKET IN SINGAPORE

Guibert shared three key observations of Singapore's ever-evolving wine market.



First, the growth of the online wine sales market changed the landscape. “In many Asian markets like Taiwan and Korea, online wine sales are forbidden. But for Singapore, having wine delivered to homes really helped. Suddenly, you could buy a merlot at the same time you bought nappies, and you get it delivered at home.”

Second, he noticed that Singapore’s fine wine consumers were maturing, which succoured Guibert’s cause.

“In your journey into wine, you start with the big regions. Bordeaux and Burgundy and then, Rhone.” After a while, wine collectors look for something new, and Guibert identified that “Languedoc has a dimension in this journey.” Earlier, no one visited Languedoc from Asia. Now, after 20 visits to Bordeaux and another 20 to Burgundy, the rural and raw Languedoc has started to appeal to seasoned Asian wine tourists.

Lastly, Guibert revelled in the maturity of the wine ecosystem. “Growth is not restricted to drinkers, but also the sommeliers, distributors, and restaurants. You need a sommelier association, education, restaurants who have the courage to bring the wines and then comes the clientele.” Over the last decade, Singapore has achieved that maturity with an influential Sommelier Association led by Gerald Lu, multiple wine education providers and venues like [67 Pall Mall](#) establishing themselves in the heart of the city.



Another sign of a maturing market is when wine becomes less posh and snobby; he has already witnessed this here. “This is an exciting time. People are interested. The only thing that needs to get better is the tax.”

## **SINGAPORE JOURNAL**

Besides work success, Guibert is walking away with the best of Singapore memories, including visits to his favourite Asian Civilization Museum, late-night bicycle rides at Marina Bay Sands and dining at his eclectic list of favourite restaurants, including Meta, Claudine, Imperial Palace, Muthu’s Curry, Madras New Woodlands and Vue.

Their friend list has decidedly grown here and includes chef Odette’s Julian Royer, who lived in the same building and shared ideas on how the two worlds of wine and cuisine collaborate with each other.

Adding to their successful stint, the Guiberts also welcomed two beautiful boys – now aged two and four – born in Singapore. The young family may have returned to France, but Guibert said Singapore will always have a special place in their hearts. “My kids may be French, but they will always have a touch of Singapore in them.”