

In Deepest Provence

An 18th-century stone barn keeps Peter Thustrup's trophy wines in ideal condition

BY SOPHIE MENIN

In 2007, after 29 years as a pioneer in the world of collectible wines, Peter Thustrup sold his Paris-based dealership, Vins Rares Peter Thustrup. The terms of the deal required Thustrup, 61, to part with his name, contacts and a collection of old and rare wines worth approximately \$5 million. The Sweden-born merchant also promised to refrain from selling rare wine for the four years stipulated in his noncompete agreement. What followed was perhaps the ultimate busman's holiday: He built a 10,000-bottle collection for his personal pleasure, which he now stores in a converted stone barn next to his home in Aix-en-Provence.

Thustrup approaches his purchasing in two tiers: Burgundy *grands crus* and first-growth Bordeaux make up the core of the collection. The wines in this trophy group represent a who's who of French viticulture, including substantial verticals of Domaine de la Romanée-Conti, Domaine Georges Roumier and Château Pétrus.

Thustrup calls the rest of his wines "the odd bottles." These speak of his passion for treasure hunts and his desire to cultivate a nuanced understanding of the regions his collection highlights. He owns extraordinary wines produced from average vintages, such as the 1971 Grand-Puy-Lacoste; relatively unknown wines that express exceptional *terroir*, such as 1920, 1970, 1975 and 1978 bottlings of Château Brane-Cantenac Margaux; and esoteric Burgundies, including a 1946 Chambolle-Musigny from a Nuits-St.-Georges négociant called Morim, which is no longer in business. Thustrup keeps notes on the more than 50,000 wines he has tasted. He recalls the 1946 Morim as having "deep concentration, a little volatile acid and a rustic character, as if had been doctored with Syrah or Algerian wine."

Thustrup recently purchased a private cellar of 100 unique bottles from a Burgundy collector. Most of the wines were unfamiliar, but since they were all from strong vintages and reputable small négociants, he discerned that the collection had been curated intelligently. So far, even a 1955 Beaujolais from Domaine Georges Mingret—"Incredibly fresh fruity nose, black fruits with a lot of life; very surprising for a 58-year-old Gamay," he wrote last year in a tasting note—did not disappoint.

The stone barn where Thustrup keeps his collection was built before the French Revolution. It has a clay floor and walls 18 inches thick—a reflection of Thustrup's belief that to honor their *terroir*, "when it comes to storage, it is best for wines to be among the earth and stones." Besides generous airflow, the space needed little more than a cooling system for the summer months in order to be converted into a reliable cellar. The clay floor grows moist when it rains, allowing the barn to naturally maintain 80 percent humidity.



Thustrup tracks his collection of Bordeaux and Burgundy by memory and handwritten notes.



Peter Thustrup

WHAT'S IN PETER THUSTRUP'S CELLAR

FOCUS OF THE CELLAR: 70 percent Burgundy, 30 percent Bordeaux

NOTABLE VERTICALS: 10 vintages of *Domaine de la Romanée-Conti La Tache*, 1956–2010; seven vintages of *Domaine de la Romanée-Conti Richebourg*, 1964–2010; 10 vintages of *Domaine de la Romanée-Conti Echézeaux*, 1972–2010; 13 vintages of *Domaine de la Romanée-Conti Romanée St.-Vivant*, 1967–2010; seven vintages of *Domaine de la Romanée-Conti*, 1969–2010; 12 vintages of *Beaulieu Vineyard Georges de Latour Private Reserve*, 1966–1980

OLDEST BOTTLE: Port from approximately 1870, with no label. The oldest bottle with a label is a 1900 Latour.

HUMIDITY: Approximately 80 percent, regulated naturally by a clay floor

The cellar's interior evokes an old library brimming with vintage-edition books. Two large rooms hold wines in their original wooden cases, stacked from floor to ceiling, alongside open racks featuring bottles with Thustrup's white handwritten tags hung around their necks; he refuses to catalog the wines he purchases. "This is a pleasure!" he insists. Instead, inventory tracking relies on his visual organization—although he always takes fastidious tasting notes.

Every evening, Thustrup journeys to the cellar to choose a bottle for his dinner guests or for his own tastings. When he picks a young wine—and for Thustrup, "young" could mean a 1982 Latour—he will often drink a glass, then leave the bottle uncorked overnight in the refrigerator to observe its evolution.

Over the past couple of years, Thustrup has returned to the wine business part-time as a consultant to a handful of major collectors. But his personal cellar remains his private passion, rooted in the same enthusiasm that drew him to the wine business three decades ago. For Thustrup, collecting is a lifestyle. "Wine is integrated into every aspect of my life," he explains. "Not just my tastes and investments, but where I travel, what I read and the people I invite into my home.

"Today people are very much in a hurry," he adds. "We do everything at high speed. I respect that, because I am the same way. But wine encourages a different perspective."

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