

Jean Meyer (1945–2016)



Josmeyer's guiding light had a great flair for winemaking, marketing, and the joys of the table

There is a striking degree of unanimity to descriptions of the Josmeyer house style. Elegance, purity, clarity, and restraint are the favored adjectives used to sum up the typically dry, racy wines of this great Alsace producer, certainly since Jean Meyer took over the management of the estate in the 1960s.

And there is similar agreement when it comes to Jean Meyer himself, not least in the many tributes from friends and colleagues that emerged in the sad days after he finally succumbed to a long illness, aged 71, earlier this year.

Tom Stevenson, who had known Meyer since 1985, contacted *WFW* to say of his old friend, "I had known about Jean's illness for so long that I had begun to wonder whether it was any longer a serious threat. Sadly it was. Jean's condition curtailed his traveling, but that enabled him to devote more time to the most important thing in his life: making sure that Odile, his wife, would be settled and able to live an independent life, if she wished, when he finally passed away.

"To that end, he renovated a house in the center of Wintzenheim so that everything she needed would be just a

few steps away. My wife and I were privileged to be the very first guests they entertained in their new home. That was all of ten years ago. Jean proudly showed us the lift he had installed, telling us this would ensure that Odile would never be prisoner in her own home should mobility become a problem. Jean Meyer was a man of unique kindness and generosity, who always thought of others and did everything in his power to ensure the happiness of the family he left behind."

Influential and irreplaceable

Marcel Orford-Williams who, in his role as Alsace buyer for British retailer The Wine Society, has been a long-term advocate of Alsace in general and the wines of Josmeyer in particular, painted a similar picture on the Society's blog, describing "a boyish charm and infectious enthusiasm that will be irreplaceable."

As well as being a much-loved figure, Meyer was among the most important and influential winemakers in Alsace in the postwar years. As Orford-Williams said, "He did something unimaginable, combining an approach to winemaking that bordered on the puritanical with a flair for marketing that could have benefited any of the world's most prestigious brands."

On the production side, under Meyer's leadership, Josmeyer evolved from a *négociant* to an estate producer, and from "an ultra-*viticulture raisonnée* way that respected nature, worked the soil, and used the minimum of chemicals" (in Stevenson's phrase, *WFW* 22) to full-blown biodynamics. When it came to marketing, Orford-Williams says, Meyer's innovations included focusing on the personalities of the Alsace grape varieties with artistic labels inspired by their individual qualities that changed from vintage to vintage, as well as producing a Japanese-inspired label for the grands crus for which he was always such a passionate advocate.

All of this was in service to Meyer's belief that wine was but part of the experience of gastronomy, a belief shared by his daughters Céline and Isabelle and his son-in-law Christophe Ehrhart, who continue to run the estate with distinction, and which made him, as Orford-Williams says, not just a visionary winemaker but "an outstanding cook" and "a host without equal."

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