

# French vintners want 'chateau' off U.S. wine bottles

By Edward Cody, Washington Post

PORTETS, France – When Dominique Haverlan pastes the label “Vieux Chateau Gaubert” on his wine bottles, he proclaims this to his customers: I am selling you 400 years of French pedigree, the shadow of aged Palladian buildings restored at a cost of nearly \$2 million, the fruit of 87 acres of vines tended to like children and the glories of a winemaking heritage here in the Graves flatlands near Bordeaux that reaches back for centuries.

How, then, Haverlan asks, can American winemakers pretend to put “chateau” on their labels from the New World? What chateau? They have chateaux in America? The very word is French, he notes, and the Vieux Chateau Gaubert, formerly Le Bordillot, was standing here before there even was an America. Worse, how can American merchants try to sell such wines in Europe? And even in France – maybe even Bordeaux?

But they are.

The European Commission, the 27-nation European Union’s executive body in Brussels, is considering a U.S. request to drop a ban on import into Europe of American wines bearing the label “chateau” or “clos,” a similar term used mainly on wines from Burgundy in eastern France. An E.U. wine committee is tentatively scheduled to vote on the request Sept. 25, whereupon it will go to the commission for a final decision that, given the tides of globalization in Europe, could well be positive.

“They’re trying to steal our reputation,” Haverlan said during

a tour of his sun-splashed property. “The real chateaux, they’re certainly not in the United States.”

Preservation of “chateau” on wine bottles is another chapter in France’s long struggle between tradition and globalization. Throughout the country, peasants and craftsmen are fighting to maintain the value of expensive prestige accumulated over centuries – just the right cheese, or a perfect dress – against an onslaught of cheaper imitations sloshing in on the latest freighter from abroad. With borders disappearing and trade increasingly ignoring origins, their voices are getting weaker every year.

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