

Merchant makes statement with vintage Burgundy purchase

By Rachel Kirkpatrick
Editor

Approximately three years ago, Francos Wine Merchants co-owner Rick Franco made a “whopper” of a purchase, buying up every available case of 2006 Louis Jadot Burgundy in the country. It was the largest deal of his career, he said then, back in 2009, but just last week, he may have topped it — if not in size, then in style, and risk.

Last Thursday morning, a truck parked behind the 78-year-old store off-loaded some 365 cases of vintage (2009) Louis Jadot Burgundy — the largest single-store shipment of this wine in North America.

According to Franco, the 23-store Binny chain in Chicago is the only order that surpassed his.

“It makes you a little nervous because with the equities market in such a state of flux these last few weeks, you kind of wonder how everybody’s feeling,” Franco said. “This is a big bet, there’s no doubt about it, but everything in life’s a bet.”

E-mails have been sent to customers announcing the vintage wine’s arrival, and while no customer has been able to pre-pay for their order — that’s against the law in Connecticut — many have given their word they will be by this week for their share.

The store is hosting two tastings of this selection, one this Saturday, October 15, from 1 to 5 p.m., and the other, Saturday, October 22, at the same time.

This particular vintage is what is called a collector vintage, according to Franco.

Only about two collector vintages are produced every decade from the region of Burgundy.

“Burgundy has a lot more variable weather than Bordeaux, so we don’t see as many truly collectable vintages from Burgundy



Francos Wine Merchants co-owners Carl Franco and Rick Franco stand among the cases of vintage 2009 Louis Jadot Burgundy delivered last Thursday morning. The shipment of this selection is the second largest in the country.

as we do Bordeaux,” Franco said. “This is a great vintage; this is the best vintage from Burgundy since 2005.”

Burgundies are made from two grapes: the white Burgundy from Chardonnay, and the red Burgundy from the Pinot Noir.

“You’ll see a significant difference in the style from Burgundy as opposed to California,” Franco said. “The Chardonnays don’t have the opulence that the California Chardonnays have. The white Burgundies have a leaner style with more minerality to them, and the Pinot Noirs — the red Burgundies — have a lower alcohol content, and are more delicate on the palate than the Pinot Noirs we see from California or Oregon. So even though the grapes are the same, stylistically the difference

is pretty significant.”

The Louis Jadot Burgundy is made by Jacques Lardiere, considered one of the greatest wine makers in France, according to Franco, who preordered the wine a little over a year ago.

“We’re a significant client, so I know we get special attention, but special attention not in terms of price; special attention in terms of having the first crack at some incredibly limited wines,” Franco said. “Some of these wines, there’s only one or two barrels produced, so maybe there’s 20 to 25 cases coming into the U.S., and maybe we got three or four of them.”

This vintage Louis Jadot will sell at a wide range of pricing, from around \$25 to upwards of \$500 or \$600 a bottle.

Francos Wine Merchants

holds one of the oldest licenses in Connecticut, issued on the first day of the repeal in 1933. Relationships with purveyors for the Francos go back 60 or 70 years.

“If you’re in a business arrangement with anyone, it’s always a two-way street,” he said. “You have to put your best foot forward and sometimes you have to do it before the purveyor puts his best foot forward, just to show the good faith.”

Thursday morning, Franco and co-owner Carl Franco emerged from towers of Louis Jadot Burgundy cases, as more and more were carried from the box truck and sent down an assembly line into Franco Wine Merchants’ basement.

The floor inside the store was otherwise absent the usual displays, in anticipation of the arrival of their Burgundy bounty.

Francos’ 2009 purchase of every case of the 2006 Louis Jadot in the country took about a year and a half of negotiations.

But while Franco anticipated it would take two years to sell, it took only six months.

The prices were, in fact, pretty low.

This latest move, however risky, is exciting, not just for customers — who follow wine and who often, as Franco describes, research arrival dates and know about harvest and quality reports before he does — but exciting for him and his staff.

“You’ve made a big play, there’s risk here, it’s a cool product, it’s going to bring people in so it will generate excitement,” he said.

“These guys are excited,” he added, turning to his bustling staff, “They all showed up for work early today. It’s fun to have something going on.”