

# TEMPUS

TIMELESS INSPIRATION

EXCLUSIVE

## SIR RIDLEY SCOTT

Talks a life in film and taking a cinematic approach to his family wine estate, Mas des Infermières

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# Source of inspiration

Filmmaker Sir Ridley Scott reveals the story behind his family wine estate, Mas des Infermières, and how he is applying the cinematic approach to winemaking

Words: Michelle Johnson

Nestled in the heart of the Luberon nature reserve in southern France, Sir Ridley Scott's idyllic family wine estate has evolved from a Provençal escape to a viticultural success story. The prolific director purchased Mas des Infermières in 1992 as a holiday home where he could paint, read and relax away from Hollywood – and the industry he has dominated since his second film, *Alien*, burst into cinemas in 1979.

Since 2019, the estate's picturesque 11-hectares of verdant grenache and syrah vines, olive trees and truffle oaks have been delivering a range of red, rosé and white wines that each perfectly encapsulates the unique character of the Luberon's exceptional terroir. Although Ridley admits that, when he first bought Mas des Infermières, he had

no interest in making wine himself.

"I think we all have an intuition," says Ridley, contemplating what made him take that leap. "I've learned to trust mine – when something clicks, I act on it. The reason I've done so many movies is that I don't pontificate over 40 subjects. My motto is: 'Just do it – but do it the best you can.'"

Ridley, 86, built a team of expert winemakers to help guide the process, installed a state-of-the-art cave, and applied a sustainability plan to protect the biodiversity and health not just of the vines, but the native flora and fauna of the region itself – Mas des Infermières is certified as an HVE (High Environmental Value) and bee-friendly producer.

While winemaking may be a new venture for the director, Ridley is by no means a 'hands-off'

vintner. His directorial expertise, interest in art and design, and personal love of wine ensures his input remains invaluable to his team. After all, he says, if you're going to make something a success, "you've got to be involved".

"My experience comes from 50 years of drinking," he laughs. "[Winemaking] is like making a movie: once you're in, you're in deep. Up to your nose in challenges. It's exactly the same with wine.

"We're all about quality," he adds. "The competition is enormous; so many people make wine. But there are so many films now, and I'm still surviving after 40 years. I released *Napoleon* [in 2023] and I'm delivering *Gladiator II* in November. So, I just ignore [the competition] and focus on the wine." »





## NORTHERN SOUL

While it's tempting to draw parallels between the story of Ridley's discovery of Mas des Infermières and his 2006 film *A Good Year* – in which Russell Crowe's high-flying city investor inherits a Provence château – Ridley's true motivation was to get back to the land.

"I'm from the north of England. I'm a bit of a farmer," says Ridley, who was born in South Shields in 1937. "In 1972 I bought myself a small farm in the Cotswolds. We were there for 10 years – I had horses, 60 sheep, 50 ducks... The family gradually lost interest, so I was the only one who wanted to go down on the weekends.

"I sold it in '82 but I always missed the land. In '92 I decided I needed to find a farm and to find sunshine." Ridley was at Cannes Film Festival when his realtor discovered Mas des Infermières. "The house was a gem. I drove 250km [155 miles], walked in and bought it."

Soon enough, the history of the mas (the Provençal term for a Mediterranean-style farmhouse) was offering its own inspiration. The first official mention of Mas des Infermières was in 1831 – an estate belonging to General Baron Robert, a surgeon (or 'health officer') in Napoleon's army. Just as it would take years for that link to the French Emperor to enter Ridley's working life, the estate's lush vineyards would take time to work their magic, too.

"The vineyards, to me, were a garden; I had no interest in making wine," he admits. Instead, Ridley made a deal with local producers. Cave de Lumières, who soon began winning awards for their wine. Ridley said: "I think I better start paying attention".

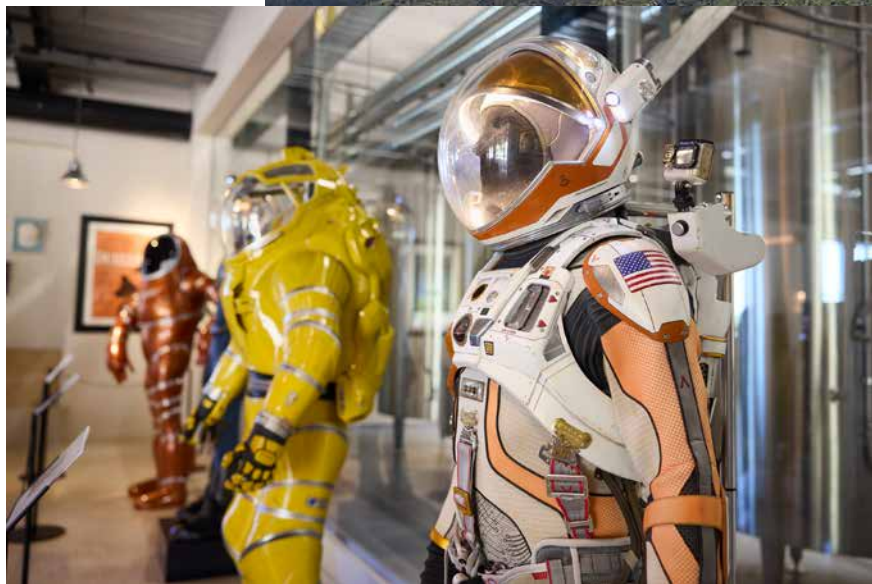
Upon realising the potential of his vines, Ridley burst into action. He built a new, modern cellar; hired a new director, Christophe Barraud, and sales director, Melanie de Rudder; and undertook a complete renovation of the properties on the estate – three of which are now available as luxurious holiday homes. "The evolution has been huge," he says. "Already, the wine is great."

The collection itself is perfectly indicative of the terroir: crisp reds, fresh and aromatic whites and fruity, subtly spicy rosés. The vines are elevated to 200m on the cool northern face of the Luberon massif, noted for its marly limestone, sand and red clay. The most exceptional wine in the portfolio is the limited-edition Ombre de Lune, made from the estate's oldest syrah vines and aged in barrels after an early, moonlit harvest. The Chevalier collection offers powerful and complex reds, rosés and whites, all perfect for fine food pairings. Finally, the Source collection is inspired by an abundance of water that encourages the fruity, fresh notes in the red, rosé and white cuvées.

The wines' label designs are also created and drawn by Ridley, and inspired by the story of each expression – though despite his artistic skill, he says painting is an area of constant self-improvement.

"I'm a terrible painter," he says, though his elegant labels and the popularity of his 'Ridleygram' storyboards would counter his self-deprecation. "When I'm in France I paint every day. What I've discovered is it's best to have several canvases to work on. You finish a canvas, see it's not right, come back in a month, and mess it up again. It's an ongoing cycle – but I'm Sagittarius, and one of the [characteristics] I always took on board was: 'When it's finished, you're never satisfied'." »

**Family legacy:**  
Ridley Scott (previous)  
at Mas des Infermières  
(main); The state-of-  
the-art wine cellar  
(below) features  
props from Ridley's  
blockbuster films





### CREATIVE CONTROL

Best known for his impressive feature film portfolio, Ridley began his life in film creating high level commercials for household names including Chanel and Apple.

"I became quite successful pretty quickly, so I could afford to eat at the best places – and that ruined me," he laughs. "I used to enjoy Alvaro Maccioni's La Terazza – it was like the gates of heaven opening for Italian food in London. I loved Italian and Sardinian white wines – fresh and young. The wine of the moment in the '60s was Verdiccio," he says, taking a moment to sketch the distinctive Coca-Cola-bottle shape of the bottle. "We drank gallons of it."

Ridley's oenological education continued when shooting his first feature film, *The Duellist* (1977), in France. "I was into seriously good French cuisine – we used to go to Chez Flo, a very fashionable banqueting restaurant in the '70s and '80s – and I developed a taste for French red wine."

At Mas des Infermières, guests can see highlights of his work from this era to present day – from the props and costumes adorning the cellar walls to an on-site exhibition of some of his personal collection of memorabilia. But life could have been very different had he not been encouraged to apply for the Royal College of Art.

"I was an academic disaster," he says. "I was an army brat, in and out of schools, and my report card was terrible. The best thing that ever happened to me was going to art school. But it goes to show, it doesn't matter if you're not academically bright, you must go for what you enjoy."

It's a sentiment that Ridley has passed down to his children, all of whom are directors of commercials, music videos and feature films. His daughter Jordan recently released her debut movie *A Sacrifice* (2024) – a gripping psychological thriller starring Eric Bana and *Stranger Things*' Sadie Sink – while his son Luke is known for *Morgan* (2016) and Jake for *American Woman* (2018). Ridley's granddaughter Cuba is also making her name as a photographer: "Cuba's better than any photographer I know," he says.

"Everyone has talent; it's a matter of digging it out. I was blessed with a very good eye – I know where to put a camera – so I followed that route," he says, acknowledging that his competitive nature has honed that further. "I'm not just efficient, I'm very fast. I shot *Napoleon* in 51 days – normally it would have taken 120 [days]. I finished *Gladiator II* in 51 days. I'm always in competition with myself – and I love that."

With Mas des Infermières now available in the UK, I have to ask how his encounters with wine critics have compared to those in the film world.

"Oh, I'm constantly crucified by critics," Ridley laughs. "My third movie, *Blade Runner*, was decimated by The New Yorker. It was so bad that I framed [the review] – it's still in my office today. It reminds me that, just when you think you've got it, you don't know anything."

"That review affected the outcome of the movie, but it recovered and, 20 years later, it's a classic of science fiction," he says. "I learned years ago that you can't listen to criticism. The only critic you can listen to is yourself." 🍷

[masdesinfermieres.com](http://masdesinfermieres.com)

**Artistic eye:** Ridley Scott's creative flair is evident in his artwork for Mas des Infermières artwork, including cork details (opposite) and bottle labels (below); The director attends the Spanish premiere of his film *Napoleon* in 2023 (top left)

