

Wine & Spirits

SPECIAL ISSUE
24TH ANNUAL BUYING GUIDE

TOP 100 WINERIES OF THE YEAR



100 BEST WINES



100 BEST BUYS



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Chateau Musar

BEKAA VALLEY



Serge Hochar

Founded: 1930
Winemakers: Serge Hochar & Tarek Sakr
Viticulturist: Tarek Sakr
Acres owned: 445
Annual production: N/A
Estate grown: 90%
Owners: Serge & Ronald Hochar
Known for: Long-lived whites and earthy reds
Importer: Broadbent Selections, San Francisco, CA
Website: chateaumusar.com.lb

Serge Hochar has done more for Lebanese wine than anyone else in the country's present-day history. In 1930, his father, Gaston Hochar, had been inspired by a trip to France—he planted cinsault, mourvedre, carignan, cabernet sauvignon and grenache in the varied soils of Mount Lebanon's foothills, some 3,000 feet up in the Bekaa Valley. At the time, winemaking was mostly a backcountry affair, something a farmer did on the side.

Hochar, however, had grander plans. He built a winery on Mount Lebanon—closer to the commercial center of Beirut but farther from the Syrian border, and therefore, more insulated from political unrest. His son, Serge, started working around the winery when he was 18, and became winemaker two years later, in 1959, after finishing enology studies at the University of Bordeaux. Since then, he's missed only one vintage—1976, when bombs were falling too heavily to harvest the grapes—and he's built the winery into a national symbol of resiliency and culture. (The 1986 vintage, he concedes, was almost missed—only two trucks made it to the winery, but they did manage to fill 18,000 bottles of wine.)



While Hochar is best known for red wines, his estate white wine is one of the great whites of the world, a long-lived, deeply golden blend of obeideh and merwah (thought to be the ancestors, respectively, of chardonnay and semillon). The 2001, from a hot, early vintage, shows its ripeness in roasted pineapple tones, but it's still fresh with vibrant acidity and rounded with beeswax and mushroom tones. The reds—all based on cabernet sauvignon, carignan and cinsault—run from the Cuvée Rouge (now called Musar Jeune), a bright, nonoaked red meant for immediate drinking, to the Estate Red, released with considerable age and the ability to go even further. The 2001 is particularly impressive, with none of the flatness common to hot vintages. In fact, like all the Hochar wines, it's uncannily like its maker—a blend of Mediterranean exuberance tempered by continental reserve, refreshingly individual. —T.Q.T.

TOP-SCORING WINES

- 93** '01 Bekaa Valley \$50 (6/10)
89 '01 Bekaa Valley \$41 (6/10)
87 '07 Bekaa Valley Musar Cuvée Rouge \$21 (6/10)

100 BEST WINES OF 2010

LEBANON

BEST RED

93 | Château Musar \$50

2001 Bekaa Valley As elegant as Serge Hochar himself, the man behind Château Musar, this blend of cabernet sauvignon, carignan and cinsault is lithe yet firm. The fruit feels autumnal, in shades of rust red and ocher spice, and is saturated with a spicy, foresty fragrance. It's delicious now, ready for game birds scented with juniper berries, and should live on for another decade. *Broadbent Selections, San Francisco, CA*