

# STAR POWER IN PROVENCE

*Former president of France Nicolas Sarkozy and singer Carla Bruni, his wife, team with wine industry veteran Jean-Guillaume Prats to create an ambitious new rosé*

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**W**hen approached to become an owner of spectacular Provence villa Château d'Estoublon, Nicolas Sarkozy and Carla Bruni required no arm-twisting. "It's the magic—the place vibrates with its own energy," describes Bruni, famed singer-songwriter and model. Her husband, the former president of France, was also not immune to Estoublon's charms. "It was a shock the first time we visited—we fell in love instantly. It's hard to explain," Sarkozy says.

In 2020, the couple became the new owners of the 15th-century estate as part of an A-list partnership which includes Jean-Guillaume Prats, former owner of Bordeaux's Cos d'Estournel, and French entrepreneur Stéphane Courbit. From a commercial standpoint, they were enticed by the estate's world-renowned olive oil business and the luxury hospitality opportunities, but it was the vines and *terroir* that captured their imagination and inspired them to create a

flagship rosé brand, Roseblood. For the past two years, Roseblood was offered in Europe and is now making its U.S. debut with the newly released 2023 vintage.

"Roseblood is a very big dream," says Sarkozy, whose reputation for grand ambition and boundless energy appears undiminished since the end of his presidential term in 2012. Although he can be moved to sentimentality when describing the venture—"it is the story of friendship and love; love for the property and for Carla"—the former politician has embraced the role of entrepreneur with gusto, ready to go head to head with many large and established rosé brands. "We know big companies are our competitors and we are late to the rosé game, but we dare. If you wait for others to tell you it's possible, nothing happens—you have to make it yourself."



SEBASTIEN VALENTE

Carla Bruni, Nicolas Sarkozy  
(center) and Jean-Guillaume Prats  
introduce their Château  
d'Estoublon wines in the  
U.S. market this year.



**T**here are myriad ways to experience the rural charm of Provence; Château d'Estoublon offers the decidedly aristocratic sort.

Founded by a noble family from Genoa in 1489, the estate covers a sprawling 500 acres of rolling green hills in the southern slopes of the Alpilles in the heart of Provence. Visitors approach the restored 18th-century château through a grand, cypress-lined entrance (or by helicopter on Estoublon's own helipad, convenient for those who've docked their yacht in nearby ports of Monaco or Antibes on the French Riviera). Famous for its olive oil, produced from the property's 120 acres of olive trees, Estoublon is a member of the elite Comité Colbert, an association which promotes French luxury brands, a rarified group that includes Hermès, Chanel, Dior, Louis Vuitton and Cartier, among others.

But Estoublon's next chapter will be headlined by wine, say the determined new owners. It's easy to be cynical about another celebrity-led Provence rosé (they follow the well-trodden path of Brad Pitt and Angelina Jolie, George Lucas, Tony Parker, George Clooney, Kylie Minogue and others). But the sheer scale of their investment in the property as well as additional vineyard acquisitions shows a commitment to quality that is undeniably genuine.

Prats, who has served as CEO at Château Lafite Rothschild and LVMH's fine wine division, oversaw the purchase of Villa Baulieu in Coteaux d'Aix-en-Provence and Domaine Cantarelle in Coteaux Varois, which gives the enterprise ownership of more than 900 acres of planted vines. He transitioned to organic farming and brought on Victor Joyeux, the longtime winemaker at New Zealand's Cloudy Bay.

Control over such a wide swath of Provençal vines means that all Estoublon's wines—from the higher-tier 1489 rosé and white cuvées, which spend time in neutral oak, to the larger-volume flagship Roseblood—are all crafted from estate fruit, an impressive point of difference. "We own more vineyards than Château Miraval, Whispering Angel and Minuty," says Prats. "Wine drinkers are looking for authenticity and truth. When you buy Estoublon, you are buying an identity."

Observing how that identity expresses itself in Estoublon's wines has been a fascinating journey for Bruni, who attends every blending session. "Like a tea bag, the place has infused its signature into the wine," she describes. The craft of assembling the final wine blend is not dissimilar to creating music, she believes: "It's the application of inspiration."

Over the past two decades, Bruni has recorded six studio albums featuring many chart-topping hits, and her process remains deliberately slow and

## VISITING CHÂTEAU D'ESTOUBLON

*Chateau-estoublon.com*

You too can live the Château d'Estoublon dream. Just 25 minutes from Avignon, the spectacular 16,000-square-foot château is available for rent in its entirety and can accommodate up to 20 guests.

The castle was restored by architect Christophe Tollemer and features period furniture and antiques. Guests have access to a private pool, movie theater and an ancient chapel, and can book cooking classes and horseback riding on the property's extensive trails. Visitors coming for the day can lunch at the estate's restaurant, La Table d'Estoublon, which sources ingredients from its own gardens, enjoy wine and olive oil tastings, and explore the trails, vines and olive groves.



MASTERMEDIALAB RETOUCHÉE

old-fashioned, hand writing lyrics for each song in notebooks. “I’ve been so reliant on my ear for music, so focusing on my sense of smell has been a novelty and beautiful discovery. A scent can put us back so precisely in memory. It’s similar to hearing a melody you danced to 30 years ago, which transports you back in time.” Born in Italy and raised in France, Bruni has long held a deep appreciation for wine—“if I had to choose one bottle of red to drink forever, it would be Cheval Blanc,” she says—and helped select the wines served to guests and dignitaries at the Palais de l’Élysée when she was the First Lady of France.

**M**any found the news of Sarkozy’s involvement in a wine venture surprising—after all, his famous abstinence from alcohol nearly hindered his political career. “Everyone in France knows I never drink wine—the miracle is that I was elected in spite of it,” he says. (Paparazzi photos of his frequent cycling and jogging further put his image at odds with the bon vivant French lifestyle.)

Yet according to Sarkozy, it’s impossible to be French and not feel that wine is a part of one’s national heritage. “France is the country of wine. Even for people like me who never drink, wine is a piece of our landscape, it’s part of our identity.” He’s drawn to the wine project by the “beauty and craftsmanship” and spends a lot of time walking the vineyards. Though he enjoys analyzing the aromatics of the estate’s wines during blending sessions, he admits that his partners don’t ask for his opinion. “But it’s OK,” he says, with a smile. “They are kind enough to let me be part of the association.”

Cementing Estoublon’s luxury credentials is partner Stéphane Courbit, who amassed a fortune through his online gaming, media and luxury hotel empire (his LOV Hotel Collection operates hotels in Courchevel, Saint-Tropez and Provence). Last year he acquired Ladurée, the high-end French macaron bakery chain, where it is now possible to purchase a Roseblood rosé-infused version.

Sarkozy’s contribution? “I’m the tool box,” he offers, jokingly. “Jean-Guillaume knows everything about wine, Stéphane is the best businessman in the world, Carla is a specialist in elegance and good taste. I am not a specialist, but I do what the others in the project don’t want to do.” What that generally means is utilizing his many international connections to open new markets for distribution and promote the wines of Estoublon abroad. And currently, his sights are set on the U.S.

During his time as president, he seemed unoffended by the somewhat derisive nickname he earned from the French, “Sarko the American,” for his affinity for U.S. culture and capitalism—a predilection he’s carried into his business venture. “We want our brand to be strong in France, but America is the dream. America is the



Bruni attends all the blending sessions for the Estoublon wines. Above: She and winemaker Victor Joyeux, formerly of New Zealand’s acclaimed Cloudy Bay winery, taste through samples for the flagship rosé.

*“I’ve been so reliant on my ear for music, so focusing on my sense of smell has been a novelty and beautiful discovery.”*

**CARLA BRUNI**

country of the human story, of the guy who goes on to create something big. We want to create this dream, and the U.S. is the country for that.”

This powerful team and grand aspiration makes Roseblood an exciting new venture, despite the market challenges of a crowded rosé landscape and waning demand for pink wine, says Michael Quinttus, president of Vintus, who imports Château d’Estoublon into the U.S. “It is a vastly different proposition than most rosés. The historic estate, the fascinating people behind it, the commitment to owning all their own vineyards, the luxury connection—this speaks loudly to people. We expect Roseblood to be one of the leading Provence rosés within three years.”

Sourced from the higher-elevation vineyards of Coteaux Varoisen-Provence, the 2023 Roseblood rosé is based on Grenache, but includes 15% Syrah—an important addition for color and power, believes winemaker Joyeux. In recent *Wine Spectator* blind tastings, the new release earned 90 points. For the higher-tier 1489 rosé cuvée (92 points), Joyeux relies on 50-plus-year-old vines and ferments in a mix of large-format oak and stainless steel, which imparts a greater broadness, concentration and complexity. (Made in much smaller quantities, the 1489 blanc is almost 100% Rolle with a touch of Sauvignon Blanc, and received 91 points.)

Some wines succeed on savvy marketing, others on *terroir*-driven provenance and quality, telling the story of a place. Roseblood aims to triumph on both fronts. The bottle’s seductive, somewhat mysterious label is encircled by two elegantly twisting snakes, one biting a rose petal—an allusion to the Garden of Eden they have created at Château d’Estoublon, a utopia where they spend as much time as their busy schedules allow.

While owning a wine estate hasn’t made Sarkozy into a wine drinker, it has made him very happy. “Carla and I realize that we should have entered the wine world a long time ago. It’s much more fun than politics or modeling.” □