

Rothschild winery buys pure vineyards in Chile

PERALILLO, Chile (AP) — Gen-reflecting in the field, Gilbert Rokvam points to a thick and twisted trunk sprouting clusters of tiny new grapes.

"These vines are very old," he says with quiet authority in French-accented Spanish. "You won't find them anywhere else in the world."

Rokvam says these venerable plants lured his employers, the Rothschilds, out of the Bordeaux region of France for the first time in more than a century of wine-making.

The owners of the legendary Chateau Lafite and three other French wineries have become partners in a little-known Chilean vineyard called Los Vascos.

Los Vascos is near Peralillo, a small farming town in a sun-drenched valley named Canete some 95 miles south of Santiago. It is typically Chilean: straw-hatted cowboys kick up dust as they amble beneath tall eucalyptus windbreaks, with brown Andean foothills as a backdrop.

But it has something more French than in France itself: its grapevines.

Chile's rootstock, imported in the mid-1800s, was untouched by the plague of a root-chewing parasite, phylloxera, that swept most of the rest of the world. To halt the infestation, vineyards in Europe, the United States and most other grape-growing countries introduced a generic American rootstock that, while immune to phylloxera, upset some wine purists.

And the Rothschilds are, in many ways, purists.

"In fact, nobody at Lafite ever thought we'd leave home and get involved abroad," says Rokvam, technical director at Chateau Lafite.

He says Los Vascos passed judgment because it is family-owned, by Jorge Eyzaguirre and his wife, Maria Ignacia, and because it makes wine only from its 500-acre harvest. The winery never buys from outside vineyards, as do many others.

"They have the same kind of operation as we do in France," Rokvam says. "Family production, it's very important."

Before reaching a decision, Rokvam said he had brought a prominent French oenologist to Chile to taste-test 156 local red wines and 45 whites.

"To be fair, I can't say that Los Vascos came out above all the others," he says. "But it was right there at the top."

As a final step before approval, Eric de Rothschild, who heads the family operations in France, spent several days with the Eyzaguirres at their country estate.

Eyzaguirre says he sought a foreign investor who could bring Old World technique to his operation, but attracting the Rothschilds was more than he had hoped.

"I cast out my line," he said, "but I never expected to catch the biggest fish."

He and his wife come from families involved in winemaking for more than a century. But they only took over the Los Vascos vineyard and began making export-quality fine wines six years ago.

In 1983 they shipped 1,000 cases

abroad. They are now exporting virtually all their wine: 80,000 cases a year of Cabernet Sauvignon, Cabernet Blanc and Chardonnay. The biggest buyer is the United States, where Los Vascos sells for about \$5 to \$6 a bottle.

Chilean exports in general are rising as the country begins to earn a reputation for good wine at a very good price.

The new French partners believe that reputation can be improved.

"We believe we can contribute some details in quality, in finesse," Rokvam says.

It will mean some radical changes at the winery, which uses antique barrels made from a Chilean hardwood, rauli, to store wine while it ferments. The vats leave a slightly bitter aftertaste that Chileans enjoy, but that European and American critics consider a flaw.

The rauli barrels will be replaced by big stainless steel vats with "all the ugliness of a milk plant," but which help ensure quality, Rokvam says.

Only some wines will touch wood, in barrels of French oak imported from Chateau Lafite.

Rokvam says there will also be strict control of the vineyard's yield per acre. If the vines are pushed to produce too many grapes, the quality drops.

Rokvam says the changes will take at least a year.

Will the result be very, very good wine?

"It will be fine," Rokvam replies. "Let's leave off the 'verys' until next year."

Author says Bush's '88 campaign reminds him of McCarthyism days

NEW YORK (AP) — When George Bush labeled campaign rival Michael Dukakis a "card-carrying" member of the American Civil Liberties Union, frightening memories flooded back to Howard Fast.

In the 1950s, Sen. Joseph McCarthy achieved notoriety for his purges of suspected Communists, brandishing a piece of paper in his hand and charging that he had a list of "card-carrying" members of the Communist Party.

Fast was one of those members. He confronted McCarthy at a hearing of the House Committee on Un-American Activities (HUAC) and went to jail in 1950 for refusing to submit names of alleged "subversives." Thirty-eight years later, Fast has reconstructed that time in a novel, "The

Pledge" (Houghton-Mifflin, \$18.95).

"Bush's campaign had something of the same feeling. That 'card-carrying ACLU' device was worked out very precisely," said Fast.

"Pledge" is based on a part of my life that was a great time of fear in the United States, and this generation should learn that this happened. None of them know," he said in an interview.

"The Pledge" begins in post-World War II India and centers on a war correspondent, Bruce Bacon, who has reason to believe that the British government played a role in the famine then sweeping Calcutta. His actions come to the attention of the British and U.S. governments and he is ultimately forced to leave the country.

Back home, Bacon resumes his job as a prized newspaper reporter for the New York Tribune, but his world becomes unraveled. Determined to prove his theory of British collusion in the famine, Bacon attracts the attention of the FBI and is subpoenaed by HUAC.

When questioned by HUAC, he angrily refuses to answer any questions about his friend, a communist party member, lashes out at the committee and goes to jail for contempt of Congress.

"This has nothing to do with democracy," Fast said. "It has nothing to do with the United States. This book is a true book. Eighty percent of it happened to me. What didn't happen to me happened to people I know."

Old bank stays small, quaint and profitable

LOWES, Ky. (AP) — The narrow two-story Bank of Lowes looks like a place Jesse James would go out of his way to visit.

Little has changed in the 85 years of Kentucky's smallest bank. The teller cage is a genuine antique. Accounts are kept in a ledger book, and the closest thing to a computer is an adding machine.

"A lot of people like small banks and don't like computers," says Dorothy McClellan, cashier and chairwoman of the board.

Founded in 1903 by a group of local businessmen with a pool of \$15,000, the bank remains in the

hands of local residents. It pays depositors no interest, but it thrives in an isolated corner of Graves County, serving about 500 customers with checking accounts and loans.

The bank charges no fees, except for returned checks. Bank officers help customers with bookkeeping chores and will type important papers and provide notary services. All without charge.

Customers who can't make the 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. banking hours make appointments or give their deposits to McClellan at church on Sunday.

McClellan's father, Col. Paul Wilkerson, used to write loans on the

kitchen table at his home for those who couldn't do their banking during regular hours.

"Most of what we handle is checks and paperwork," McClellan says. "We barely have enough cash on hand to operate."

The Bank of Lowes is regarded as one of the state's healthiest institutions. Its cash reserve, surplus and undivided profits are enough to cover all its loans. Earnings as a percentage of assets have in the past topped the state's more than 200 banks.

Staying small is one of the bank's goals, McClellan says.



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