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Macao Gambling Executive Louis Ng Buys Burgundy Estate

Local winegrowers cry foul over foreign investment, but is it protecting terroir or xenophobia?

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Louis Ng, an executive in Stanley Ho's Macao gaming empire, has purchased Château de Gevrey-Chambertin from the Miteran family in Burgundy's Côte de Nuits for a reported \$10 million, outbidding a group of local vintners. The acquisition includes a 12th century château and 5 acres of vines. But the sale has provoked a backlash against foreign investment by some Burgundy residents.

The estate went on the market following the death of Elisabeth Masson Miteran on Nov. 11, 2011, put up for sale by her heirs. It was appraised at \$4.4 million. The vineyards, including three plots of *premier cru* and one plot of *grand cru*, are all in AOC Gevrey-Chambertin appellation, which were appraised at \$1.9 million. The appellation of Gevrey-Chambertin covers 1,360 acres. The vines purchased by Ng produce approximately 1,000 cases per year, and remain under lease to three local growers.

Ng, 60, whose Chinese name is Ng Chi Sing, is the COO and Executive Director of Sociedade de Jogos in Macao, which is owned by SJM Holdings and controlled by gambling billionaire Stanley Ho. Ng was born in Hong Kong, but holds Portuguese citizenship. (Macao is a former Portuguese colony). He oversees 17 casinos and three slot-machine lounges in Macao. He could not be reached for comment.

Jean-Michel Guillon, owner of Domaine Guillon et Fils and president of the Gevrey-Chambertin wine syndicate, explained his reaction to *Wine Spectator*. "I have nothing against this guy personally. But you love your country, I love mine. We love our cultural heritage. We are asking UNESCO to classify our *climats* as a World Heritage site—and yet, those *terroirs* might not remain in our hands."

Guillon was also a rival bidder. He led a group of local investors who offered \$5 million, then upped it to \$6.2 million. They had plans to move the tourist office to the much-visited castle and open it to events. But Ng outbid them.

"We're worried. Where are we headed with this?" said Guillon. "We're trying to create a dam [against further foreign investment], but it's complicated."

French growers have taken militant stances against globalization before, and the Gevrey-Chambertin deal now has France's Front National (FN), the ultra-conservative nationalist party, chiming in. "This acquisition is emblematic of the dangers that threaten French heritage," said Florian Philipot, vice president of the FN, in a statement where he denounced the government for not helping the vigneron in their failed acquisition. Philipot is pushing for legislation to impede foreign investment.

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Foreigners, particularly Americans, have purchased Burgundy vineyards before, though they often partner with local winery owners. 2012 has brought a ripple of investment: In February, a 28-year-old China-native, Shi Yi, acquired 5 acres in Nuits-St.-Georges, including 2.4 acres of Vosne-Romanée Champs Perdrix near La Tâche. In May, Canadian businessman Moray Tawse, of Tawse Winery on the Niagara Peninsula, acquired [Domaine Maume in Gevrey-Chambertin](#).

Guillon told *Wine Spectator* that he also feared the whims of the super-rich. "The vigneron that I represent are worried about foreign investors who come in here and buy an estate like you buy a pair of shoes. Apparently, 8 million euros for [Ng] is like 50 euros for me."

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