

Telegraph.co.uk - April 2024

The Telegraph

Whether he's making blockbuster films or wine at his Provençal estate, the vintage director is a force to be reckoned with

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12 April 2024 • 7:00am

In the gleaming basement of a winery in Provence, an assistant is explaining the movie memorabilia seen above neat rows of barrels. Here, three Napoleon costumes as worn by Joaquin Phoenix in director Ridley Scott's latest epic. There, a scale model of Rome's Colosseum that was used for the wide shots in Gladiator. We examine heavy-looking armour from another Scott film, The Last Duel. "Plastic. The only thing that's not is the sword. If the actor were carrying something light, they wouldn't have the right posture, and Ridley Scott likes things to look authentic."

Sir Ridley Scott, I also know, having spent the morning talking to those who work for him here on his vineyard on the slopes of the northern Luberon, has an opinion on the way everything looks. This includes the interiors of the three rental properties here on the Mas des Infermières estate. Also the architecture of the new winery, whose high, circular windows, 6ft across, were inspired by Fontfroide Abbey, a location for The Last Duel, his 2021 medieval French epic.

We are just north of the craggy Luberon mountains, in the part of Provence made famous by the late Peter Mayle (the author of A Year in Provence), who moved to a farmhouse in nearby Ménerbes in 1987. Scott bought his place in 1992, after selling a nine-bedroom house in the Cotswolds because the rest of his family never wanted to go there: "It rained, rained, rained. I didn't mind it. Everyone else, I think, was fairly miserable!"



A legacy project? Scott would like his children to be involved in the winemaking business. | CREDIT: OUSA/PIRELLA

I've been told that Scott instructed Barraud to run Mas des Infermières to prioritise the bees. This has meant not going for organic certification because one particular treatment in the organic programme is not bee-friendly. Does he share fellow filmmaker and vigneron Michael Seresin's deep concern for the environment and the climate crisis? "I think we've done it. We've done it." He means, passed the point of no return. "It's insane. I've got flowers in my garden [in early February]. We are at war now with the climate. I don't know how you are going to reverse it." Has he changed his behaviour because of this? "I've been driving electric cars [for] 16 years. I've got three Priuses. You've got to start somewhere. The biggest plague are people. We've got too many people."



The architecture at Scott's estate has a moorish feel. | CREDIT: OUSA/PIRELLA

Wisely, when estate director Christophe Barraud began to draw up a plan for Mas des Infermières, he lined up a tasting of wines from the Rhône, Languedoc and Provence regions to understand Scott's tastes. Then he planned the planting and winemaking accordingly. Thus, in white grapes, Barraud has planted roussanne and rolle (aka vermentino) and bought a plot of chardonnay to add to the grenache blanc and chairette already on the estate. In red grapes, he has planted syrah and marselan and acquired cabernet sauvignon and merlot, which are on new land the estate has bought; there is also grenache and carignan.

The wines he is making are a diverse bunch, taking in sparkling as well as still rosé, a fresh still white, and an oak-aged red, among others. There is even a no-added-sulphur red, named Jolo after Scott's dog, which itself is named after Joséphine Bonaparte.

He bought Mas des Infermières as a place to holiday; it just happened to come with vines, which were then under contract to a local winemaker. Later, in 2009, he began to collaborate with another producer to create a Mas des Infermières label. Then, in 2017 he made the decision to go all-in as a fully independent producer, hiring staff and constructing a winery within 18 months, ready to make the first vintage in 2020.

Meanwhile, he's still cranking out the films at a spectacular rate. The recent Napoleon has a tangential connection to Mas des Infermières: the estate was once owned by General Baron Robert, a health officer in Napoleon's army. Scott finished the final edit of Gladiator II the day before we meet. "It will be mass-ive," he says with gusto.



Ridley Scott and Russell Crowe on the Provence set of their 2006 film A Good Year. | CREDIT: LAMORNET/ISTOCK