

Some Trouble Investing in Wine

Nicholas Jones

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About the Author

Nicholas Jones writes fictitious books about things that could be happening right now. The first book tells the sobering story of what may have happened in late 2019, to the business of investing in French fine wines.

After more than 35 years in business, Nicholas attended a six-month writing course to convert from a fact-based business person to a storyteller. His clients would probably say it was inevitable given the number of stories he told them over the years. He now intends to spend a lot more time writing about business and imagining what is really going on inside them.

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Disclaimer

All characters, organisations (except the brands mentioned) and events in this publication are fictitious and any resemblance to real persons living or dead is purely coincidental.

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I have been bothering **my wife Gillian** for most of the last forty years about my desperate need to write books based on things that could be true. She encouraged me to get on with it, then helped with the story and the editing of this first effort, over a great deal of wine. So many thanks and much love for her tenacity.

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Dedications

To my girls, Gill and Harrie
with love and thanks

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Part One - Should we Invest in Wine?



Prologue: Cote d'Azur, France, Summer 2019

It was hot, really hot, the sun blazing down on Le Vieux Port de Marseille through the bright blue sky. Leisure boats were dancing in the gentle harbour swell while locals strolled and visitors jogged. People were sitting in the cafés enjoying cooling drinks, talking about what they would be doing later and the rest of the week. If they stayed long enough, it was the “yellow vests”, the President, British tourists, terrorists and maybe even the upcoming rugby season. But it was all good-natured, it was too hot for vexation.

Unfortunately, this was not true for everyone. In a steaming warehouse hidden by sprawling buildings overlooking the harbour, a gang of men were hard at work like 18th century slaves driven on by a modern day gangmaster sporting a stolen police matraque.

“Ouch! pardon monsieur, it won't happen again, pardon monsieur, sorry sir.” Good, he's gone now. Our French men like to be treated well and called sir. They shout at us most days when we are late or don't do things right or want to have a pee. But they are not too bad they don't hit us very much unless they are already angry, or something has gone wrong. Our French chief Yves, who has a giant friend, is quite nice he talks to us and thanks us for what we are doing. His bosses M. Pascal and M. Martin have been here but they just walk around, don't say much and take away boxes from the cellar.

The work is not too difficult, but it can be harder when the big truck arrives with a belly full of liquid. Sometimes they say the place looks a mess, but we have a way of working that gets it done easy. At one end of our building, some brothers are cleaning what they told us were claret bottles. This is a very strange name I don't know why they don't just call it red wine. Down at the other end, we put the bottles into wooden cases

and nail them closed. Then my brothers put them onto platforms ready for transportation.

I work on filling the wine bottles from the big silver tanks the truck leaves for us every week. I think the truck goes back to the port but I don't know for sure. I say this because I think some of the wine comes from my home, but I can't be sure of this either, but my brothers think so. When the bottles are full, we have to make sure the level is right, then we squeeze a cork into the top to stop it from running out, sometimes it is hard to do and the corker breaks and we are yelled at. Our French man looks at all the bottle tops and then wraps some stuff around the top to hide it. Mahamid is very skilled, he polishes the bottle then puts on the label so they know who owns it. The wooden cases are all different and many have pictures of big houses, they call them chateaux. I don't know where these places are but the labels are very pretty. We must be putting their wine in the bottles for them so they can drink it or maybe sell it because there is a lot. It's good to know that we are making them happy. My brothers sometimes call us slaves but I just laugh at their jokes. I don't have to wear chains as they used to in America. I believe I am a guest in this country and helping the French who let me come here from my very poor country.

We are not allowed to go near the French men that work with the white powder. They are kept in a cellar down some stairs. I went there when I helped my friend carry a box. It was full of paper money and when I looked around me I could see lots more money being put in a machine and shuffled like when we play cards. Then they wrap it in plastic like the fruit we buy in the market, I don't why they do that it must be to keep it clean. Down there smelt very strange and there was a lot of white powder being mixed as you do for bread and then they put that in plastic too. They told me that people put the powder on their face, mainly on the nose, it makes them feel good. I don't know what they do with so much money but I wish I could have some more and then I could leave here and enjoy France.

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I am called Hakim and I have been here for one year soon, I came with my blood brother, but I have not seen him for some time. I hope he has found somewhere good and is not lost or dead. The French men told us it would be easy work and we would be able to leave after one year but I think that cannot be true as many of my brothers are still here. My close brother is now Sami and we always try to work together. We both wanted to leave our home and come to France, we have heard many stories about how good the houses are. There are I think ten of us staying in my house it's better than home although there are too many people in it. We have running water, even though it is not always hot, electricity for lights and heaters usually work. We have our own beds, but not much space to move around or store our belongings. But it is what we need to live. They give us food in the morning and give us rest time in the middle of the day when they eat. We can cook something in the evening but it is difficult with so many of us. But they give us bread and cheese. We are not allowed to drink anything but water or some orange juice. Most of us do not drink alcohol as we are strict, but it would be good to have some tea. If we want to pray they sometimes let us in the day if they are in a good mood and not being shouted at by M. Pascal. But we have a little time when the sun appears and when the sun goes down. Although it is difficult to know what time it is especially when the cold months come.

I would like to go to England but that is a long way from here. We are worried about England leaving Europe, they say it will be much harder for us to get there when it is no longer England, but a place called large Britain or maybe it is big Britain. That seems a strange name, I prefer it to be called England because we know who that is and we prefer their football teams to the French. I like Manchester City because my cousin has sent me a picture wearing a blue shirt of Riyad Mahrez before I came here. I don't know when I will be able to go and see him.

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Our French men tell us they are keeping our money to pay for everything, but there must be some leftover, they only give us 50 euros each week. We wonder if we should tell someone that we are working here for so little money, but we don't know who. I can't buy much, but we have a secret phone which we share. I make a call home when it is my turn, I think it will be tomorrow this week.

Yesterday some police came to our house, one of them was a woman which is strange I think. They said nothing to us and were very friendly with our Frenchmen, maybe they are cousins. We were worried that they might think there was too many of us in one place and tell us there was not enough room, so some had to go home. We tried to hide but they saw us but said nothing so it must be alright for us to be working here.

Chapter 1: St Albans, a Tuesday morning in September 2019

“I think you’re just being mean,” the lady presenter shouted accusingly. The audience stopped whispering to stare at her, then glanced at him waiting for a reply. “Did you hear me? I said you’re being plain mean to these lovely people,” she repeated. He still said nothing, they wondered what was going to happen, they knew the man was in charge he told them earlier. But they liked what she was saying about them. “Roger, I think you can do much more than that,” she continued in a loud voice. They were transfixed, having spent the day enjoying the seminar, the two presenters who entertained them had fallen out and they weren’t sure why. The man looked at them accusingly as though they were in league with her. There was absolute silence, the audience stared at the male presenter. Surely, he must say something to her or to them, they waited.

“Okay,” he replied and they all let out a deep breath then started to breathe normally. “I understand why you think that,” he turned to the audience with tears in his eyes. “Lydia is right, I was only thinking about what would be easier for the company. I am so sorry for what I was going to do. We have spent the whole day together and I have grown to love you people. I sometimes forget that you are most important, we must always help you first. Can you forgive me?” They nodded, they were embarrassed at the way they had ganged up against him and supported the lady. Now they hated her and loved him, “I don’t care what the rest of the company thinks I am going to do the right thing. So, I will give a third off our **“Jubatus for Currency”** training and support package – **“The world’s fastest-moving investment strategy”** not just for the first five,” he put one hand up. “Or the first eight people,” holding up both hands, one with thumb and one finger down. “But the **FIRST TEN** people,” holding up two hands, “who run up to the front and stand alongside me.” There was a clamour amongst the audience, they stood and started to run to the front of the

room some nudging others out of the way to make sure they didn't miss out. There were twelve slowly counted out by Lydia. "Twelve," he echoed. "Who were the last two up?" he asked the line. No one confessed but some looked guilty. "Well, in that case, shall I just pick two orrrrrr LET'S ALL HAVE THE DEAL" he shouted as he raised his arms. The room erupted with cheering. It was another good day for Investment Mentor 4U, thought the staff listening in the office next door.

The company had been running since 2009. It had a slow start but in the last five years, revenues had increased by at least 20% a year. Success had come by expanding in the richer Northern European countries where people had an appetite for taking a risk to make money. The owner and Chief Executive is Andre Devries, aged 38, a former banker who left because he wanted to do something more exciting.

He made an appearance at the beginning of the Foreign Exchange Workshop to whet the appetite of the attendees. He told them the well-practised story of how his parents fled South Africa for the UK when he was only five. Then onto how his father died unexpectedly leaving him and his brother to be looked after by their sick mother. But they never gave up hope and he made it to become an Investment Banker, before setting up his own successful business. Most of this was true although he left out the bits about private school, rich uncle and lots of failures. They listened intently as he told them it was all about getting the mind right, focusing on what is important and not letting anything get in the way. He claimed his only motivation was to help others to get where he was now. He walked over to the window and pointed to his brand new Porsche Cayenne Coupe.

"I got that a few weeks ago," he continued, most of them got up to look. "It cost me a fortune, I just love it, I paid for it through my investments and not with our company's money. I follow my methods without question, if you do the same, believe in what

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