

## MEYBLUM & FILS: A family affair

### A SMALL COMPANY WITH BIG AMBITIONS

**Since 1862, when the Meyblum family first became involved in selling wines and spirits, the company has come a long way. Now a dynamic group, it has developed a strong international presence through the growth of MVP wines.**

The equivalent of three million bottles marketed in a dozen countries is now the pace of sales at MVP wines, the export branch of the Meyblum family group. At the helm, Erik – in his forties and fluent in French and English – is following in the footsteps of four generations of wine merchants who have combined their global perspective with strong Alsace roots. “Each one has their own dreams, ideals and experience. When we created MVP wines in 2009, my father wanted to build on achievements in the European market by realizing his American dream. Our first targets were therefore the United States and Canada”. The strategy materialized five years later with the introduction of a specialized sales network covering the length and breadth of the North American market.



### BESPOKE PRODUCTS

Now in the saddle, Erik has set his sights even further by targeting Asia. His ambitions are matched by the resources he has committed to a top-rate team: he has three agents in China, two more in South Korea and Japan and a sales representative in Vietnam. His portfolio comprises an extensive range, running the gamut in terms of styles and colours, with both still and sparkling wines encapsulating the best of what the wine world has to offer. “As a long-standing Bordeaux wine merchant, we have access to over 300 properties, from the smallest chateau to the top classified growths, but are also proactive in sourcing wines from all French and European regions”. The lynchpin of the company’s policy is providing bespoke offerings, as evidenced by the range of private labels which now account for half of the company’s turnover.

### ROOTED IN TRADITION BUT IN THE SPIRIT OF TODAY

Pushing the boundaries even farther, MVP wines made significant investments in 2016, establishing a dedicated production line in its new logistics centre near Montpellier, Hérault. Both versatile and flexible, the centre has been assigned a single-minded objective which is to offer boutique-scale bottling of 2,000 bottles/hour to cater for smaller contracts. For the Meyblums, people-centred and industrialized processes go hand in hand, so do tradition and innovation. In practice, this enables the company to supply wines made from the finest fruit and terrorizes that are selected by in-house winemakers who work closely and diligently with contract producers. But at the same time, it uses cutting-edge wine making and maturation techniques to ensure that the wines are of the highest standard and offer irreproachable traceability.

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## MVP FOR MOST VALUABLE PLAYER

An outsider compared with the industry behemoths, MVP boasts its own precious USP – it has 150 years of experience and passion behind it, it is unwaveringly proactive and it offers highly competitive prices, particularly at entry-level and for charmat-method sparkling wines. It also has an insatiable appetite: “To bring the company full circle, our ambition is to buy some real estate in Languedoc-Roussillon or Bordeaux over the next five years to secure some of our sourcing and provide our brands with a showcase by reconnecting them with the ‘chateau’ dimension that is so meaningful to our clients”. As is the company’s name itself, referred to by some as Meyblum Vineyards Partner, by others as Most Valuable Player.

## A FAMILY OF BORN ENTREPRENEURS

**Down through the generations, the Meyblums have always had a taste for entrepreneurship. Combining a passion for wine with an innate talent for sales, they have forged ahead, selling wine from Alsace to every corner of the globe.**

Ultimately, blood will out. In the 17th century, under the reign of Louis XIV, Valentin Meyblum was already trying his hand at vine growing in Erlenbach, incidentally a prime wine area in central Alsace. With wine in his blood and undeniable business acumen, Jean-Baptiste was the first of the family clan to wear two hats. As a soldier and a wine grower, he expanded the family’s business activities to include brandy distillation in 1862. His descendants, Charles then Franz, followed his lead – a negociant business was launched whilst Charles managed a bank and Franz ran a textile factory. The saga continued with Franz’s three sons. After inheriting family land themselves, Jean-Luc, Paul and Matthias partnered around a dual objective of developing contracts with wine growers and making a long-lasting pledge to their negociant business.

## WRITTEN IN THE FAMILY GENES

In 1975, at the age of 31, Jean-Luc, the most committed of the three brothers, took over responsibility of the group and became the father of Erik that same year. For some, this would have been motive enough to take a breather, but Jean-Luc was not that way inclined. Gifted academically – he took his Baccalauréat two years early, age 16 – he was also one of the first to focus on the European market. “After completing his military service abroad, my father started his career with Kronenbourg breweries in Strasbourg then became an expert in market analysis with the EEC. His experience gave him, not only an artisanal vision of the sector but also industrial insight, along with an open-minded approach to the world at large”, says Erik Meyblum.

## INCREASED INTERNATIONAL EXPOSURE

Erik may be his father’s son, but he’s certainly no Daddy’s boy. Entering the family firm was not a foregone conclusion, and Erik ultimately graduated with an MBA in international commerce. However, his real ambition at that time was to stand on his own



two feet. “I became director of a subsidiary company in Ivory Coast, specializing in removals”. He would go on to set up a company responsible for distributing ExxonMobil products then a consultancy firm working with household French names such as Bouygues and Bolloré. But ultimately, what’s bred in the bone comes out in the flesh: “In 2009, I joined the family group. Increased competition and a fall in consumption had led to a slump in the French market. I suggested to my father that I develop exports”. It was then that Erik discovered the wine and spirits industry and embarked passionately on a steep learning curve, rising up through the ranks of the company under the watchful eye of the managing director. “The choices I made at the outset proved to be out of kilter with the company’s profile and with the needs of its target markets. You learn from your mistakes. I wasted five years before shifting focus based on insight from market research, and by putting every fibre of my being into the company”.

*Erik and Nadège Meyblum*

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## COMBINING BUSINESS WITH PLEASURE

He tackled every aspect of the company, from the product portfolio to procedures and staff, his strategy a reflection of his forthright personality and his tremendous drive. Take a closer look, however, and it becomes clear that Erik is a chip off the old block – his ancestors before him had the same rational, rigorous approach to work, and life. “My grandfather was a very active member of the Resistance during the war. One of my uncles became a colonel, one of my aunts is in the air and border police and I have a cousin who is the captain of a gendarmerie”. The family is averse to taking unnecessary risks and expertise is properly taken on board before it is shared. These are the sound basic tenets underpinning the firm’s sustainability and reputation. But it’s not all work and no play. “My grandfather was fond of Rhone reds and my father of Bordeaux’s left bank growths”. Erik has a weak spot for white wines from Alsace, the only French appellation where varietal names can feature on the labels. Now the full-fledged director of MVP Wines, he has honed his techniques and his passion for travel has taken a back seat to his rigorous business priorities. The company’s future is in safe hands.



## A FITTING LOGO

The choice of logo for the Meyblums is highly symbolic. It is modeled after the three castles in Eguisheim, the cradle of Alsace’s vineyards, which also happens to be the family home. Built between the 11th and 12th centuries on Schlossberg hill – renowned for its 1er Grand Cru – the fortresses originally formed a single structure overlooking the plain from their 591-metre high promontory. Today, only three pink sandstone keeps are still standing after being abandoned in the 15th century. In the centre is the oldest keep, Wahlenbourg, formerly owned by the powerful counts of Eguisheim. To the North stands Dagsbourg, the most imposing, and to the South, Weckmund. Three towers for three brothers...

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