

A NEW ERA

Bordeaux has many great traditions, but diversity hasn't always been one. At last this is changing, though. We met some of the professionals bringing a breath of fresh air to the world of grand châteaux and family ties

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Chinedu Rita Rosa, regional representative of Château Dauzac, Margaux, and wine consultant (see p29)

Most narratives of Bordeaux are centred around a few dominant names and families. The region has grand traditions and great families, but this can not always be a positive thing, particularly when talking about diversity.

It's a subject that was raised recently by Florine Livat at Kedge Business School in Bordeaux. With a PhD in economics, Livat worked as an economic analyst for a wine broker before joining Kedge.

She released a statement earlier this year drawing attention to the lack of women at the top level of the Bordeaux wine industry, describing it as a result of the not only 'patriarchal but often patrilineal' wine industry. In other words, a structure that puts barriers up to whole groups outside the inner circle, which means that even without actively trying to exclude newcomers, there have always been psychological, social and practical barriers.

AN HONEST CONVERSATION

Embracing diversity and inclusivity means going further than focusing on male-female representation. It means recognising stories like those of Bordeaux-based wine consultant Chinedu Rita Rosa (see p29), who says she was always treated with respect when she owned a wine shop in Nigeria, importing wines from Bordeaux châteaux, but that when she moved to the city full time and looked for marketing or sales roles with those same châteaux, they were far less welcoming 'now that I was no longer commercially important to them', as she puts it.

It means also listening to Namratha Prashanth (see p34), who moved to Bordeaux from India and has launched her own successful wine brand, in part because she sent out more than 100 job applications to châteaux but didn't receive a single reply. The end results in both cases are success stories, but how many other voices are unheard in similar circumstances?

'As with women, black and other minority wine professionals in Bordeaux have to justify and prove their worth far more than white men in the same situation,' Livat says.

Changing this takes recognition of the enormous benefit that diversity has always brought to Bordeaux. I could have included here the brilliant Michael Huang at Château de Bonnange, who made his money building an e-commerce business in China and now owns an estate in Blaye where he is focusing on old-vine Malbec; or sommelier Omar Barbosa at Le Chapon Fin restaurant, Best Sommelier of Mexico in 2011 and 2013, and who first arrived in Bordeaux in 2017 to work at La Cité du Vin. Or Tunde Thompson, a Nigerian ►

wine expert who recently set up his own export company in addition to his work as a consultant for négociant Maison Rivière.

Or José Sanfins, the director and CEO of Château Cantenac Brown, a Margaux third growth classified in the 1855 ranking. He has been in the role for almost two decades, working under three different owners and, as a result, is firmly part of the Bordeaux establishment. But he doesn't fit the expected profile at all.

Sanfins was born in Portugal but moved aged three to the tiny island of Patiras, surrounded by the Garonne river. His parents were vineyard workers. He started out in the vines also, before studying winemaking and viticulture at Blanquefort agricultural college and arrived at Cantenac Brown in 1989 as a trainee.

Celebrating diversity also means economic diversity within the local community, ensuring it is not just the big-name châteaux that get recognition – Daniel Alibrand, for example, an Atlantic deep-sea fisherman who is now a winemaker at Domaine de L'Alliance in Sauternes, or Vincent Quirac of Clos 19bis, who bought a hectare of vines in Graves after changing from a career as a tour guide in the Sahara. Or Sébastien Fontaneau in St-Yzans-de-Médoc, who was a vineyard worker before creating his own brand, L'Or des Terres.

This is a port city that has always welcomed visitors from, and traded with, pretty much every country in the world. Finding the stories within Bordeaux that show this is still true is of benefit to everyone.

Chinedu Rita Rosa

Regional representative, Château Dauzac, Margaux/wine consultant

'Naija people are born entrepreneurs,' says Chinedu (ChiChi) Rita Rosa, using the word that captures the confidence, resilience and sense of identity of Nigerians. She has been living in Bordeaux for six years now; she moved to the city in 2016 after 15 years in the wine industry in Lagos, and now runs her own consultancy, as well as representing Château Dauzac across the African continent.

Rosa worked as a banker before moving into wine after the death of her first husband in 2008. The family had been living in Lebanon until this point, but Rosa returned to Lagos to take over as part-owner and director of his former business, XO Wine Stores. Located in Ikoyi, one of the city's most affluent neighbourhoods, she built up the company's range of classified Bordeaux, Champagne and Cognac, and also launched several wine education programmes.

'I learned about wine while drinking on the job,' she says. 'Nigeria is a beer-drinking society, so I enjoyed shifting people's opinions, and learned about importing, wholesaling, retailing and marketing. Wine education is part of that.'

She met her second husband – working in the energy sector in Lagos but originally from Paris – in the store at a wine education event, and together they moved to Bordeaux.

'When I arrived here, I thought it would be easy because I had so many contacts, but it felt like starting all over again. I wasn't taken seriously, and instead it seemed that because I was no longer commercially useful to them, I had been relegated to a third party, and there was no understanding or valuing of my



knowledge. I applied for a lot of jobs, without a response. And I am not the only person to have had this experience. Why don't you see more black people in the Bordeaux wine industry? There are many talented people that don't want to come into this business because they know what they will face.'

Rosa realised she had to make the business side happen for herself. 'I love this town, love the lifestyle,' she says. 'You need to know your own worth and value, to set your own terms and stick to them. So I decided to create my own village. I launched the Bordeaux Business Network and began to make contacts, eventually launching my own consultancy business.'

'I am regularly the only black person in the room at wine events. I want to encourage other black entrepreneurs to come into this business, because there is so much room to grow. I have a 20-year plan and am only at the beginning of it – I want to stop making wine stuffy, bring in more young people, help inclusivity. I have a vision when it comes to what the Nigerian wine market will look like and want to work with partners who understand that. Working across Africa, as with any continent, requires expertise and local knowledge. But the opportunities are huge.'

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