



**BARGYLUS**<sup>®</sup>  
GRAND VIN DE SYRIE

**A Johnny R.Saadé Family estate**  
*Bargylus. A Symbol of Perseverance.*

*Latakia - Syria*



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In 2003, the Johnny R.Saadé family, based in Lebanon, launched two vineyards in the Middle East. One of them heralded the revival of Syrian winemaking, dating back to the time of the Canaanites, ancient Greeks, and Romans. The other was a pioneering venture in Lebanon's Beqaa Valley. Today, the wines of Domaine de Bargylus and Château Marsyas vie with the best in the world, attracting the interest of wine lovers and professionals from all around the globe.

Cited by Pliny the Elder, Mount-Bargylus is the ancient name of Jabal Al-Ansariyé located in the hinterland of the Syrian port-city of Latakia.

Marsyas is also cited by Strabo and Pliny the Elder as the ancient name for Lebanon's Beqaa Valley.



## THE STORY: THE JOHNNY R.SAADÉ FAMILY

Blessed with a strong Levantine heritage, the Johnny R.Saadé family boasts a passion for pursuing challenges, among which is the revival of the ancient vineyards of the “very old world”.

Of Eastern Christian origin, the family is a typical representation of Levantine syncretism with roots in the ancient coastal city of Laodicea (modern-day Latakia) as well as in Antioch, Alexandria, Tripoli (Lebanon), and Mount-Lebanon.

This family of wealthy merchants, industrialists and Syrian property magnates traces its mercantile and landowning roots to the 18th and 19th century with prominent figures such as Elias Saadé, Mikhaïl Saadé, Gabriel Saadé (1854-1939) and Rodolphe Saadé (1900-1956).

In the 1840s, Elias Saadé undertook an in-depth reform and modernization of olive tree plantation and production in the Syrian coastal area.

Olive trees remain a strong symbol of the family’s identity and an olive branch will also be used on the label of Bargylus subtly intertwined with a vine.

The family’s commercial interests encompassed Syria, Cyprus, and Egypt where many of its

members were very active in Alexandria’s cotton exchange.

The list of Syria’s main merchants in the 1907 edition of “Kelly’s Directory of merchants, manufacturers and shippers” mentions four members of the Saadé family among the eight leading merchants of the city of Latakia.

Rodolphe Saadé (1900-1958), one of the leading Syrian industrialists of his time, diversified into the production of tobacco, olive oil, cottonseed oil, and many other fields. Sharing his vision for his country, he declared to the American geologist Raymond E. Crist, author of the 1962 book titled “Land for the fellahin: land tenure and land use in the Near East” that “our wealth is in agriculture and our industries should be based on it”.

Following Rodolphe’s death, the Saadé family’s



lands, estates, industries, and other interests were confiscated or nationalized under Gamal Abdel Nasser’s regime during the ephemeral union between Syria and Egypt.

His wife Odette Nauphal, a scion of a long-established patrician family hailing from the city of Tripoli, Lebanon, which counted among its members a Russian baron and advisor to Czar Alexander III, took the reins of the family business interests and effectively opposed the seizure of all of its assets.

Many years later, her son Johnny R.Saadé developed important shipping and other transport activities in the Middle East and France.

In 1997, he spearheaded a major turnaround in the family's activities by restoring its agricultural roots through the creation of vineyards in Lebanon and Syria as well as other agriculture-based industries.

Johnny and his sons Karim and Sandro, who are Syrian-Lebanese nationals, began to consider their options. At first, they eyed Bordeaux, the "obvious choice," before deciding that they were "going to do it, right here in [their] own country." Next an exhaustive study to scout out the best land was undertaken, requiring four years in Syria and five years in Lebanon before completion.

The terroir eventually chosen were virgin lands in Lebanon's Beqaa Valley and in Syria, among the most ancient vine-growing sites in the world. Karim and Sandro sought the expertise

of Stéphane Derenoncourt, the renowned Bordeaux wine consultant who works with passionate and committed winegrowers all around the world.

### **THE SYRIAN CHALLENGE**

Making wine in Syria is a real challenge given the lack of wine culture and infrastructure. The task became even more difficult with the outbreak of the war in 2011, rendering the Saadé brothers unable to visit the estate ever since. Besides the obvious security problems, Bargylus also poses a logistical challenge: Harvesting is done over the phone by the two brothers. Grape samples for each variety and for each plot are sent by taxi for tasting in Beirut in order to determine the different harvesting dates. Laboratory tests are conducted outside the country. Endless and complex processes are



also necessary to ensure the exportation of the wines.

### **THE LEBANESE CHALLENGE**

Compounded with the war in Syria, the family faces a climate of national political and economic crises in Lebanon.

The August 4th Port of Beirut blast in 2020 nearly took their lives.

Karim and Sandro were meeting with their father Johnny in their offices located less than 600 meters from the port when 3,000 kg of ammonium nitrate exploded.

The premises were completely destroyed, with shattered windows and collapsed walls.

Johnny and Sandro were projected several meters. Fortunately, Karim was standing behind a structural wall at the time of the blast and suffered very light injuries.

It took an hour to get Johnny out of the building from the ninth floor, descending through the emergency stairs and wading through rubble.

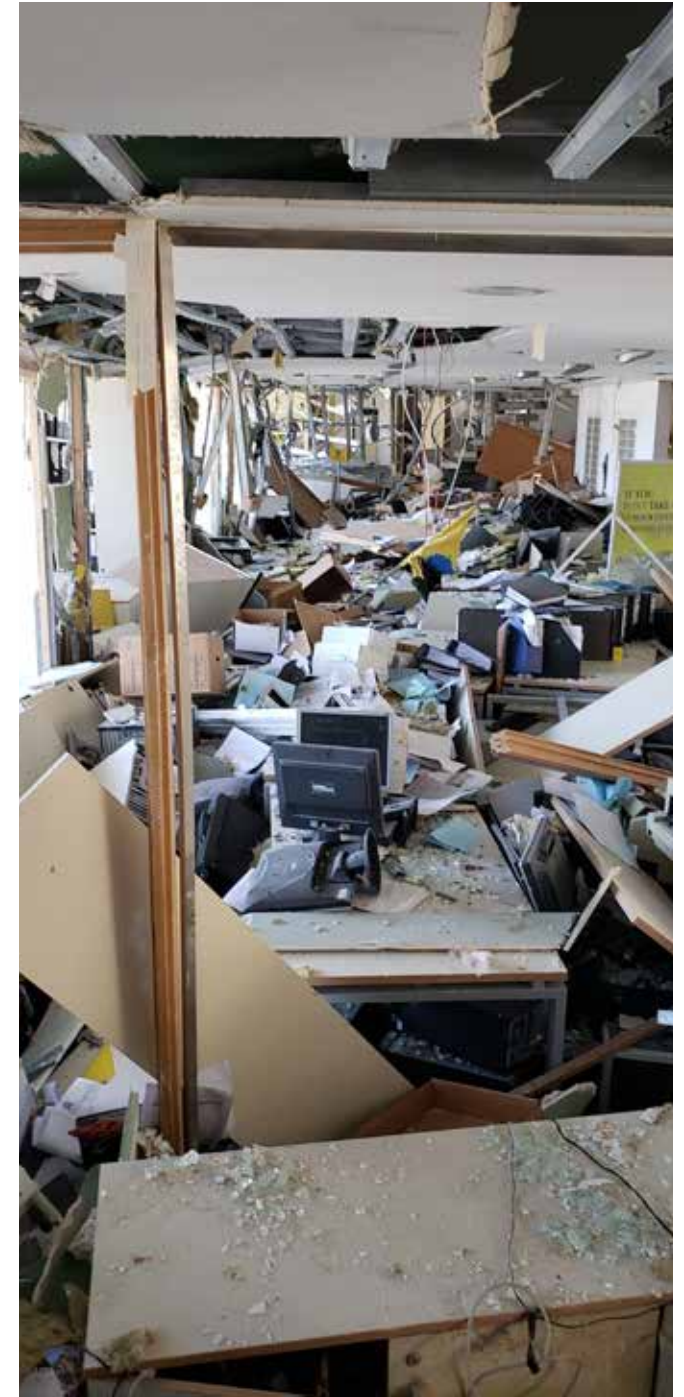
They stopped a passing car to convey them to the nearest hospital, where Johnny was kept in intensive care for 11 days and hospitalized for nearly a month.



Meanwhile the streets of Beirut were blanketed with debris, rubble, and countless casualties.

Sandro, who was on crutches for several weeks, did not have time to recover and had to organize the harvesting process with Karim, which started ten days later, on August 15th, 2020, for Château Marsyas and in early September for Bargylus.

They established their interim headquarters in their father Johnny's hospital room from which they managed the whole operation for both Bargylus and Château Marsyas.



## THE PRIMACY OF THE SOIL AND UNCOMPROMISING QUALITY

Karim and Sandro's wine philosophy is aimed at elevating Lebanese and Syrian wines to the level they deserve.

By using the best red and white international varieties, they aim to promote soil excellence and the potential for organic agriculture. In a word, the unwavering focus is on "precision".

It is important to note that 90% of the work is done in the vineyard and 10% in the cellar.

Karim and Sandro have set high quality-based criteria such as high plantation density (6,250 plants per hectare) and a very low yield per plant (under one kg per plant).

Producing great wines requires harmony with nature and a long-term vision of vineyard management. The vine must be symbiotic with the terroir, extending deep into the soil, and the fruit must be picked at perfect maturity.

Bargylus and Château Marsyas are respectively situated at an altitude of 900 meters in northwestern Syria and 1,000 meters in the Beqaa Valley.

The soils are rich with limestone and flintstone at Bargylus and mostly clay and limestone at Château Marsyas.

Great temperature variations between night and day allows for a greater freshness, subtleness and grape maturity.

The wines are aged in French oak barrels for 14 months in the case of Bargylus and 12 months in the case of Château Marsyas.

Only 20% of barrels are new. They then undergo bottle aging for 48 months in both estates. They are released five years after the year of production and absolutely no sooner.

The highly personal approach of Karim and Sandro imparts a special character to these pioneering wines.

## ORGANIC PRACTICES

Organic practices are at the heart of Karim and Sandro's vision. This is promoted via a total absence of pesticides, insecticides and herbicides. Weed killing and harvesting are done manually. In the winter, cereals and legumes are planted between rows in order to loosen the compacted soil.

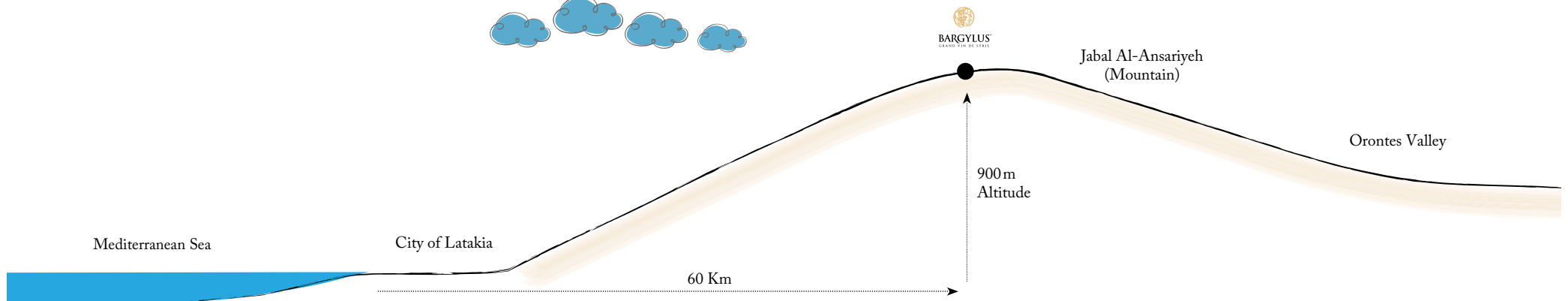
An annual application of natural compost and the creation of tree hedges in the middle of the estate reinforce the ecosystem. The material employed for tying up the vines to trellises is also biodegradable.



## DOMAINE DE BARGYLUS - A SYMBOL OF PERSEVERANCE

**Vineyard area:** 12 hectares  
**Age of vines:** Between 14 and 19 years (2003)  
**Density:** 6,250 vines / ha  
**Yield:** Between 1kg and 1.5kg per vine  
**Harvest:** By hand, gathering grapes in small crates (15kg) with selective sorting. Two passes for the difficult vintages.  
**Terroir:** Clay, Limestone and Flintstone  
**Date of harvest:** Beginning of Sept. till mid-Oct.  
**Annual rainfall:** 1,100 ml on average

**Bargylus Red**  
 60% Syrah  
 20% Cabernet Sauvignon  
 20% Merlot  
**Bargylus White**  
 55% Chardonnay  
 45% Sauvignon Blanc  
**JA-B-AL de Bargylus**  
 60% Cabernet Sauvignon  
 40% Syrah  
*\*Can vary between vintages*



**Vinification:**

Gravity flow, double sorting on reception and extraction by punching down.

**For the reds:** gentle extraction, punching down, pumping over.

**For the whites:** no maturation in casks, only in tanks, 3 months on lees.

**Maturation:** 20% in new casks  
20% in one-year-old casks  
20% in two-year-old casks  
20% in three-year-old casks  
20% in four-year-old casks

**Maturation time:**  
14 months for Bargylus  
6 to 8 months for JA-B-AL de Bargylus

**Temperature from veraison until harvest**

**Winter** ☀ From 14° to 16°  
☾ From 30° to 32°  
**Summer** ☀ From 8° to 12°  
☾ From 0° to 4°

*\*Builds fruitness during the day and acidity at night*

**THE TERROIR OF DOMAINE DE BARGYLUS**

Typically Mediterranean in style, Bargylus elegantly combines strength and refinement: it has a deep color, and the range of aromas is palpable through the fresh fruit and minerality that reflects the shingle soil. The balance between sweetness, indirectly transmitted by the sun, and the grapes' full maturity and salinity emanating from the limestone, allow Bargylus to convey a strong soil identity and a distinctive taste.







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## The Vintages

2006

Beautiful year marked by a cold and rainy winter with 909mm of rainfall followed by a fresh and bountiful spring. The summer season was hot and dry with several maritime entries. The harvesting season started on September 8 for the whites and September 14 for the reds, finishing on October 4 with the Cabernets. The wines of this vintage are balanced, powerful and fresh. It is the first vintage of the domain.

2007

This vintage is marked by a fresh spring season and a cool summer, followed by low rainfalls of 782mm in the winter. The flowering was rather good with a slow maturation of the grapes. We had to be very selective to reach a good maturity level and obtained refined wine with a beautiful aromatic freshness. The harvesting season started on September 3 with the Chardonnay and ended on October 4 with the Cabernets.

2008

The vintage is marked by a fresh and sunny spring followed by a hot and very dry summer. The rainfall this year did not exceed 850mm; however, because of the maritime influences and the hard work in the domain, we succeeded in obtaining powerful and structured wines with a beautiful acidity. The harvest started on September 9 and ended on October 15.

2009

Beautiful vintage emerging from an inclement winter, both rainy and snowy, followed by a mild spring with light rainfall. Summer was also rather cool, allowing us to obtain very good, homogeneous maturation. The wines of this vintage are complex, blending power and structure with aromatic finesse. We began the harvest on September 7 and ended on October 25.





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## The Vintages

2010

This vintage is the product of a scorching summer and severe drought, which affected the entire region. Maritime influences and a rainfall of 773mm, combined with hard work in the vineyard, allowed us to reap beautiful maturation. The harvest began on September 12 and ended on October 16.

2011

Following a cold and snowy winter, spring set in with a certain coolness. Flowering was thus delayed, resulting in a longer vegetative cycle and thereby increasing the aromatic complexity of the wines. Summer was lovely and hot, but not excessively so. The harvest began on September 24 and ended on October 25.

2012

A torrential winter saturated the groundwater table. Spring was dry and warm, but the vines tapped into the wet soil to foster a decent flowering of fruit. The summer season passed unscathed by heatwaves, consequently imparting beautiful aromatic freshness to the grapes. Thus, the 2012 vintage reflected a fine harvest.

2013

A vintage marked by a long, wet and cold winter, followed by a mild spring which allowed for uniform flowering. The summer was generally cool enough to allow for gentle grape maturity. Wines from this vintage show a lot of freshness and elegance. Harvest for the whites began on September 5 and for the reds, on September 12; harvest ended on September 30.





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## The Vintages

2014

The 2014 vintage was notably marked by a cold and rainy winter with a mild spring. Summer was warmer than in previous years but the winds carrying humidity allowed for a nice maturity of the grapes. Harvesting started on September 8 and ended on October 7.

2015

The 2015 vintage was probably the most difficult to date, since the creation of Bargylus in 2006. Winter was short but with good rainfall. Spring was mostly fresh and cool which promoted harmonious vegetative growth. Summer was hot and dry, and in mid August, we experienced a severe sandstorm with very hot winds that affected the maturity and the yield of the fruit, mainly the white varieties. We had to conduct a rigorous grape selection during the latter stages of the growing cycle, to preserve the best quality grapes. The harvest started on the 11th of September with the Chardonnay and ended on the 7th of October with the Cabernet Sauvignon.



## MEDIA REVIEWS

*“Vintage after vintage, through crisis after crisis, the Saadés have made extraordinary wines and, in so doing, are helping fuel the belief in an eastern Mediterranean wine renaissance to come.”*  
**Centurion Magazine (American Express) - 2021**

*“making great wine against incredible odds.”*  
**Harper wines - 2020**

*“Bargylus and Marsyas produce wines ... of mesmerising quality”*  
**Evening Standard - 2020**

*“‘war wine expertise’ in managing vineyards in very unstable environments...”*  
**Wine spectator - 2020**

*“The harvest was very early this year, so we were caught up [in it] quickly after the blast on 15 August”*  
**The Drinks Business - 2020**

*“Makers of ‘world’s most dangerous wine’ spend Christmas picking up the pieces from Beirut blast”*  
**The telegraph - 2020**

*“Blessés dans leurs bureaux soufflés par la terrible explosion du 4 août à Beyrouth, les célèbres vigneron libanais se relèvent.”*  
**La Revue du vin de France - 2020**

*“Avant chaque vendange, les échantillons des raisins de chaque cépage et de chaque parcelle sont acheminés en taxi jusqu’à Beyrouth pour les faire analyser.”*  
**Europe 1 - 2020**



## MEDIA REVIEWS

*“Ces vins de caractère, qui portent les stigmates des crises actuelles, ouvrent une perspective de renaissance savoureuse à cet Orient décidément plus compliqué que jamais.”*

**Le Figaro - 2020**

*“Pionniers de vins libanais modernes,... ”*

**Les Echos - 2020**

*“We had to harvest and at the same time we were at the hospital.  
We transformed [our father’s] hospital room into an operational room for the harvest”*

**Forbes - 2020**

*“It’s not just a wine for drinking, it’s a wine for thinking... [Bargylus]”*

**The Wine Show - 2018**

*“Fractious vintage: the most dangerous wine in the world. Bargylus is grown, produced and bottled in Syria”*

**The Irish Times - 2017**

*“Syrie: le vin le plus dangereux du monde”*

**Arte -2017**

*“Nouveau-né a la notoriété grandissante Château Marsyas”*

**Le Figaro -2016**

*“Puissance maîtrisée et fraîcheur [Château Marsyas et Bargylus]”*

**Le Monde - 2015**



## MEDIA REVIEWS

*“Syrian vineyard making the world’s most dangerous wine”*  
**The Telegraph - 2015**

*“Vin haut de gamme [Bargylus] consommé dans de grands restaurants étoilés, en France”*  
**Rfi.fr - 2014**

*“Marsyas, l’un des plus élégants vins blancs du Liban”*  
**La revue du vin de France - 2014**

*“The Finest wine produced in the Eastern Mediterranean is...[Bargylus]...”*  
**Jancis Robinson - Hugh Johnson, World Atlas of Wine - 7<sup>th</sup> Edition - 2013**

