

# CHAMPLAIN CHAREST

## Biographical notes

In much of the wine world, the very name, Champlain Charest has become synonymous with the appreciation and pleasures of wine. A Radiologist by profession, Charest was a brilliant student during his undergraduate days at the Université de Montréal and at Boston's Harvard University, prior to beginning his professional career with Dr. André Legaré. Dr. Légaré was not only a fine physician but an oenophile and also a man of grand culture, all of which was very much in line with Charest's own interests. His visits to the art galleries and museums added painting and sculpture to his personal passions. At the same time, his palate was being seduced by the grandest of the world's wines. "It was thanks to him" he says mischievously, "that I was contaminated by wine".

### **Radiologist on the Move**

Although his career began at Saint-Luc Hospital in Montreal, he soon proceeded to open other radiology clinics. And with growing recognition as a specialist in pulmonary diseases he became an assistant professor of radiology at the Université de Montréal while helping to open more radiology centers across Quebec and New Brunswick. In 1980 he became assistant secretary of the Canadian Radiology Association and the related travels not only broadened his horizons but enabled him to help open departments of echography in many of the smaller hospitals throughout northern British Columbia.

### **First brush with a painting Great: Jean-Paul Riopelle**

In 1968, Champlain met the celebrated painter, Jean-Paul Riopelle in a brasserie near La Coupole in Paris and, by besting him in a wrist-twisting match, "won" his "first Riopelle". Although the painter returned to Canada a week later, the chance "battle" marked the beginning of a lifelong friendship. Ardent sportsmen, they both enjoyed hunting and fishing in the great outdoors while their shared affinity for speed led them to piloting their own airplanes and driving Ferrari automobiles. Eventually, however, it was their deep interest in wines that cemented their relationship.

### **The Oenophiles as Restaurateurs**

In 1974, to appease their epicurean penchants, Charest and Riopelle acquired the general store in Sainte-Marguerite-du-lac Masson. They transformed it into a restaurant which became Le Bistro a Champlain by 1987. The restaurant enabled Champlain to communicate his love of wines to all who visit. Then. As now. And he continues to seek out and obtain the best bottles. "Wine brings a pleasure that is always new".he says. "Each bottle and each vintage is different.

During that epoch the omnipresence that wine enjoys today in Quebec had not yet caught on. Consequently, the launch of Michel Phaneuf's first "Guide de vin" marked 1980 as a somewhat watershed year for wine awareness in this province. Le Bistro Champlain played a part, expanding its culinary artistry into the visual with growth of the fine art collection including works of Riopelle, Miro and Joan Mitchell, and for encouragement, young Quebec artists such as Louise Prescott, Marc Seguin and Sylvie Pommerleau.

### **His Cellar...A source of Pride**

Aside from his profession as a radiologist, Champlain Charest is also a business man and above all, an excellent communicator. "If I sell a bottle, that enables me to buy two more." he says with a broad smile.

He encourages young sommeliers to participate in competitions at an international level and opens his cellar to assist in their training. And that cellar is maintained at a volume of some 38,000 bottles. He is especially proud of the section expressly dedicated to 175 of the larger formats such as Mathusalems (6 litres each) of Domaine de la Romanee Conti one of his preferred wines. Not surprisingly, wine lovers from across the globe come here to admire this cellar where wine indeed does reign supreme. North America's premiere magazine WINE SPECTATOR selected Bistro à Champlain for its Grand Award in 1988m the only one in Canada at the time, and the restaurant has been so honored annually since then.

### **The Family**

Champlain is also the proud father of two distinguished daughters: Marie Saint-Pierre a notable designer whose creative signature fashions are building an enviable reputation and supplying her exclusive retailing operation. Her sister Daniele, an actuary by profession, directs the business end of the fashion enterprise. Nice grand children round out Champlain's immediate family. Monique Nadeau is a long time confidante, companion, and associate with the Bistro.

### **PRIZES AND HONOURS**

#### **Champlain Charest-Selected Honorifics:**

- Montreal Passion Vin 2005 - Wine Personality of the Year,
- Government of France Honours: Officier du Mérite Agricole
- Man of the Year 1997 – Revue Vin de France
- Université de Montréal, Faculty of Medecine-Culture & Society Prize.
- Entretiens avec C.Champlain – La passion du vin by Marc Chapleau, Editions Liber

#### **Restaurant Le Bistro a Champlain-Honoured:**

- Wine Spectator Magazine - Grand Award annually since 1988
- CAA Four Diamonds - Annually since 1992
- Grand Prix du Tourisme: continuously growing list of Provincial awards
- Member – DI RONA - Distinguished Restaurants of North America

### **PHILANTHROPIC CONTRIBUTIONS**

#### **With associates at Hospital Saint-Luc**

1976 - Donation of a fountain "La Joute" by Riopelle. This highly valuable work of art was installed at Montreal's Olympic Stadium. It has been subsequently moved to the recently completed magnificent Place Riopelle facing the Palais de Congrès de Montréal.

Donation of numerous works by Riopelle: a painting to the Faculty of Medicine at Université de Sherbrooke; two to Faculté de Médecine at Universsité de Montréal; a sculpture to Place des Arts; the sculpture "La Demeure" by artist Etienne Martin to the Musée National des beaux-arts de Québec.

#### **Personal Contributions**

1980 - Founding member, Saint-Luc Hospital Foundation, asks Jean-Paul Riopelle to donate four lithographs to help launch a fund-raising drive of the Foundation (CHUM) to acquire the province's first "Scan".

Personal donations of special wines for fund-raising drives at Hopital Maisonneuve-Rosemont, Sainte-Justine, Santa Cabrini, and the CHUM.

Honorary Chairman - Saint-Jrôme Museum.

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