

THE WISDOM OF OWLS

NICOLAS THIENPONT

with Nicolas Thienpont

Building on philosophy and studies of antiquity, Nicolas Thienpont has managed to achieve what others can only dream of: he runs four absolutely top-level estates in Saint-Émilion. His career has been an unusual one.



My nickname was 'owl', perhaps because I can see things in the dark which remain hidden to others. I like the symbolism: owls mean wisdom. As Hegel commented, 'the owl of Minerva spreads its wings only with the falling of the dusk', meaning when the hustle and bustle abates and everyone else is asleep. I like that. I studied law and the philosophy, but did not graduate. Philosophy is still part of my life today – I read a lot and live according to the principle 'I know that I know nothing', which is why I surround myself with people who are more competent than me.

How did I end up in wine? A sort of snowball effect. My father had a farm with cattle, corn and soy. I had a go at growing kiwis, which at the time were more profitable than Saint-Émilion wine but turned out to be a resounding fiasco following two years of frost. I switched to

winemaking in the 1980s. The owners of Pavie Macquin were friends of mine, and offered me the position of manager in 1994. I did not feel entirely equipped for the job, but the worst thing that could happen would be getting the sack. While I was there I met a vineyard worker called Stéphane Derenoncourt with whom I quickly joined forces, and so things got off to a good start. Today I manage Pavie Macquin (which we have managed to elevate to the rank of Premier Cru Classé), Larcis Ducasse with its exceptional soils, Premier Cru Beauséjour Duffau Lagarrosse, and the gem that is Berliquet, four estates which are very different when you look at them side by side. Stéphane is also still involved. The secret to my success? There isn't one. I was in the right place at the right time and made good wine!



Nicolas Thienpont, wine owl and philosopher.