

Ep 179: Chateau Musar - The age ability of these icon wines (Part 2)



Janina Doyle 00:00:07 Welcome to Eat Sleep Wine Repeat, a podcast for all you wine lovers, who, if you're like me, just cannot get enough of the good stuff. I'm Janina Doyle, your Host, Brand Ambassador, Wine Educator, and Sommelier. So, stick with me as we dive deeper into this ever evolving, wonderful world of wine. And wherever you are listening to this, cheers to you!

Hello, wine friends, and welcome back to part two with Marc Hochar of the iconic Chateau Musar. Now if you've missed the previous episode, I highly recommend you dive right back into that to uncover their captivating history, all of the resilience that has characterised Chateau Musar's journey, the wines and undoubtedly the people.

Marc also talks about the terroir of the Bekaa Valley, which you need to know about, and I'm just simply honoured to have Marc join us, who exhibits this, this genuine human connection, warmth and kindness, I'm sure you've all picked it up.

And so, we will continue with part two where we are going to focus on their white wines. So, you're going to get to know the ancient grape varieties, Obaideh and Merwah much better. We'll discuss oxidative ageing and find out how long these wines can actually age, and I don't know, when is the perfect drinking window? I will be cracking open a bottle of 2017 Chateau Musar White, so I hope you can join me on that one.

But don't forget, I'm really grateful to have the support and confidence from award-winning online retailer Wickhams Wine, so show them some love, pop across and see their great selection of wines. And you can use code "EATSLEEP10" for 10% off your first order.

And lastly, whilst I'm here, don't forget to subscribe to this podcast and click that bell so you don't miss an episode. And if you're feeling especially kind, leaving a review does help this podcast to become more discoverable to others. So, please share the love and on that note, I'm excited to share the rest of this episode with you all. Enjoy!

Janina Doyle 00:02:17 I want to go in that little bit deeper dive into the ageing of the wines. So, in part one, I said that we were going to talk about what I was drinking. I can now announce to everybody, in ProWein, you poured me a 1969 Chateau White, which was just insane.

And I can still remember your face, the pleasure of your face looking at me as I was just having my own special moment and it will go down in history now as a wine moment that I will keep. So, I'm so pleased to have been able to have that. You've got vintages back, what's your oldest vintage right now that you know of, cellared, waiting?

Marc Hochar 00:03:00 So, we have some from the 30s, but I don't know exactly which vintage because it's in a special room that we basically never open and we don't know what's in there. But we have some 48, for example.

So, last time I was in Lebanon, we had visitors from the US and we opened the 48, which I'd never tasted before. 75 years old. We were in 23 when we opened it. Amazing. Just up. And that was a red, that wasn't a white. In terms of the whites that we still sell, we go back to 54, which we actually opened at ProWein, but that was before you came to visit us.

Janina Doyle 00:03:37 No.

Marc Hochar 00:03:38 So you missed the white 54. We also opened 56 reds, which was also absolutely outstanding.

Janina Doyle 00:03:48 At this point, the fruit has gone super dried and maybe pretty diminished. And now, all the tertiary flavours and the earthy, maybe barnyard mushroom – you've got all these other flavours. And the wine gets lighter. It gets more ethereal. Like, describe to me what the 1950s Chateau Musar reds are like.

Marc Hochar 00:04:11 As I told you, I don't know how to describe our wines, but what I can tell you, you can have to taste them. We'll have to taste them one day together, Janina. I'm thinking back to this bottle of 48 that we opened. 56 was a little bit similar.

We had hoisin sauce. We had this almost barbecue component that came out, like pulled pork with barbecue type of aromas. Very like balsamico almost to some extent, but the wines were, as you say, ethereal, elegant, but the aromas were on this barbecue, almost sweet plum like plum sauce.

And what was surprising is when we opened the 56, so we opened it in the morning at ProWein and then we poured that bottle throughout the day. And as is usual with Musar, you ended up having actually the best part, which is after six, seven hours. So, when we got to the middle of the afternoon and to the end of the bottle, that's the part where the bottle was really singing. And that's maybe surprising to a few because some wouldn't expect wines that are that old to do so well with airing, but actually they do need this time.

Janina Doyle 00:05:25 Well, I remember, and as I was saying this to you, when I was trying the 1969 white, which obviously quite clearly is just so young compared to your other vintages. But it was like smelling the very best cognac you can find.

So, all of these dried apricots, these ginger spices, this vanilla, like everything you can imagine, but without any of the alcohol so that it's just luscious and smooth and the texture on my tongue, it just continued. And you watched me, didn't you? And I'm just like, okay, I didn't want to drink any of the reds because at that point I wanted to keep the flavour of my tongue because actually it's worth mentioning about all of Chateau Musar's wines, the length on these wines, they continue. They really continue. And I'm always blown away by that component in terms of structure, the length.

Okay. I have a question for you. We did discuss this before. When do you think is the perfect time to drink a Chateau Musar wine, red or white? Because obviously it tips, it changes. So, what's your thoughts on that?

Marc Hochar 00:06:42 I would say all the time. You should be able to drink it all the time.

Janina Doyle 00:06:49 Anytime, all the time.

Marc Hochar 00:06:50 Anytime, all the time. No, but in terms of which age, it's personal.

Janina Doyle 00:06:54 Yeah.

Marc Hochar 00:06:55 Some people really like our wines when they're young. Young meaning six to 10 years. I think our wines go through different phases. I think when they're in the six to 10 year brackets, you're talking a lot, or mainly about fresh fruit flavours and aromas.

As they hit, let's say 12, 15 years of age, they move to what I call the stewed fruit or the cooked fruit component. So, a bit more concentration in sweetness and sugars, as if you're really cooking the fruit.

And then afterwards, and this is the second phase, I call it the adolescence. And then they move to adulthood, and that's between 15, 20 years depending on the vintage. And the adulthood is when they move away from this cooked fruit component to earth. They will still have a bit of fruit. They'll still have a bit of this cooked fruit component, but they'll start to show a lot more earth.

And that's for me, the part that is the most interesting because it's the one that takes you on a journey every time. Every bottle is different. Every experience of an older Musar is different. Even if you're opening two bottles at the same time from the same vintage, you know, they might not evolve in the same way. This is life. And if you have something that's alive or a product that's alive, it's normal that it changes and it evolves in a different way. And so, every bottle will have this ability to take you on a journey.

For me, the journey is more interesting with an older wine than with a younger wine. But I understand if people prefer something that's more predictable in a way. And in that sense, maybe they would go for the younger vintages because then the experience will be a bit more similar. I tend to not like similar experiences. I tend to like to experience life every day. It should be different.

Janina Doyle 00:08:39 That's life.

Marc Hochar 00:08:40 That's life. Exactly.

Janina Doyle 00:08:44 Well, it's funny because I've got some of my most favorite wines. But I never, I very often don't drink them because I'm like, but I know they're amazing and I know they'll always be there and there's a whole world of wine to try and different vintages. It's just, you always want to be seeing what else is there, even if it's not as good as something else you've tried. It's all about the experience, right?

Marc Hochar 00:09:07 I was about to say a comment on the name of your podcast because it says Eat Sleep Wine Repeat. So, this is perfect except that when you do it, you don't want to repeat the same thing. You want to repeat a new experience all the time. But it's good to repeat. It's just that you don't want to repeat exactly the same thing. And this is where, I think, the beauty of all the wines is that you don't repeat the same thing. And this is the interesting part.

Janina Doyle 00:09:36 And you won't repeat things when you work through the vintages of Chateau Musar. And there are so many to go through. There are actually so many on the market. These are such cellerable wines and so many people are selling different vintages.

So, my question to you, why do you think they age so well? Do you think you mentioned in part one that these are really low yielding vines, they're very healthy vines, the fruit coming in obviously is top quality. Do you think that's what it is? Do you think it's something that you're doing in the winemaking?

Marc Hochar 00:10:12 Many answers to your questions. First answer and the honest one, I don't know.

Janina Doyle 00:10:18 Okay.

Marc Hochar 00:10:20 I don't know because you're asking me something which is linked to life. And there are a lot of things we don't know about life and we don't control. And when we make our wines, it's a gamble. When we decide on the blend, it's a gamble. When we decide when to harvest, it's a gamble. When we decide what to blend, which vats, everything is a gamble.

So, can I tell you it's because we've done something in a certain way that I know it's going to age better? It's a no because I don't know. All I know is that the experience we have is that by doing certain things, we've realised that our wines age. And we realise that the closer we stay to nature, the better the stability to age in the vineyards and in the winemaking process.

But is it a certain recipe? No, I think there are some vintages that did not work out well in the 70s, in the 60s. Even in the nineties, we had some mistakes. And so, we always make mistakes. And so, there's always a gambling component.

I think probably what makes a wine's age so well is a combination of millions of things, including organic vineyards, terroir, the varietals, maybe the process of bringing the wines over three hours in a truck, I don't know, maybe that helps. I think probably the natural fermentation that happens, the yeast that are at the winery on the grid, everything. So, I can't really pinpoint one thing. All I can say is that we try to make sure that we, we don't change things because we don't know if a small...

Janina Doyle 00:11:56 Because it works.

Marc Hochar 00:11:57 Because it works, yeah. And you don't know that a small tweak that we might change, for example, like bottling at two and a half years instead of three years, that will change maybe the nature of the wines.

We know it will because we've tested it. And it changes a little bit the complexity that you get in your wines, just by bottling six months earlier. When we do blends, I remember an experience we had when my father was still here. We were tasting and we were looking at the blend and we had one vat that had a bit of a high acidity. And so, we decided, okay, let's see how much we're gonna add of this vat into the blend.

And so, we did samples. 0%, 25, 50, 75, 100% of that blend. Then we tasted them blind. Then we said, okay, let's figure out what's the best. And when we tasted them, obviously, your mind as a

human, you're always trying to figure out what is 100, what is 50, what is 75, rather than focus on the taste, we said, no, no, don't focus on trying to figure out which is which, just focus on the taste.

We focused on the taste and we got to eventually agree on what was probably the right blend of Musar. But then we tried also to figure out which percentage of the acidic wine we had added, we realised that it wasn't linear. So, it's not, okay, we could spot the zero and we could spot the hundred. But in the middle, what we thought was 75 was actually maybe 50, what we thought was 25 was maybe 75.

And actually, it turned everything upside down in terms of how we expected the wines to behave by adding this percentage or additional percentage. So, the conclusion of all of this; we don't know. We just taste.

Janina Doyle 00:13:39 And I love that. And that is then the magic of grapes. There is a science, we can understand it, but actually when you start adding certain things, I've talked about this before doing dosage trials that I've done for sparkling wine, and you would think that as you add an extra gram of sugar into a sparkling wine, it would evolve, be a bit fruitier and a bit more intense. Absolutely.

And I've said many times that actually you'll get like the six grams and the eight grams being really citrusy and then in between the seven being really red-fruited and you're like, what? And then it dips down completely changed and then comes back up again and you're like, wine is not linear. And it should be, but I guess that's the exciting, marvellous, magical part of wine that you just kind of have to just go with the flow and enjoy it.

Marc Hochar 00:14:29 Exactly.

Janina Doyle 00:14:30 I have in my hand now the Chateau Musar White 2017, which I've been sniffing away. I have to say the whites are just so intriguing because of course, there is this slight oxidative edge to them, but they have this lovely, like, nutty, fruity, soft, creamy nature to them. Lovely perfume! So, let's talk for a second on the grape. It's a perfume, isn't it?

Marc Hochar 00:15:03 It's a perfume.

Janina Doyle 00:15:04 Let's talk about the grapes for a second, because you are using indigenous white grapes rather than having brought over French grapes and choosing French varieties. Why is that?

Marc Hochar 00:15:19 So, when my grandfather started, so we're talking 1930, there had been phylloxera, I think, in the early 1900s. And so, he had to plant reds because there were no reds of *Vitis Vinifera* available. But there were whites.

Obaideh and Merwah are two varieties that probably existed at the time of the Phoenicians, and we're talking up to 6,000 years ago, when they were producing wines in the region. And they were also still used to produce Arak, which is this anise-based spirit that we produce in Lebanon.

And so, the grapes were available. And so he said, okay, we will use these. He actually started just by using Merwah in the 1930s. And then when my father came in, he added the Obaideh component in

the 80s. And so, we ended up having a blend of Obaideh and Merwah from the middle of the 80s onwards or end of the 80s onwards.

They are very unique varietals, they create wines that as you say, are like more of a perfume. The more you wait, the more this perfume is intense. It's difficult to describe because they don't fit in a particular box of what you expect from a white wine. I remember being in Japan and we were tasting these whites with the sommeliers there and they said, "Ah, this is the umami of white wine because it doesn't fit in a box."

Janina Doyle 00:16:46 Yes.

Marc Hochar 00:16:47 It doesn't fit into a box of what you expect from a white. As the wines get older, they put on even more sweet notes on the nose to the point where you look at the bottle, first you look at the colour, because all the bottles are in clear bottles. People look at the colour and say, oh, this wine is gone. They open it and then they smell it and say, oh, wow, this is a sweet wine. And then they taste it and it's not a sweet wine. It's a dry wine.

It throws you off completely and it surprises a lot of people. And throwing people off in wine terms, I think is good because it shows you that what you know is basically – my father used to say, "The more I know about wine, the less I know about wine." And he did 55 vintages. And that's the reality is that when you're dealing with something that's alive and that's so many different varietals, so many different terroirs, so many different winemakers, the combinations are endless.

And this white is really unique in the same way as our reds are unique. I think our whites are even more unique. And their ability to age also is fantastic. I mean, you tasted the 69. The 69, you smell it and you just, actually I don't drink our old whites, I just smell them because just on the nose, you're just taken somewhere. You don't know where you're getting and you're where you're going. It's like a perfume but it's a perfume of so many different things that you don't expect that it makes the experience worthy.

Janina Doyle 00:18:19 Totally. I mean, so for anybody wanting to know about this for me in terms of smelling it. I get this, like a bruised spicy apple. I get that with then these toasted almonds. It's creaminess, but it's almost like a freshness of fresh milk, like real fresh milk rather than cream.

I say that just because, I don't know, it seems alive. Maybe this is a muscle memory being triggered. Not sure. I used to have a family living on a farm in Poland. So maybe, like you said in part one, maybe this is where I'm going back to. But actually there's even on the palate, just this touch of almost a smokiness with it. I need to go back. Hang on.

Yeah, like a smoked walnut vibe with some apricots and soft peaches. But it's weird because it's really fresh, yet the acidity is not very high compared to the typical international varieties that people are used to.

But again, there's elegance. But what's interesting is that it's delicious. This is 2017. It's got the characteristics that I was able to pinpoint of the 1969, but the 1969 is just softened and literally gone now. Like mouth coating weighty. It's got richer in terms of texture as it's got older, which is bizarre for me. But yeah, they're fascinating. So, it's a journey with these wines, right?

Marc Hochar 00:20:00 Yeah, I think you hit the nail on the head, as we say, because our whites, as they get older, get darker and heavier in terms of weight. The reds, it's the opposite. As they get older, they get lighter in colour, lighter in body.

So, it's exactly the opposite. Perfect. But yeah, that's the nature of these whites. And I think probably all of the whites that have the ability to age will have the same tendency to go on and put on a bit more weight and structure on the body.

Janina Doyle 00:20:36 Put on a bit of weight.

Marc Hochar 00:20:37 A good weight.

Janina Doyle 00:20:38 Like your traditional Mediterranean Nana. The nonny that when she cooks, she gets amazing food. There's a saying, I don't know if it's for the Italians or something. Why is it that the women, as soon as they get married, double in size? It's like a married apron, on, there's some sort of saying. Some Italians are going to kill me moving on.

Marc Hochar 00:20:58 Yeah. No, but if they cook well, I think it's not only the nonnas and the wives and I think it's the husbands also. So, I think everybody just puts on weight if you have good food.

Janina Doyle 00:21:07 That means they're well taken...

Marc Hochar 00:21:09 Yes, exactly.

Janina Doyle 00:21:10 Yeah, well taken care of. No, before I get myself in any more trouble, going back to like this current vintage as well, it is also much darker. You're not talking about pale lemon colour, you're hinting towards lemon amber. It's medium depth in terms of colour.

But that's also because these wines, the Chateau Musar white, are aged in oak as well, isn't it? Hence my smoky vibes, I guess.

Marc Hochar 00:21:37 It is. It is actually fermented in wood. There's no skin contact, so we just press the juice from the grapes, put them into wood, ferment, stay on lees there, and at the end of year one, we blend all of this, and then we bottle it. And so, it's bottled actually at year one, and then it stays another five years before it's released.

So, we release that year six, the white, same as the red. But I think the 17 is a vintage that has a bit more of this ripeness, this evolution. I think you tasted probably the 18 as well when we were at the fair. The 18 has probably a lighter body, lighter colour, more flowery notes. And the 18, the smell is very different from the taste. Whereas on the 17, what you smell is what you taste. And again, this is the unpredictable side of wine and every vintage will be different.

Even though these are varietals that are harvested relatively at the same time, very late. They're harvested in early October, so after the reds, which is fairly unusual. And despite having spent so much time in the sun compared to the reds and other whites that we brought in for Musar Jeune Whites, these old whites or these local whites just only come up to 12 degrees of alcohol, which is really low and surprising given how late we harvest them. Yes.

Janina Doyle 00:23:00 I'm looking at the back. This says 11.5%. Oh, it's a breakfast wine. Brilliant, Marc.

Marc Hochar 00:23:08 Yes, you can have it for breakfast. Yes, definitely. If you want to have a breakfast wine and we've had it once, I remember in the US we actually, the best would be the Chateau Musar Rosé.

So, Chateau Musar Rosé is the blend of Obaideh and Merwah, these two white varieties to which we add a little bit of Cinsault grapes when we crush them. And the Cinsault grapes give you this little hint of colour. And this 3% just changes the nature of the wine. The wines are ready to drink earlier. They just open up a bit differently compared to the whites. And that is a very versatile rosé. It's a serious rosé because it's like our whites.

So, it's a rosé that can age. We started producing it in 94 and we opened bottles of 94 and it's still absolutely outstanding. So, it's a more serious rosé, but it's extremely versatile. It goes with everything. So, with breakfast, actually, I'm sure it would be a very, very nice experience.

Janina Doyle 00:24:01 Well, you'll be happy to know and everybody, I will find out what episode it is. And I will put the link in my show notes that I featured the young Rosé and then your Chateau Musar Rosé. In one of my earlier podcasts, I think literally talking about what is Rosé.

So, I featured these two wines. And from what I remember of the Chateau Musar Rosé was this insane texture, quite herbal notes, again, this unique character that you definitely would not put with a typical rosé, but also savoury vibes and the nose was actually much more of this mineral savouriness rather than fruit.

But I'll have to dig up my tasting notes and I'll definitely put the link to the show notes if people can listen to that. But yes, rosé. I'm glad you mentioned that because I think sometimes people are still surprised that there's white and there's obviously the Jeune wines, the Jeune red, white and rosé, but they're like, oh, this white is there. And then you say there's rosé. They're what? Yes, you've got the whole collection, haven't you?

Marc Hochar 00:25:08 Yeah. On the Chateau, we have the three of them. But I think maybe one thing to mention, because when you take the tasting notes of what you remember, this may be the herbaceous part of the rosé. That is usually when you may open the bottle and also depends at which temperature you have it. And same for our whites. If the temperature is too cold, you will get a bit more of this.

As the wine warms up, like people, it opens up. And as it opens up, then you really get a bit more floral aromatics that you get from these wines. And so, you need a little bit of...

Janina Doyle 00:25:49 No. Maybe I did it wrong.

Marc Hochar 00:24:51 No. No, I'm sure you didn't. But it's a question of time. It's a question of time of letting the wines open. That's all. But I'm just saying actually, because...

Janina Doyle 00:26:01 I'm just going to have to do it again.

Marc Hochar 00:26:03 Yes, maybe.

Janina Doyle 00:24:04 I'm going to have to try again.

Marc Hochar 00:26:05 No, but I'm saying it also for the people who are hearing this, actually. So it's important not to drink the whites too cold. That's, I guess, my message.

Janina Doyle 00:26:16 Absolutely. So, actually there's a few things, one, whites and rosé, don't drink too cold. I actually think all of them, white, red, pink, decant. But one thing you mentioned again in part one, if you've got the time and the patience and the willpower, I guess more importantly, the willpower.

Perhaps you might recommend, like, with the white specifically, you said, don't drink it all today. Maybe don't even leave some just for tomorrow, but maybe of course, two, three, four days, try and have one glass every day, maybe five, six days and see what happens. Because you touched on that that there's a real interesting evolution of leaving it in the bottle and not just drinking it all on the same day, right?

Marc Hochar 00:26:59 Yeah. A few full days is short in terms of bizarre time span.

Janina Doyle 00:27:02 It's too short.

Marc Hochar 00:24:03 It's too short. And I'll tell you a story. So, I remember when I was not living in Lebanon and going back to Beirut and then I get into the office in Beirut. And my father gives me a glass of white and says, what do you think it is? First thing I know it's Musar because he never drank anything else. And he would not give me something else to blind taste.

So, at least I got that one right. But then I went and it was a white wine. So, I was trying to figure out going through the motions of colour density, taste, flavour profile, aromas, et cetera. And so I tell him it's 89 white. 89 white is a beautiful Musar. Really extremely complex. It just develops. It goes with everything. I mean, this is a wine that takes you on a journey literally for hours and hours.

And he tells me, no, no, it's not 89. It's 04. And 04, when we saw that it was probably 10 years ago, we're talking about a 10-year-old wine. And I said, yeah, but this doesn't taste like a regular 04. 04 would be probably a bit more fruit forward. This has already a lot of nuts and things like that happening. He said, yeah, it is all for, and here's the bottle. And he shows me the bottle on his shelf. And he told me, and we were in September, he told me, I opened it in January.

He left it and he left it in the office, you know, with the ups and downs of temperature, just with a cork, no coravin, no fridge, no nothing. And we were tasting it nine months later. And so, it had evolved and put on all these features that I found more reminiscent of 25 year old wine at the time.

So yeah, the wines can age. And so, if you have the ability to be patient when you open the bottle, just try after one week, two weeks, three weeks, even longer if you can, just to see where it goes. And you're because you're a professional, Janina. Take some tasting notes on the first day, then after one week, and then after two weeks, and then after a month, and then just compare and then just see where things have gone. That would be actually a very interesting experience too.

Janina Doyle 00:29:09 I am going to do this because we have recorded this. So now you've asked me to do it, which means I have to do it. So, I would do it.

Marc Hochar 00:29:21 Thank God it's recorded.

Janina Doyle 00:29:23 But I would do this with the white. But reds, would you open up a bottle of the Chateau Musar red and leave it more than four days?

Marc Hochar 00:29:31 No. Well, I think a week is probably the max with the reds. The acidity will pick up really a lot after three, four days. I remember, we had an article in the Decanter by Ballesteros, who was writing for Decanter. And so we sent him, I think 12 or 15 vintages before COVID (BC).

Janina Doyle 00:29:59 BC! Thank God, we're AC now.

Marc Hochar 00:30:01 Yes. And so I asked him, you know, when you're going to taste the wine, just make sure that you taste them over many, many days. And so, what he did was he tasted every day and recorded his rating every day for each wine.

And then, his final rating was the highest that he got for any particular wine. And most of the wines, his highest rating was after either the second or the fourth day. So, between two and four days, depending on the wine.

Janina Doyle 00:30:31 That's so interesting.

Marc Hochar 00:30:32 Yeah. And this is, we're talking reds here. And so, that was interesting. Yeah, the wines do continue to open up. I mean, we sent him back to 61 vintage. So we're not talking about young wines. We're talking about very old wines. And I think 61, I think he wrote down the highest rating was after three days or four days. So, even old wines need time.

Janina Doyle 00:30:57 Okay. That is intriguing. Everybody, you heard this here first, but perhaps we don't take that advice for other wines. These are special wines. These are Chateau Musar wines that have a magic, the magic we don't know, but they have a magical component that can handle this.

Before somebody starts opening up some 300 pound bottle of second growth Bordeaux thinking, hey, I'm going to wait, I'll just drink one glass now and I'll come back to it in a week or two. And then they're like, oh.

Marc Hochar 00:31:25 I wouldn't know. It depends really on every wine. But again, I'm just relaying the experience that we had with this particular wine writer.

Janina Doyle 00:31:34 I just want to touch on these ancient varieties, Obaideh and Merwah. What are they? I mean, from when I look online, it's like, okay, they're lower in acidity. I think Merwah is like a bit of nuts and citrus. I think they say one's related to Semillon. I think Merwah is related to Semillon, right? They think there's some sort of relationship that Obaideh has with Chardonnay?

Marc Hochar 00:32:02 In terms of history, when we started producing these whites and with these varietals and started exporting them, first I guess they were very difficult for people to understand. So, I could tell you for 20 years, from the 70s until the mid 90s or late 90s that these whites were just not understood. And I'm talking about the international community. I'm not talking about just us in Lebanon.

But we persisted because we thought, okay, they have a place and they have a style and they have an identity that's very unique, so the market will come around. And eventually, it came around and there's many more styles of wines now that are appreciated that have this, people call it oxidative. I don't think our wines are oxidative because the more you wait, the more you realise that there's no oxidation. There's actually a lot of fruit, a lot of flowers, everything that comes out.

But they show off aromas that are different from wines that have been kept in a steel tank with no air, with a lot of sulphur, just to keep them just on the pure freshness side, which is not our style of wines. We continued producing with these varietals. And when people started asking in the 90s and 2000s, what are these?

We looked at ampelography, which is the shape of the leaves to determine whether they were linked to other varietals. With some professionals in the field, we determined that Merwah was similar or linked to Sémillon because of the shape of the leaves. And Obaideh was linked to Chardonnay/Chasselas.

Now since then, there's been obviously evolution and there's DNA testing. So since then, there's been DNA testing on the Obaideh. Not the strains we have, but some strains that were in Lebanon provided by another grower. And the result was that there was absolutely no link to any other varietals.

Janina Doyle 00:33:55 Oops!

Marc Hochar 00:33:57 Oops. Yeah, well, you discover things and the ampelography was just a shape of a leaf. That's it. That was the whole assessment. DNA is a little more...

Janina Doyle 00:34:12 A little bit more accurate.

Marc Hochar 00:34:14 A little bit more. And on Merwah, I don't think there's been any analysis done yet. But it seems like it's probably not linked to Semillon and it's probably also separate. But in terms of the features of the varietals, in terms of the wines that they give, I think Obaideh is closer to Chardonnay in its style, the butteriness that you get from the Chardonnay. And Merwah is closer to Sémillon. So, it gives you these notes.

Actually, some of the wines that we have of the white wines sometimes are compared to a white, dry white from Bordeaux, which has Sémillon in it. So maybe that's the Merwah component that gives it similar features.

Janina Doyle 00:34:50 Okay. So, would you say though that Obaideh is more about the texture? In terms of choosing these two as a blend, what does each one give to the other?

Marc Hochar 00:35:03 Contributes.

Janina Doyle 00:35:04 Yeah.

Marc Hochar 00:35:05 I think it's that. The Obaideh will give you more body, more butteriness on the palate, whereas Merwah will give you more acidity, more aromatics. And actually, there are some vintages of Musar white that are single varietals of one or the other, which was random, which is random, not on purpose, but just because either we could not find the Obaideh or we could not find the Merwah or because of the weather conditions. So, 2015 Chateau Musar White is Merwah only.

Janina Doyle 00:35:36 Interesting.

Marc Hochar 00:35:38 All the very old Musar, so we're talking 81 and older, are Merwah only. We had some Obaideh only years, I think 92, if I remember well, is Obaideh only. And some in the 80s as well. We've had a bit of both, but in the more recent vintages, the only one that's pure Merwah is, for example, is 2015.

Janina Doyle 00:36:59 Well, that's fun. Everyone, make a note because actually sometimes, you know, getting to know an ancient variety. I know some other wineries are doing 100% Obaideh or 100% Merwah, but not in the Chateau Musar style. So, it'd be good to kind of pinpoint 15. And if anyone sees it, give it a go.

Marc Hochar 00:36:19 Yeah. And also obviously not with the history that we've had of using them for almost 90 years now.

Janina Doyle 00:36:23 Absolutely. Well, they're all interesting, but the white, of course, with this texture, this nuttiness, this spiced bruised apple that I'm getting. What's some amazing pairings that you've had? What would you pair it with?

Marc Hochar 00:36:42 I think the whites pair with more things than the reds, especially when you have different vintages of whites, meaning some younger, some 10-15 years old and some maybe 30 years old, they will really pair with many more dishes than the reds.

For me, a red wine, in particular the Musars, I go with colour pairing, food and wine. Red food, red wine. Meat, any tomato sauce, anything that has a red sauce on it, I would go for a red wine. Anything that is not red on your plate, I would typically go for white of Musar. I'm talking about Chateau Musar white here.

And if the dish is a bit more elegant and it's a bit more subtle in flavours, then I will go for a younger white because that one would have a bit less body and a little bit more aromatics of flowers and a bit more subtle.

And the heavier your dish becomes in terms of weight. So, if we're talking white meats, if we're talking chicken, pork, if we're talking veal, cheeses, then I would go for older and older whites because then the whites will have a bit more body and structure so they could go with a white meat much better than with fish or shellfish. So, the age then of the vintage really makes a difference in terms of what's the best pairing.

Janina Doyle 00:38:15 Okay. Yeah, I'm thinking of just like maybe a tagine or something. I'm thinking, what would I do? Like a tagine when you're putting the apricots in it and you're putting in

these dried fruits and things like that, like a chicken tagine or something with just spices. I think I want something that you're throwing in loads of herbs and spices. I mean, again, a bit of a lot of Greek food, I think could be really, really nice. Lebanese, Turkish, Greek, Moroccan.

Marc Hochar 00:38:50 Yeah, so all the Mediterranean. Yes.

Janina Doyle 00:38:53 Right. Just throw in a little herbs and spice and it'll be perfect.

Marc Hochar 00:38:55 I think of all the Middle Eastern foods, I would tend to go more for whites than for reds, definitely, because there's a lot of vegetables, there's less of this red colour in the food. But in terms of Western foods, definitely white meats.

Janina Doyle 00:39:14 On the Barbecue.

Marc Hochar 00:39:15 On the barbecue pork or veal. I would not go with the red wine with these. I would definitely go with the white wine. Anything with chicken, pheasant, lamb. Lamb also could be great with whites. With all the whites if you don't have a red sauce, but just a lamb grilled or with a crust. That actually works very well with the whites.

Janina Doyle 00:39:38 Nice, but like a parmesan and parsley crust. Okay, before I get too hungry. So just to finish off this episode, this Chateau Musar is a winery with absolutely incredible history, perseverance, and a showcase of resilience. It's unique.

We've already talked about it's a winery of magic. It is a winery of magic. That's the main conclusion. What about innovation? Does it matter? Are you thinking about the future in any way, or just simply, hey, look, we have a formula. Actually, that is who we are. We don't need to do anything and we're not going to do anything.

Marc Hochar 00:40:20 Every generation that comes in, and we're now third generation and hopefully the fourth one will come as well on board at one point, will tweak or adapt. Now our Chateau wines, as in the top premium labels, Chateau Red, White and Rosé, we will not change.

This is set in stone. This is really the identity of our brand and winery. So, we will keep the same identity. Whether we tweak a little bit on some things, we're looking maybe at changing the shape of the bottle. Will it change something? Maybe not. I don't think so.

I mean, changing the corks. Which corks do we use? These are like tiny tweaks, but this is really nothing. All the winemaking stays the same. On the younger wines, we want to add and innovate a little bit. You know the Jeune, we've added the label of the Musar Jeune 20 years ago.

Janina Doyle 00:41:17 So fun.

Marc Hochar 00:41:18 I guess, funky and different. Yeah, young. Maybe a bit too funky now. So now we're thinking it's a wine I think that is more serious than the label gives you the perception of.

Janina Doyle 00:41:30 Okay, fair.

Marc Hochar 00:41:31 Yeah. So, we might tweak it a little bit. So, these are all tweaks. But in terms of the wine making itself, we're adapting to global warming. So the rosé, for example, the

Jeune Rosé, used to be only a saignée. Now it's part saignée, part press because with global warming, we have less juice.

So, we need to control a little bit more extraction and time on the skin. And if we just wait for the saignée, it's just too dark, which is not really what you want to do with our Jeune Rosé. So, now we use part press, part saignée.

And we've added also a new varietal, which is Tempranillo, in one of our wines. We have a wine called Levantine, which was available in the UK at Marks & Spencer. No longer is. Probably will come back at one point in the UK, but we will see exactly where and when. But that's the Musar take in terms of wine making, meaning Cinsault and Cabernet, but with a third right hold that is Tempranillo.

And why Tempranillo? Because it resists heat and heat is one of the major issues that we have in Lebanon. And so, we planted it, I think, more than 12 years ago. And then gradually the vine started to give us enough juice to warrant making a wine on its own. It's a small production. It's what I call the Musar take on Tempranillo. Musar take meaning Cinsault, Cabernet plus whatever varietals we have.

Janina Doyle 00:43:03 Lovely. Okay. Honestly, I think we've touched on everything. I'm kind of glad that you didn't say that you were going to get an egg to start fermenting in or start ageing in glass because I'm like, I want you to stay traditional. That's the beauty I think of the fact that you have all these insanely amazing older vintages, but nice to know that you're thinking about the future with lovely little tweaks.

Thank you so much, Marc, for this. I hope it just inspires everybody and anybody to give these wines a go. Also, they're such good value for what they are with considering the ageing before they're released. Compare that to great Bordeauxs, Burgundies, Rhone. No, these are great values. The white, I wrote down stockists. You are looking at paying around £35 to £40 for the white in ND John Wines, or if you're a member of the Wine Society, you can get a great price.

Hedonism is the sweetie store for wine lovers. You have to pay a little bit more because it's Hedonism. That's the premium, but it's there. I imagine, actually, Hedonism has more than a few vintages actually, just knowing the amount of wines that are in there. I'm sure you can find a few back vintages. Yes, go and get Musar and find out what you smell and let me know what is it that you taste because it's unique. I'm sure you'd be interested as well, Marc, wouldn't you finding out what do people smell and taste.

Marc Hochar 00:44:32 Yeah, yeah. This is very personal. This is really very personal, but this is what makes it fun. I tasted our wines, the tastings in, let's say in Asia and China. In Asia, all the vegetables, trees, plants, flowers, everything's different. So, there are some common ground, but a lot is not. And so, when the taster tells you, ah, it smells of this particular tree, for me, that doesn't ring a bell because I don't know that tree. But this is where it's very personal. But it's fun. This is the beauty of what we have here.

Janina Doyle 00:45:08 Thank you for sharing your passion, your energy, your philosophy for life. I think that's very, very beautiful. So I will, as promised, do my experiment with the Chateau Musar

White and enjoy the reds and give you my conclusion at the end. But you will also have to be patient.

Marc Hochar 00:45:25 I will. Anytime you want. Janina, just call me back with your tasting notes and then we'll share a bottle or a glass of wine together and then you can give me all your tastings.

Janina Doyle 00:45:35 That is a plan. Thank you so much!

Janina Doyle 00:45:42 I was genuinely sad to finish that interview, but I hope you enjoyed it as much as I did recording and chatting with Marc. But good news, next week I am joined by the super lovely Anne McHale, Master of Wine.

So, she's an incredible wine educator and communicator. She's created educational programs for all levels. So, from the beginner all the way through to Master of Wine. Now if you're doing your WSET diploma, so that stands for Wine Spirit Education Trust, you may have heard of her course Diploma Therapy. So, this is created to help WSET students navigate the really tough exams and to hopefully do them with a lot less stress.

Well anyway, she's recently come back from the Alsace region in the north east of France and so I'm picking her brain about the latest discoveries, wines we should be trying, but also looking at some of the more typical questions you might be asked in the diploma D3 exam, such as: compare and contrast the styles and characteristics of Alsace Grand Cru wines or Riesling in particular? Or can you describe the unique terroir of Alsace and how it influences the characteristics of the wines produced there?

And so, Anne is going to be taking us through how you should answer these questions so you do not want to miss next week. And as always, I will leave you with a wine quote and it has to be another one from Serge Hochar, doesn't it? And this is a quote said to Tim Atkin, Master of Wine, himself, as he approached Serge, stood on the steps of Chateau Musar to welcome him and other journalists, Serge said:

"Our motto is to be happy. Wine is not serious. If you take it seriously, you must leave now."

So may we all remember this, in his honour that wine is emotion, wine is humanity, wine is feeling and joy and memory and experience. So, may your week be filled with all of the good stuff. Sending you all love and light and until next week, wine friends, cheers to you!