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By [Harrison V. Langly](#)

What a story Chateau Tariquet can tell!

Bears, bartenders, ocean voyages, the biggest cities, small rural communities, courage in war, rehabilitation and 'disobedience.'

Let's start at the beginning.

At the end of the 19th century the citizens of Erce at the foot of the French Pyrenees with their proximity to the mountain bears' natural habitat, were skilled

in the art of bear-taming (peace, animal lovers, this was a long time ago). One young gentleman, M. Artaud took his two bears on the road and finished up in New York. He returned to his homeland in 1912 and fell in love with a run down property which he resolved to buy. Assisted by his son, now a successful bartender in NY, they took over Chateau Tariquet where the first Bas-Armagnacs had been produced

in 1683, now with just 7 hectares of sorry vines.

In 1914 the son, Jean-Pierre returned to fight for his country, was badly wounded and remained with amnesia in hospital until 1922. He finally rejoined his wife in NY who had waited eight years, weekly greeting each boat from Le Havre in vain hope. They returned to France and had a daughter Helene.

Pierre Grassa, born in France to Spanish parents...

from just over the border was a fine sportsman and a military man. He was captured in WWII and escaped to join the Resistance in the South West. As you might have guessed he met and married Helene.

They devoted their energy to restoring and expanding the Chateau producing some of the finest brandies of Bas-Armagnac. Two of their children remained with the property and continue to build the empire.

So where does 'disobedience' come in?

Michel Serres, the philosopher, said: "Let us teach our children to disobey us!"

In 1982, with their reputation for Armagnac already confirmed, the next generation decided against all the traditions of the district to produce fine white wines from their property. If you have ever tasted the tart thin wine that goes into producing eau-de-vie before it is distilled you'll know that the grapes ugni blanc and colombar, traditionally handled, are not a great place to start.

So Yves Grassa planted other varieties rarely seen in this part of Gascony: chardonnay, sauvignon and chenin. Now with clever management within the local terroir and masterful blending of the crop, there are a number of whites and roses worthy of your attention.

In their centenary year, they now have 900 hectares of vines, 100 of which are for the armagnacs producing around 120,000 bottles of the various categories.

But the family now produce about 8 million bottles of the Cotes de Gascogne table wines with strong exports to the UK and the USA.

The gros and petit manseng varieties were introduced in the 1990s and are used for sweet whites and also became a part of the 'Classic' blend.

As Remy Grassa says: "This year represents our centenary and in 100 years from now the Chateau will still be producing fresh and fruity wines and fine and elegant Bas-Armagnacs, not to mention other new wines we haven't yet thought about!"

A sweep of epic tales over a century in the telling. That's what behind the wines you can check out at [www.tariquet.com](http://www.tariquet.com) and probably at your local merchant.

(Apologies to the Grassa family and our French readers, we are having trouble with our accents. We are sure you know where they should go.)