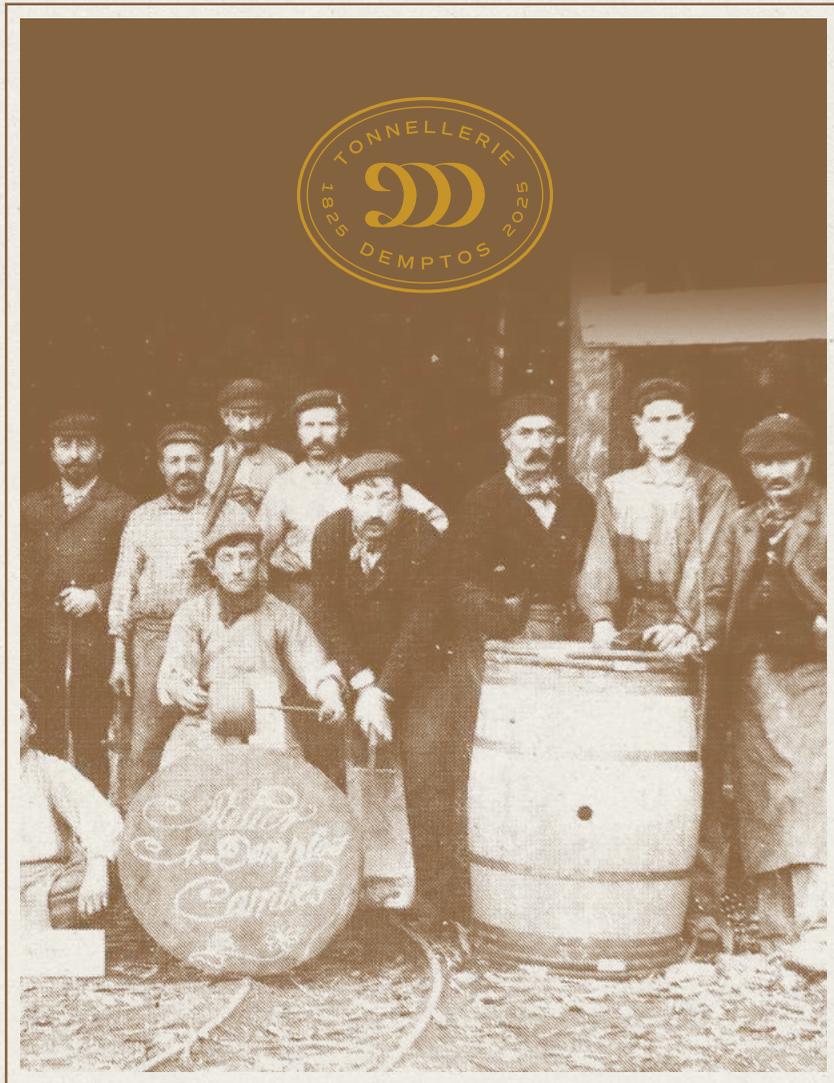


TONNELLERIE DEMPTOS

# the everlasting season



OAKS & MORE



*Tonnellerie Demptos*  
Carrying the legacy forward



## Two hundred years

On the scale of history, it's a comma.

In economic terms, in business terms, that's an epic.

From its creation in 1825 to the present day,  
a number of coopers have kept the fire alight,  
using this creative spark to breathe life into

**la Tonnellerie Demptos.**



## PREFACE

Over several centuries, the strata of the past of this Gironde-based cooperage have been deposited on the earth's surface. A bicentenary is more than just a date on a calendar. It is a work of history, work that draws on memory and projects into the future. The subtle balance between history and memory constitutes the power and energy involved in conveying and sharing the entrepreneurial, economic and human work at Tonnellerie Demptos over the centuries. The history of a company begins where the company was formed and continues until it becomes aware of itself.

In the words of a famous oenologist of the last century, as long as the pages are blank, as long as history has not been embodied in letters of ink, we must strive to define it. History is the critical and analytical study of the past. It is not limited to the mere recording of past events, but involves the analysis of human groups and companies. A scientific approach of this kind cannot be divorced from a more sensory, more intimate approach to history. History is a rational science, but its subject, humankind, is an irrational being made up of memories, beliefs, convictions and instincts that impart unique colour and vision. The cold dust of the archives must mingle with the living, breathing memory of the people of our time. This embodied memory is a kind of present in the past.

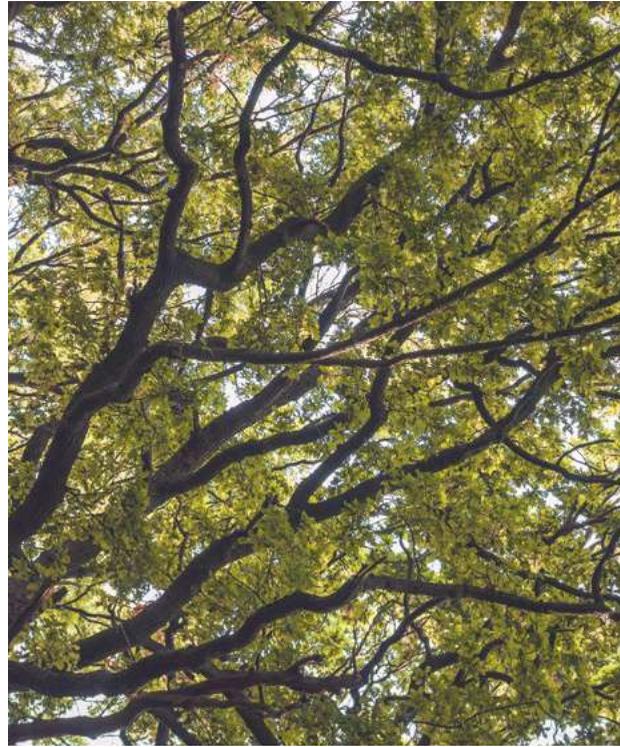
The historical research carried out to write the many lines of the history behind Tonnellerie Demptos was like waves that awakened the quiet memories of a company on the eve of the anniversary of its foundation. This wave not only awakened the archived past, but also the memories of the people who, set in motion, sought out their own memories. The tension between history and memory forms an energy, an entrepreneurial historical capital. History is more than capital; it is heritage. For a company, the notion of heritage is a key aspect of its symbolic and economic wealth. Heritage, as an inherited common good, is playing an increasingly important role in the economy. It is one of the main drivers enhancing the value of goods and merchandise, places and practices. Following on from the thinking of the sociologist Max Weber, we might add that heritage is a factor of domination through the tradition and charisma it generates.

Beyond the issues that exist between history and memory, between memory and historical heritage, there are issues between the historian themselves and their subject of study. Initially, they are two strangers who tame each other until the moment when the historian becomes worthy of their subject and can finally write its history. The thousands of archives that were opened and explored for this work were much more than mere papers. They were, in fact, the lives of people, and wanted nothing more than to return to the light of our sun.

As you prepare to embark on the path of history like a pilgrim, your senses will be mobilised. They will awaken in the same way as they do when a barrel is opened to reveal the treasure it holds within. The treasure that is being offered to you today comes from the deep roots of the old French oak from which Demptos barrels are made. It has lived through two hundred seasons under the sun, under the clouds and is now ready to offer itself to you after two hundred years. This treasure is the story of Tonnellerie Demptos.

# Introduction

THE CIVILISATION OF WOOD  
& THE CHILDREN OF SOLOMON



A long time ago, in a civilisation in the far east of the Mediterranean, the two hundredth golden shield was deposited in the House of the Forest of Lebanon. This house is one of King Solomon's works in his capital, Jerusalem. Its purpose was to house his most precious objects. Each of these two hundred shields was forged at the request of the sovereign. The gold used to make them came from a gift from the Queen of Sheba during her visit to the great king of the Hebrews.

The Queen, whose kingdom was much further south in the land of Canaan, did not only offer the king gold. She had a second gift for him which was just as priceless as the first. She gave him precious wood to honour the first of the Hebrews. Solomon used this wood to build divine temples to consecrate the Covenant between Man and God. Long before our time, wood, the material used to build temples of matter and spirit, was a sacred substance, an alchemical and creative element, a material derived from the long history that hides in the kingdom of the forests.

The course of the sun opens the way to the civilisations of wood. The forests of Lebanon fade into the distance, Anatolia looms ahead and, after crossing from the south to the north of Turkey, the city of Sinope offers the image of a man, an outsider, of Diogenes and his barrel, in which he sought the ideal of a self-sufficient life. Let's cross the Bosphorus and leave ancient Byzantium behind to set foot on the European continent. Following the Danube, further west, we encounter Etruscans, Romans and Gauls. Julius Caesar's writings mention the existence and use of wooden barrels by both the Gauls and the Etruscans, who had mastered the art of assembling staves, as illustrated by the paintings adorning their funerary objects. Even further west, on the banks of one of Gaul's largest rivers, the Garonne, there are many traces of ancient cooperage activity. In the city of *Burdigala*, or Bordeaux, two funerary monuments to coopers have been discovered. It was the second most important cooperage centre in ancient times.

Let's travel back in time along the banks of the Garonne. The seasons have passed, the leaves have fallen and returned to the earth, as have the people. Wars and peace have succeeded one another, Antiquity has disappeared, the Middle Ages have faded, giving way to new eras. In Aquitaine, new towns have emerged, while ancient cities have prospered. And all the while, wine, the nectar of civilisation, continued to spread, carried in barrels, its faithful travelling companions on land and sea. But before seeking the riches of the open sea, the real wealth lies in the forests of Tronçais. Thanks to the age-old vision of Jean-Baptiste Colbert, Secretary of State for the Navy, among others, oak was enshrined as a French treasure during the Grand Siècle period of the 17<sup>th</sup> century. Cooperages past and present are grateful for this. The French Grand Siècle also established the barrel as a scientific object, following in the footsteps of the Greeks, who had made it a philosophical object. It was the century when Blaise Pascal, one of France's greatest minds, used a barrel to explain the principles of hydrostatics in his "*Traité de l'équilibre des liqueurs*" published in 1646.

In the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the quays of Bordeaux were a veritable merry-go-round of barrels, casks and vats. As a trading centre and the crossroads of viticulture, the barrels were a link between the city and its vineyard hinterland. They were the epitome of port activity in Bordeaux. They were rolled along, piled up, loaded and stored on board longboats by porters and sailors.



Travellers, such as Sophie de la Roche, a German who stayed in Bordeaux at the end of the Ancien Régime, immortalised them in their travel accounts. Painters including Nicolas-Marie Ozanne, Joseph Vernet and Pierre Lacour made them icons. Bordeaux's quays stretched from the Porte de Bourgogne to the Chartrons district, where aristocratic travellers, inspectors and sailors crossed paths in a never-ending ballet. This landscape, this theatre, was the realm of the master coopers and workers who played a major role in shaping the urban geography of the city and its surroundings. In the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the cooperage industry was the largest employer in Bordeaux. Between five hundred and a thousand people made their living from this activity, "*the only factory in the country*". The coopers of Bordeaux developed their own identity based on a liberal vision of their business, avoiding anything that might restrict their freedom to trade. They joined forces to form "Compagnonnage", or Guilds, the heirs of ancient professional brotherhoods such as the aptly-named "*Children of Solomon*".

The barrel was part of a cosmos. It was at the forefront of a picture in which each element complements the other perfectly, helping to define the territorial identity of Bordeaux and Aquitaine. It developed a special relationship with its creator, Humankind. And then, after Humankind, it is wine that entered into this material and spiritual dialogue, a dialogue between wood, wine, people and the waters of the Garonne, where the alliance was created, where an entire viticulture was developed. Tonnellerie Demptos is one of the heirs to this age-old alliance, and has been honouring it for two hundred years. Its history invites us to ask questions. Of all the cooperages in France and the world, what is the personal message it seeks to convey? Who was behind its genesis? What trials and tribulations have shaped it? Who are the people who embodied it yesterday and today? What is its identity? What is its raison d'être? This is the story of Tonnellerie Demptos, a tale that we are going to tell you as it completes its two hundred years, in the light of its two hundred suns.

# Chapter one

IN THE BEGINNING WAS A VINEYARD,  
AND THEN THERE WAS A BARREL



Touching the historical soul of a company such as Tonnellerie Demptos means travelling back in time to its origins, roots, and the wood from which the people of the company were hewn in the beginning. Tonnellerie Demptos's heritage as a cooperage does not date back its founding. We must travel back to the heart of the Bordeaux vineyards, under the sun of yesteryear, to a time long before the first barrels were branded with the Demptos logo.



The first of April 1777. It was a baptism day for one baby, as it was for thousands of others in the kingdom. The newborn bore the same first name as his father. Little Pierre was born in Saint-Caprais-de-Bordeaux, the stronghold of the Demptos family. Jean Demptos, his winemaker grandfather, came to pay his respects to his new grandson. The distant origins of the Demptos family are still rather unclear. Some sources tell us that the Demptos are of Greek origin, without being more precise.

It would seem that on their journey from the east of Europe to the west of France, they brought their own vines with them from Greece. The work of winegrowers like Jean Demptos and his son Pierre was not limited to planting vines and harvesting grapes. Making a few extra barrels by hand could be a complementary activity that provided income outside the time devoted to the vines. A well-equipped workshop could house a small artisan cooperage. This is how, in the early years of the nineteenth century, the archives record some members of the Demptos family focussing increasingly on the cooper's trade.

# 1825

Three decades have passed from the birth of little Pierre. On August 29 in the summer of 1806, at the top of the steps leading to the door of the village church dedicated to Saint Caprais, stands Pierre, now twenty-nine years old. He is about to marry. In the church, at the threshold of the choir, to his left and right are a representation of Christ and the Virgin and Child. In addition to these holy figures, his father and two of his brothers also witness the marriage. Pierre is now married to Catherine Roussillon, an inhabitant of Saint-Caprais just like him.

The groom was also a young cooper. Had he already set up a business renting or making barrels? Or was he employed in a cooperage? The archives are silent on this subject. But then, as now, the dialogue between vines and barrels is a continuous one, and it's not unusual to see former winegrowers become coopers, or even former coopers become winegrowers or cellar masters responsible for overseeing vinification.

This was the case with the Demptos family. Jean, the grandfather, was a winegrower. His father, Pierre, was also a winegrower. His elder brothers were both winegrowers and coopers, and one of his nephews worked as a steward at various châteaux in the Bordeaux region. Winegrowing produced versatile men. Winegrowers, large and small, stored and aged their wines in barrels and casks. It was not uncommon, among the many activities that rural life entailed, for a vineyard worker to end up creating his own cooperage. The manufacturing technique was the same, whether you are a small craftsman or a master cooper.

Pierre is now forty-eight years old. The year is 1825. France is living under the Restoration regime, which saw the return of the Bourbons to the French throne after the fall of Napoleon I's Empire. After Louis XVIII, his brother Charles X reigned over the kingdom for a year. The same year also marked the beginning, not of a reign, but of an entrepreneurial epic in the making. 1825 marked the true beginnings of Tonnellerie Demptos.

It was on this foundation that Pierre Demptos built his own eponymous cooperage. Legally, this very first business was founded as an individual enterprise. France was experiencing a wave of growth and business creation as a result of the industrial revolution, particularly during the decade of the 1820s. At that time, the term "entreprise", or company, was used less often than "fabrique", or factory. The personality of the person at the helm was the primary image projected by company. In this context, production took place within small structures, the style of which resembled a proto-industrial craft, within or close to the home, linked to the forestry and fire sectors, as was the case for cooperage. The owner of a business at this time was usually a single man, without a management team. His personal and family life was inextricably linked to his business. If the beginnings of an organisation were in evidence, it was family-based, with everything in place to found a dynasty by involving the son in some form of education and training.

Pierre Demptos was part of this movement, this historic moment in the emergence of new businesses. From the outset, his professional and family activities merged. The Clos de Luzanne family estate in Saint-Caprais-de-Bordeaux was directly integrated into the company.

The floor was littered with tools and bits of wood left over from woodworking. Here, a stave cramp; there, a bung borer and a barrel hoop. The walls were lined with several flat surfaces. In one corner, the toasting station where the flavours of the wood are revealed, bearing the inscription “*Vive la Saint-Martin*”.

What did the first cooperage of 1825 look like? It was not very different from other cooperages and workshops. From the church in the village of Saint-Caprais, you could see a line of black smoke streaking across the sky, heading east towards the Clos de Luzanne. The original Tonnellerie Demptos had a ground floor where the workshop was located. Upstairs, the wooden hoops, assemblies and stacked staves were stored. The smell of wood enveloped the whole atmosphere. This first establishment was far from being the large cooperage we know today. On closer inspection, the floor was littered with tools and bits of wood left over from woodworking. Here, a stave cramp; there, a bung borer and a barrel hoop. The walls were lined with several flat surfaces. In one corner, the toasting station where the flavours of the wood are revealed, bearing the inscription “*Vive la Saint-Martin*” (Long live Saint Martin) in honour of this ancient soldier in Christian history who gave half his coat to a beggar. Tradition has it that coopers display this inscription in their workshops, an old relic of a popular peasant practice linked to the rhythm of the seasons. On Saint Martin’s Day, which falls on 11 November, many wine producers delighted in opening the barrels to taste the new wine from the most recent grape harvest. And it was during this period that temperatures were often milder again after the first frosts, earning this period of the year the nickname “*St Martin’s Summer*”.

For seven years, Pierre, the founder, worked to establish his cooperage. It was not just one boss, but a whole family that was involved in this new venture. From his second marriage to Jeanne Broqua, two children were born. Pierre, the eldest, in 1812, and his younger brother, Jean, on 10 January 1815, in Saint-Caprais-de-Bordeaux. We know very little about Pierre. As for Jean, we know that he was destined to succeed his father at the head of the cooperage sooner or later. December 1832, just a few days to go before autumn gives way to a new winter. For Pierre Demptos, this would be his last autumn, the winter of his life. On 12 December, the founder of the Tonnellerie died at the age of fifty-five, leaving behind Jeanne, his widow, his two children and a body of work in the making. It was his youngest son, Jean, who took over the fledgling family cooperage. Traces of this period are few and far between, but the occasional element has survived. Jean was married to Jeanne Labet, whose father was also a cooper. This union is representative of the marriage strategies of coopers, who, as an identified social group, had their own marriage rationale, and the union of Jean and Jeanne was a result of this. The second generation is now in a position to continue the story that began in 1825. **In the beginning was a vineyard, and then there was a barrel.**



# Chapter two

FULL STEAM AHEAD  
FOR TONNELLERIE DEMPTOS



The early days in the history of Tonnellerie Demptos is multidimensional. It is made up of oak forests, land, water, families, the deceased, the economy, politics and cities. Just like oak wood, just like the vine stock, the history of a cooperage allows us to feel the changes in the seasons, the warming and cooling of the economy. People and their creations are influenced by the ecosystem that surrounds them.

**Premiers Cûts**

Chateau Lafite	Pauillac	Sir Samuel Scott Baron
Chateau Margaux	Margaux	Aquade
Chateau Latour	Pauillac	de Beaumond
Haut Brion	Pessac (Graves)	de Cantillon
		de Mors
		Eugene Lavier

**Secondes Cûts**

Mouton	Pauillac	Comte de Rothschild
Roux	Margaux	Comte de Castelnau
		Viqueux
		Marquis de Las Cases
		Baron de Laffite
		Barton
		de Luytens
		de Belhonne
		Baron Serret
		de Voisgerard
		M. de Plue
		Baron de Brane



**MINISTÈRE D'ÉTAT.**

**DISCOURS**

PRONONCÉ

**PAR LE PRINCE LOUIS-NAPOLÉON**

**A Bordeaux, le 9 Octobre 1852.**

**MESSIEURS,**

L'invitation de la Chambre et du Tribunal de commerce de Bordeaux, que j'ai acceptée avec empressement, me fournit l'occasion de remercier votre grande cité de son accueil si cordial, de son hospitalité si pleine de magnificence, et je suis bien aise aussi, vers la fin de mon voyage, de vous faire part des impressions qu'il m'a laissées.

Le but de ce voyage, vous le savez, était de connaître par moi-même nos belles provinces du Midi, d'approfondir leurs besoins. Il a toutefois donné lieu à un résultat beaucoup plus important. En effet, je le dis avec une franchise aussi éloignée de l'orgueil que d'une fausse modestie, jamais peuple n'a témoigné d'une manière plus directe, plus spontanée, plus unanime, la volonté de s'affranchir des préocupations de l'avenir, en consolidant dans le même main un pouvoir qui lui est sympathique. C'est qu'il connaît à cette heure et les trompeuses espérances dont on le berçait, et les dangers dont il était menacé. Il sait qu'en 1832 la société courait à sa perte, parce que chaque parti se consolait d'avance du naufrage général par l'espoir de planter son drapeau sur les débris qui pourraient survivre. Il ne sait gré d'avoir sauvé le vaisseau en arborant seulement le drapeau de la France.

Désabusé d'abordes théories, le Peuple a acquis la conviction que ces réformateurs prétendus n'étaient que des rêveurs, il y avait toujours disproportion entre leurs moyens et le résultat promis.

Aujourd'hui la France m'entoure de ses sympathies, parce que je ne suis pas de la famille des idéologues. Pour faire bien du pays, il n'est pas besoin d'appliquer de nouveaux systèmes, mais de donner, avant tout, confiance dans le présent, sérénité dans l'avenir. Voilà pourquoi la France semble vouloir revenir à l'Empire.

Il est néanmoins une crainte à laquelle je dois répondre. Par esprit de défiance, certaines personnes se disent : L'Empire, c'est la guerre. Mais je dis : L'Empire, c'est la paix. C'est la paix, car la France le désire, et lorsque France est satisfaite, le monde est tranquille. La gloire se légue bien à titre d'héritage, mais non la guerre. Est-ce que Princes qui s'honoraient justement d'être les petits-fils de Louis XIV ont recommencé ses lattes? La guerre ne se fait pas plaisir, elle se fait par nécessité; et à ces époques de transition, où partout, à côté de tant d'éléments de prospérité, germent de causes de mort, on peut dire avec vérité : Malheur à celui qui le premier donnerait en Europe le signal d'une lision dont les conséquences seraient incalculables!

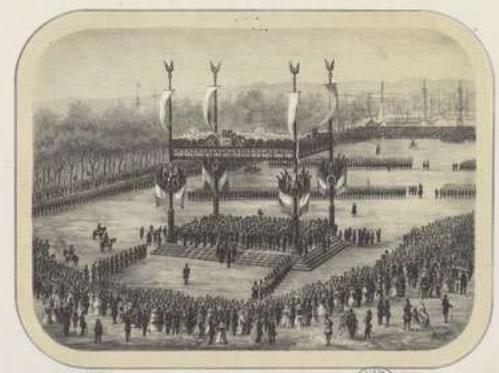
J'en conviens cependant, j'ai, comme l'Empereur, bien des conquêtes à faire. Je veux, comme lui, conquérir à la conision les partis dissidents, et ramener dans le courant du grand fleuve populaire ces dériviations hostiles qui vont se perdre à profit pour personne.

Je veux conquérir à la religion, à la morale, à l'aissance cette partie, encore si nombreuse, de la population, qui, au lieu d'un pays de foi et de croyance, connaît à peine les préceptes du Christ, qui, au sein de la terre la plus fertile du monde, peut à peine joindre de ses produits de première nécessité. Nous avons d'immenses territoires incultes à défricher, des terres à ouvrir, des ports à creuser, des rivières à rendre navigables, des canaux à terminer, notre réseau de chemins de fer compléter. Nous avons, en face de Marseille, un vaste royaume à assimiler à la France. Nous avons tous nos grands ports l'Ouest à rapprocher du continent américain par la rapidité de ses communications qui nous manquent encore. Nous avons, en partout des ruines à relever, des faux dieux à abattre, des vérités à faire triompher.

Voilà comment je comprendrais l'Empire, si l'Empire doit se rétablir. Telles sont les conquêtes que je médite, et vous qui m'entourez, qui voulez comme moi le bien de notre Patrie, vous êtes mes soldats.

Ce Discours, fréquemment interrompu par les applaudissements de l'auditoire, se termine au milieu des cris unanimes de *Vive l'Empereur!*

*Louis-Napoléon*



In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Bordeaux vineyards flourished again under the impetus of the new regime, the Second Empire. Cooperage was associated with this movement, which tended to forge an image of excellence for an entire region. Jean Demptos and Pierre, his son, were close witnesses to this historic turning point, which opened up a host of opportunities for them. The Bordeaux vineyards and all their associated trades, such as coopers, had long been associated with a certain prestige. In the 13<sup>th</sup> century, Bordeaux wines enjoyed a protective status, one of the fruits of English domination in this region, which gave rise to a particular economic system that favoured their trade and their renown far beyond the steeples of the Bordeaux region. This naturally encouraged the wealth and development of an entire region, and in particular the Bordeaux cooperage trade, which became a benchmark. In the 18<sup>th</sup> century, these medieval economic privileges were curtailed by royal and revolutionary policies.

Now a new character enters the scene. A boat is sailing down the Garonne. On board, the first President of the French Republic is about to catch sight of the Port de la Lune in Bordeaux. It is the seventh day of October 1852, and a jubilant city is preparing to welcome Prince President Louis Napoléon Bonaparte, the nephew of the late Emperor Napoléon I. It is in this city that he has come to seek his destiny. Just a few hundred metres from the Chartrons district, with its wine cellars and coopers, ten thousand people have gathered to welcome the *primus inter pares francorum*. Everyone who is anyone in the city of Bordeaux is there, in the Place des Quinconces. The crowd demonstrates their overwhelming enthusiasm for their "prince-president".

At that precise moment in time, as the boat came down the river, only a few people knew what was about to take place, as Louis-Napoleon himself was still hesitant. He was reluctant to put an end to the Second Republic that he was leading and replace it with a new empire, the Second Empire. His circle of close advisers included a good number of personalities from Aquitaine. Among them was Baron Haussmann, then Prefect of the Gironde. The President's interest in social issues, the forces driving development and the power of trade and industry was well known.

It was at the Bordeaux Chamber of Commerce, in a chequered room surrounded by a massive colonnade, that he announced the imminent return of the imperial regime to the audience made up of the city's leading notables. It was not a political speech that echoed within these walls, however. In front of industrialists, shopkeepers and working people from all over the region, he wished to convey a message with a focus on building and developing. His dream was to build a new France with tenfold economic and industrial capacity. Bordeaux would be the cradle of the new empire and would benefit from its fruits. Two months after his visit to Bordeaux, on 2 December 1852, the empire was reborn and Louis-Napoléon became Emperor Napoléon III.

The history of Tonnellerie Demptos is linked to the new imperial epic through two great moments in time. The whole of Aquitaine was permanently marked by the imperial seal. Three years after his official visit, Napoleon III wanted to give the whole of France the means to showcase its excellent know-how. This idea became a reality with the organisation of a Universal Exhibition between 15 May and 15 November 1855. French excellence had long followed the path of the vine. For the purposes of the event, which was intended to show the world the best products that France could produce, it became imperative to establish a classification of the most prestigious Bordeaux wines.

Lodi-Martin Duffour-Dubergier, a wine merchant, former mayor of Bordeaux and president of the Chamber of Commerce, undertook the classification. This classification of the Grands Crus of Bordeaux offered unrivalled prestige in terms of image and reputation. It was not just the wine being honoured, but the entire procession of people involved in making the wines, including the coopers. These Grands Crus require the best barrels for maturing and ageing the wine. A few decades later, Tonnellerie Demptos was able to capture this prestigious clientele and give its barrels all the hallmarks and recognition of their excellence.

Fifteen years have passed. The sun of the Empire has set over Bordeaux. In his speech in 1852, Louis-Napoléon unknowingly saw his destiny and that of his Empire. He proclaimed that “*the Empire is peace*”, before adding: “*Woe betide the first to give the signal in Europe for a collision whose consequences would be incalculable!*”. By 1870, the days of exaltation were long gone. The Emperor was defeated at Sedan and Bordeaux welcomed a government in retreat from Paris. At the end of the same year, the armistice was proclaimed from the capital of the Gironde region in the face of the Prussian invaders. The twilight of the Empire was not the only wound that mutilated the body of France. Another scourge, accustomed to a silent form of warfare without recourse to artillery or gunfire, had a profound effect on Bordeaux, its vineyards and its coopers.

Since the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, gold had been flowing from the vines. Indeed for several decades, the entire wine sector enjoyed a golden age. Yields increased and wine sold well. This was a boon for coopers, and Tonnellerie Demptos in particular, who saw business grow. But the euphoria of the good years gave way to concern. The veil was lifted on two new enemies. Phylloxera and then mildew shook the Bordeaux vineyards. The vines were not the only ones to suffer. The cooperage industry and its coopers also fell on hard times. Jean Demptos and his son Pierre were first-hand witnesses to the threat of the situation. In this crisis, they knew had to rely on their own strength to resist, to face up to and overcome the crisis. The Tonnellerie de Saint-Caprais-de-Bordeaux could depend on the judicious choices and decisions made by its directors. Times were hard, the years passed and the blood of the vine was no longer flowing as it had been. Cooperages, whose market is concentrated exclusively in France, were hit hard. It was at this point that the directors of Tonnellerie Demptos decided to escape the ups and downs of the French market and look further afield for opportunities through a proactive sales policy. They looked south, across the Pyrenees to Spain. Historically, the north of the Iberian Peninsula had been an area of influence and economic opportunity for Aquitaine since the 8<sup>th</sup> century. A number of merchants from Bordeaux and Aquitaine, known as *francos*, enjoyed dazzling commercial success in the past.

The Demptos family was part of this historic movement. They wanted to move to Rioja in search of work and subcontracting opportunities. Crossed by the River Ebro, this province is bordered by the Basque Country, Navarre, Aragon and Castile. Around Logroño, its capital, the vineyards were spared the ills of phylloxera and mildew, which devoured them on the French side of the Pyrenees, and consequently the Spanish cooperage trade was less affected by the crisis.

The Demptos family travelled throughout the region and forged close links with some of their colleagues, including the Murua family, owners of the *Tonnellerie Mecánica de Riojana*. Thanks to this strategy, the Demptos cooperage survived the phylloxera and mildew crisis, unlike many other cooperages. This episode is full of lessons to be learned and illustrates one of the constants of the Saint-Caprais-de-Bordeaux-based cooperage, whose search for opportunities outside France is one of the keys to its identity and economic performance.

The end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century was in many ways a new beginning for Demptos barrels. The company was legally incorporated in 1872, and began a transition phase between two generations. One had founded the company, the other kept it going, seizing opportunities in the midst of peril, and another generation was about to follow. In the late afternoon of 22 March 1876, the setting sun of Saint-Caprais-de-Bordeaux welcomed the birth of Jean Abel Demptos. Pierre Demptos and his wife Jeanne welcomed this new child. Among those who witnessed the birth was his grandfather, Jean. He didn't know it, or perhaps he secretly hoped for it, but the future of his cooperage lay before him. At that point in time, he had probably handed over the reins of the family business to his son Pierre. The new century was approaching and Jean would never see it. At the beginning of 1888, his neighbours discovered him lifeless in his home. He left behind a body of work. His legacy was to have inherited his father's cooperage, to have kept it going through all the crises and to have founded a dynasty of coopers. **Full steam ahead for Tonnellerie Demptos.**



# Chapter three

CRISES COME AND GO,  
TONNELLERIE DEMPTOS STANDS STRONG



At 8 rue de Cheverus, the headquarters of the Journal de *La Petite Gironde* in Bordeaux, people were busy getting the August 17, 1906 issue out on time. From the typesetting and printing departments to the press room, where the presses were running at full speed, one of the journalists was putting the finishing touches to the article to be published under the two-column headline: “The Gironde coopers’ strike”.



*Atelier Demptos  
1908*

Jean Duzan  
Louis Lescour  
Camille Lescour  
François Mianne  
Ulysse Laville  
Pierre Boutin  
Gaston Bedin

*St Caprais*

At the beginning of the century, the village of Cambes was home to one, then two cooperages. The Subervie cooperage was initially the only one in the village, but from 1906, Tonnellerie Demptos moved to the banks of the Garonne, specifically to a place called the “Grand Port” which benefited from direct access to the river. In Cambes, the company had its own production workshop as well as a large shed where the staves were stored both indoors and outdoors. The beating heart of Tonnellerie Demptos was now firmly established on the banks of the Garonne. This redirection of production activity away from the Saint-Caprais-de-Bordeaux site inevitably led to a new way of managing people. The coopers and foremen were split between several sites: the workshops at Quinsac, Saint-Caprais-de-Bordeaux and Cambes. The cooperage in Saint-Caprais-de-Bordeaux had ten coopers, headed by Pierre Demptos, the owner, and his son Abel, still a simple cooper.

Beyond its barrels, a cooperage is embodied by its faces. One day in 1908, a photographer stood in the middle of the cooperage. The coopers had gathered together and a small scene was being prepared for the occasion. The backdrop for this event consists of a barrel base with a chalk inscription “Atelier Demptos, 1908, St Caprais”, tools, bottles and glasses of wine, doves and four barrels of various sizes. The actors take their places. Almost everyone wears a cap and proudly sports a herringbone moustache, a handlebar moustache, a Mexican moustache or a natural moustache. In the front row, three women complete the cast, with a little dog in the spotlight. Concealed in the anonymity of the moment, the owner of the cooperage stands alongside his employees and fellow coopers. The boss is not distinguished by his clothes, his posture or his moustache. Abel Demptos stands in the back row on the left, his hand resting on one of his barrels. The photograph taken that day does not allow us to restore the image to its original colours. But other documents from the period can.

Thanks to his military service record, completed at the start of his military service, we know that Abel had blue eyes, chestnut hair and was six feet tall. Around him, his coopers strike a pose. The oldest is Jean Duzan, followed by Louis and Camille Lescour, François Mianne, Ulysse Laville, Pierre Boutin and Gaston Bedin. From six coopers in 1906, there were only four by 1921 and none by 1926 at the Saint-Caprais site. At its peak in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Tonnellerie Demptos in Cambes had up to sixteen coopers, including an apprentice in 1911.



At the workshop in Cambes, the same scene was repeated. All the coopers were called to gather in front of the shed under the wooden staircase that marked the entrance for the photographer. The Cambes residents, Jean Bruzac, François Martin and his son Léopold, Léon Venries, Marc Paillou, Robert Pénard and Guillaume Passaret responded to the call. They were followed by Armand Larrieu, Gabriel Fouquet, Anisset Trénit, Albert Carrasset, Pierre Magna, Jean Massieu, Léopold Hautefaye, Alcide Jagoux and Joseph Bousquet. The latter came from the surrounding villages of Listrac, Saint-Caprais, Rions, Quinsac, Landiras, Blaye and Saint-Macaire. The sixteen coopers are ready to immortalise this moment in the life of their company around their manager, Abel Demptos, who once again stands amongst them without the slightest distinguishing mark. You can see him in the background, cane in hand, wearing a jacket, a moustache and a cap on his head.

His right hand is resting on the shoulder of one of his coopers, dressed in their typical work clothes: wooden clogs, apron, simple shirt sometimes supplemented by a jacket, scarf and, always, a cap firmly planted on their heads. A barrel base in the foreground bears the following inscription: “Atelier A. Demptos Cambes”. A flower underlines the whole. The youngest member of the group is in the background between two barrels, holding a hammer in his right hand. He is Léopold Martin, aged around fifteen. In Demptos workshops, father and son often worked together. This was also the case during the same period at the smaller Demptos workshop in Quinsac, where Antoine Bordelais worked alongside his father, also named Antoine. These photographs were very common in cooperages. They all reflect a style and artistic and aesthetic codes specific to the world of coopers.

Although the war killed many Frenchmen, men also continued to die of natural causes away from the battlefield. On 9 September 1918, at eight o'clock in the morning, Pierre Demptos, Abel's father, died at his home. His son alone carried on the work of his peers and his father, while a new generation emerged.

Unfortunately, other more painful moments, in other places, are yet to come. Abel and his coopers were to be the unwilling protagonists. On 13 August 1914, following the decree for general mobilisation, Abel had to join the army. He went to the 140<sup>th</sup> infantry regiment. It was war! France mobilised as one, and the coopers from the Demptos workshops joined their regiments. Most of them were wounded. Others would never see their families, their work or their cooperage again, like Jean Roland, from the Saint-Caprais-de-Bordeaux workshop, who was killed by the enemy on 23 March 1915.

Abel Demptos joined the war as a warrant officer. After more than a year of conflict, he was sent home out of necessity, but asked to remain in his corps. He was sent off the battlefield due to a problem with his sight and he was diagnosed with myopic astigmatism. He did not return to his cooperage. On 4 April 1916, he was initially posted to an ether factory, before being permanently transferred to the military cooperage workshop in Bordeaux. Although the war killed many Frenchmen, men also continued to die of natural causes away from the battlefield. On 9 September 1918, at eight o'clock in the morning, Pierre Demptos, Abel's father, died at his home in a place called Caucetey, in Saint-Caprais-de-Bordeaux. He was 72 years old. His son alone carried on the work of his peers and his father, while a new generation emerged.

The First World War came to an end. It left its mark on bodies, minds and trade. The Demptos workshops were still part of the Bordeaux cooperage scene. Now another ordeal was beginning, that of war reparations.

The Treaty of Versailles, which gave peace the force of the law of the victors, provided for the creation of a mixed arbitration tribunal to resolve legal and economic problems. The war had completely overturned the legal relationships that governed business life. The tribunal's purpose was to resolve the consequences of the war for private interests.

On 8 June 1921, Abel Demptos submitted a request to the Franco-German Mixed Arbitration Tribunal in its fourth section concerning private property, rights and interests. Two years later, in Paris, on 17 January 1923, the tribunal handed down its decision. Although Abel Demptos withdrew his application at the end of the proceedings, his aim was to have a pre-war contract with a stave supplier based in Germany recognised as a contract of general utility that had to be honoured. Abel Demptos was seeking recognition of the disloyalty of the German company in refusing to fulfil the contract, as Article 299 of the Treaty of Versailles stipulated: "*Contracts concluded between enemies shall be deemed to have been annulled from the moment when any two of the parties have become enemies...*" but "*excepted from annulment, under the terms of the present article, are contracts which, in the general interest, the governments of the Allied or Associated Powers [...]*".

Before the war, Tonnellerie Demptos employed more than twenty coopers in its three workshops. After the war, the business contracted, leading to a drop in the workforce. **Crises came and went, but Tonnellerie Demptos stood strong.**



# Chapter four

FROM RUE SAINT-LOUIS  
IN BORDEAUX TO CAPE TOWN.



It's five o'clock in the morning on the Garonne. Every day, like a liturgy of the hours, the village of Cambes, an ancient fiefdom dating back to the 10<sup>th</sup> century, awakes to the first sonorous strokes of the blacksmith at work. Three hours later, the coopers make their presence felt with the sounds of metal, wood and flesh. The majority of these sounds come from Tonnellerie Demptos, one of the village's biggest employers. The cooperage moved to rue de Gauthier around twenty years ago. For centuries, the village of Cambes has been linked to barrels, the image of which is even emblazoned on a section of its coat of arms. Thanks to the river and its armada of barges, which can transport barrels further up or down the river, Demptos occupies a strategic position.



Coopers remember that, although their geographical position was very enviable in terms of trade, it was not without its drawbacks. The workshop in Cambes often had to cope with high water from the river, and it was not unusual for it to be flooded. For a fortnight, wood and barrels floated in the middle of the workshop. The coopers walked through knee-deep water. Fortunately, in their home village of Saint-Caprais-de-Bordeaux, the Demptos family still owned their Clos de Luzanne property, where all their wood was kept for drying in a specially dedicated area that was independent of the river's moods. The nineteen-twenties, known as the "Roaring Twenties", was a decade that came with a number of challenges. After almost a century of existence, it would be wrong to think that Tonnellerie Demptos was by this time somehow protected from the trials of the world thanks to its expertise and its history. For Abel, who was left to shoulder the legacy of his ancestors alone, the collateral damage of war and the economic consequences of peace had to be confronted.

On 20 October 1920, the Bordeaux stave wood wholesalers' union wrote a letter to the Minister of Agriculture, Joseph Honoré Ricard, an agricultural engineer from Gironde, the third Minister of Agriculture since the beginning of the year. In this letter, timber merchants, supported by cooperages, protested against the ban on exports of stave wood to certain countries. This decision had the direct effect of weakening the timber market in particular, and above all its customers, including barrel hirers and buyers. The coopers' unions, in which Abel Demptos has been heavily involved for several years, worked with the Ministry to draw attention to the situation facing an entire profession. During these difficult times, Tonnellerie Demptos put measures in place with the help of its coopers so that, even though activity was almost at a standstill, they could at least continue their work, albeit without certain guarantees included in their salary.

Not only cooperage workers and managers were affected. The impacts were felt by a whole chain of players in the wine industry. Merchants were affected by the drop in activity. Tonnellerie Demptos's clientele included several wine merchants in the 1920's. Account books dating back a century show a number of prestigious names, including Rosenheim et Fils, a wine merchant based at 132 quai des Chartrons who, since 1917, had been responsible producing the Château La Tour Haut-Brion wines, which was classified as a Graves wine a few years later. The wine merchant Sichel is also a Demptos customer. The Sichel family set up in Bordeaux in 1883, in the heart of the wine market, at 19 quai de Bacalan in the Chartrons district. It was a family-run business with operations in several countries and on several continents, including Mainz, London and New York.

Although these companies left their mark on the wine trade, they did not succeed in turning their names, prestigious as they were, into strong commercial brands in the imagination of Bordeaux wines. They were able to embody the image of great merchants who control the flow of wine, without being able to define the identity, the characteristics and the taste of wine from Bordeaux terroirs. Gradually, however, over the course of history, a merchant model with a greater sense of identity based on the wine château emerged. You have to go back three centuries to the 1660s to find the first reference, in the cellar book of Charles II, King of England, to a Bordeaux wine as a "cru particulier". This innovation by Château Haut-Brion, which would much later use Demptos barrels, gave rise to an imaginary sense of quality that identified the best Bordeaux wines.

Other great châteaux, such as Latour, Lafite and Margaux, were part of this slow maturation of a new marketing model. The labels affixed to the bottles illustrate this paradigm shift, with the name of the estate becoming a veritable brand, followed at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century by the appearance, for the Médoc grands crus, of the first "bottled at the château" phrase, a sign that the vinification, ageing and packaging of the "grands vins" were now carried out in the estate's cellars.

In the 1920s, a young Baron, Philippe de Rothschild, was ready to challenge the might of the wine merchants. In 1853, his great-grandfather, Nathaniel de Rothschild, bought Château Brane-Mouton, now known as Château Mouton Rothschild, an estate in the heart of the Médoc, in Pauillac, at auction. Philippe de Rothschild had been at the helm of the estate for two years, and in 1924 he decided that bottling at the château should be systematised for every vintage

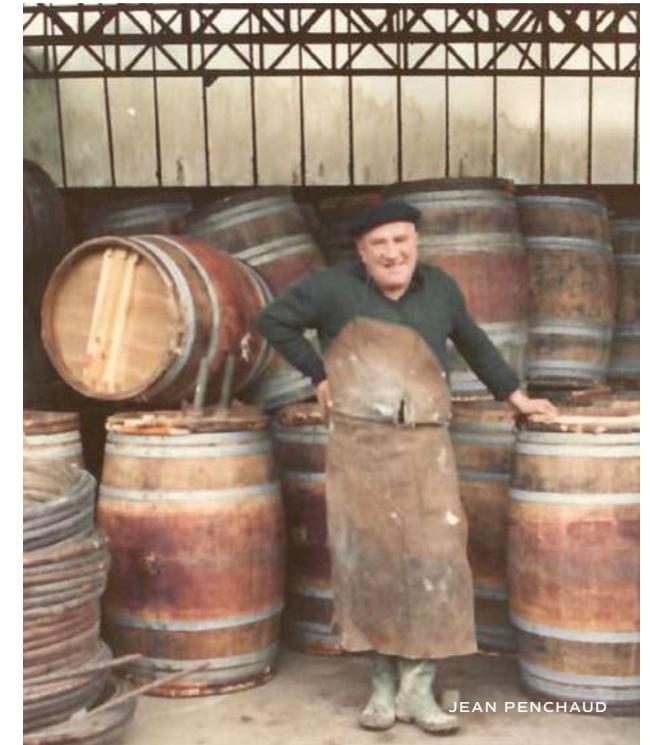


at Mouton Rothschild. The label on the bottles of this grand cru became the banner of change. The Baron called on a young twenty-four year-old graphic artist, Jean Carlu, to design the new label. In addition to the Cubist influences, the five arrows of the family coat of arms and the iconic sheep's head, the label's main message was: "This wine was bottled at the château". Two years later, the château's cellar had to be extended by a further hundred metres, as bottling on the estate inevitably meant an increase in the wine's barrel storage capacity. Abel Demptos no longer had to send his barrels to Bordeaux wine merchants, but directly to Pauillac for use in the "Grand Chai" at Château Mouton Rothschild, which could hold a thousand oak barrels.



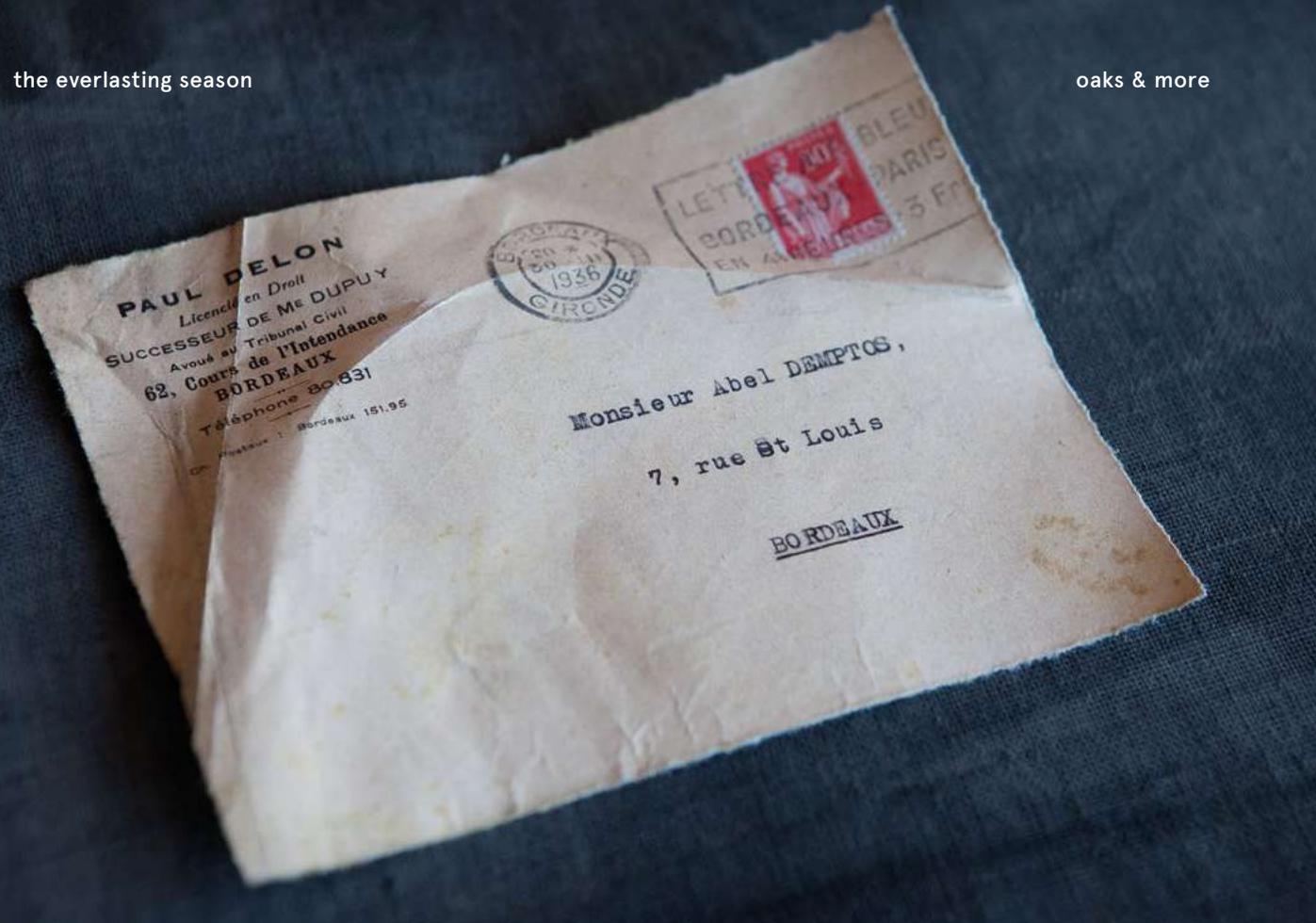
Tonnellerie Demptos was no longer the small barrel-making and rental company of its early days. The pace of production was no longer the same. Its influence had become much greater. One of Demptos's strengths in the face of its competitors was that, as soon as the phylloxera crisis hit, it turned its attention to international markets. Its barrels sailed as far as South Africa and the port city of Cape Town. But the workshops were overflowing. Too many barrels could no longer be exported, particularly to Spain, where the market was controlled by the state to prevent prices from soaring. Tonnellerie Demptos had strong links with the Iberian peninsula. These were not just commercial relationships that were expressed on both sides of the Pyrenees, but genuine human relationships, from person to person. In 1926, a Spaniard straight from Saragossa joined the Demptos cooperage team at the Cambes workshop. His name was Emmanuel Ardit, and he was not the only Iberian to have passed through the doors. Demptos barrels were mainly made in Cambes, but the head office was in Bordeaux, in the heart of the Chartrons district. It was in 1924 that Abel Demptos decided to move his office to the heart of this trading district, where the entire wine and barrel market was made and unmade. To buy or hire barrels, customers headed to number 7 in the rue Saint-Louis, or called 5199 beforehand. Tonnellerie Demptos had several cellars around its head office. These were located in the rue Barreyre, rue Cazalis and rue Marsan. In the maze of streets, the cellars were filled with second-hand barrels and casks. On a daily basis, wine merchants came to Demptos to hire or return barrels whose rental contract was coming to an end. The coopers had to handle, store and maintain hundreds of barrels. But that's not where their work ended. Their mission extended to repairing, sealing leaks, cleaning and burning sulphur wicks to prevent the barrels from going mouldy.

A whole lung of Bordeaux breathed, lived and organised itself around the coopers. The cadastral organisation of the land reflects their influence on the shape of the Chartrons district, which really developed in the 14<sup>th</sup> century under the influence of foreign merchants, particularly English. They gave the district its commercial and port vocation, following in the footsteps of the Carthusian monks who had settled there in the Middle Ages. From his office in the rue Saint-Louis, Abel Demptos managed no fewer than 340 customers who bought and rented the barrels made in Cambes and Saint-Caprais-de-Bordeaux, which at times took over part of the production. With his sights set on the high seas, he set about spreading his barrels around the world, even to the Scandinavian kingdoms of northern Europe, through his customers, the wine merchants. Among them was a company founded in Bordeaux in 1900 called *J. Chaigneau et Compagnie*. Based at 76 cours de la Martinique, they proudly displayed "*Suppliers to H.M. The King of Sweden and Norway*" on their official documents. Between September 1931 and September 1932, Tonnellerie Demptos supplied this merchant with a total of more than 5,600 barrels, making it one of the cooperage's largest customers. Abel Demptos was no longer alone in this entrepreneurial and family epic. At the turn of the century, he married Marie-Louise Dorléac, daughter of Jean and Catherine Dorléac, whose father was a laundry worker in Bordeaux. The marriage was a fruitful one, with the birth of two sons, Jean-Pierre in 1910 and Jean-Louis two years later, and a daughter, the eldest of their children, born in 1907 in Saint-Caprais-de-Bordeaux. In the 1930s, Pierre and Louis, as they were more commonly known, were two more young men working alongside their father to learn all the subtleties of the trade, from making to selling a barrel. On 9 June 1938, Tonnellerie Demptos landed another sale. Two hundred and fifty new stave wood barrels had just been ordered by a prestigious château classified as a Saint-Émilion Grand Cru for a total of 56,250 francs.



This sale was the culmination of the efforts of one of Abel Demptos's sons, who had personally spoken to Viscount Louis de Mallet Roquefort, owner of Château de La Gaffelière. International, local and prestigious are the three hallmarks of the Demptos clientele. The Mallet Roquefort family is one of the oldest in France. Its illustrious members took part in the invasion of England with William the Conqueror in the 11<sup>th</sup> century, and gave the kingdom of France great naval officers who were alongside Marquis de Lafayette at the insurrection of the American colonies at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. It was in 1705 that Louis II de Mallet Roquefort, on marrying Isabeau de Bonneau de Fonroque, a family that had been established in Saint-Émilion for several generations, acquired La Gaffelière. The two hundred and fifty barrels were delivered directly from the Demptos workshop in Saint-Émilion. Saint-Émilion, a village with an iconic image. Its impressive bell tower crowns the sea of vines stretching to the horizon. Over the course of its history, Tonnellerie Demptos has had several workshops here. The village of Saint-Émilion is part of the Demptosian geography. When the cooperage was first set up, between the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the first part of the 20<sup>th</sup>, the original workshop was located near the town hall.

Some time later, the workshop moved to one of the narrow streets in the village known as the *escalettes* or *tertres*, at number 5 rue des écoles. Abel Demptos regularly visited his workshop in Saint-Émilion, as illustrated his correspondence with his customers. The cooperage's location in this geographical context reflects a desire to be close to the great châteaux and estates in the surrounding area. The old walls of the workshop still preserve the memory of the sounds, voices and smell of the barrels. It had a shed roof, with a glazed south-facing slope and a long north-facing slope, covered in canal tiles and supported by three large riveted metal beams. Two people, two figures, were the life and soul of the place: Moréno and Penchaud, both foremen. Moréno's own daughter and some of her friends would come to the workshop after school in the evening, the door always being open, to discover this world of wood and iron, of men working mostly in the open air, handling drawknives, hoop drivers, scrapers and cochoirs (a sort of billhook specific to barrel-making in France). The workshop was busy from Monday to Saturday. Sundays were devoted to the Lord, to rest and, crucially, to the communion of individuals around a table improvised in the workshop surrounded by mute tools, where the blood of the neighbouring vineyards took pride of place.



Unfortunately, a cooper's day-to-day business does not consist exclusively of selling or hiring out several hundred barrels. In his correspondence, Abel Demptos expresses his annoyance when his debtors fail to honour their commitments. The history of a company is also about bringing back to life the day-to-day concerns of those involved. In a letter dated 15 July 1938, Abel Demptos demanded that a number of unpaid invoices that were affecting his cash flow be settled. During the same month, the cooperage was faced with a new external disturbance. The French government decided to devalue the franc, which had the direct effect of weakening the cooperage's accounts. Imports automatically became more expensive. A devaluation is a reduction in the official exchange rate of a currency against other currencies or against a gold or silver reference. In 1938, the franc was devalued by 10% against the dollar. On 24 July Abel Demptos wrote: "[...] my cash requirements have doubled since the devaluation of our currency, as we pay in pounds or dollars for the staves we buy either in Central Europe or in America".

Abel Demptos's mail also came straight from the French colonial empire. Business was done with Oran in Algeria, or with Port-Lyautey in the Moroccan protectorate. The exchanges in this mail obviously concern commercial matters, but correspondence from a company is also about people's lives, rain and bad weather, and the cooperage workers' holidays:

"For a few weeks here, we've had excessive temperatures that we're not used to. The few showers that have fallen in the last two or three days have cooled the weather, and everyone is delighted, both for themselves and for the crops. Business on our square is quiet, as it is every year at this time, but this year it is particularly so because, I believe, of the many businesses that are closing due to staff holidays. Stave wood is still in short supply."

LETTER FROM ABEL DEMPTOS DATED 9 AUGUST 1938  
TO MONSIEUR COLLOT, 82 AVENUE SIDI CHAMI, ORAN

In October 1938, Abel Demptos turned over a new leaf. He no longer wished to be involved in the trade union bodies in which he had been involved since the 1900s. With an open heart, he made a sad assessment. In a letter, he wrote the following words to one of his colleagues at the Raymond Massieu & Fils cooperage in Preignac:

"I wholeheartedly agree with everything you say about our colleagues who have not kept their promises. You must know that I have done everything to make the existence of our union viable, in the interests of both employers and workers, but I have to confess that I have not succeeded. You also know that at the last meeting, which was held at my instigation, I could not find any of our members who wanted to take over the presidency. In view of this indifference on the part of our colleagues, who, in my opinion, have a poor understanding of the fact that, given the current economic and social conditions, we can no longer operate in isolation, and, with sincere regret, dear sir, I have decided to stop dealing with trade union issues."

Abel Demptos's letters bear witness to the difficulties inherent in his life as a cooper, such as the theft of seventy staves from his workshop in Cambes. But they also reflect the hopes he placed in those who would one day take over from him. To prevent each generation of coopers from starting again from scratch, human wisdom invented the passing on of skills and expertise. This passing on is based on memory, know-how and interpersonal skills. Abel Demptos was committed to this. He knew that, when the time came, he would have to pass on his heritage, and that in the life of a company, and particularly a family business, this was a crucial issue.

At the end of 1938, Abel Demptos was forced to dismiss a foreman. Initially thinking of replacing him with another foreman, he changed his mind and decided that his sons were the best alternative. Louis and Pierre would take on the duties of foremen, so that they would be legitimate cooperage bosses. In Abel Demptos's view, a boss should not ask one of his workers to do a task that he himself could not carry out: "*This role of foreman will complete their professional knowledge*" he says. While preparing the next generation, Abel Demptos continued to spearhead the family cooperage. Far from confining himself to the role of manager in his Bordeaux offices, he travelled frequently during the day, meeting with customers himself:

"I will be at your disposal on Wednesday, 16 October at the Château de Berliquet, between 4 and 5 o'clock. If these times do not suit you, I would ask you to telephone me in Cambes on Wednesday morning before 9 o'clock. After that time, I'll be on my way to Saint-Émilion."

LETTER DATED 12 AUGUST 1939 TO MONSIEUR LE COMTE  
DE CARLES DU CHÂTEAU DE MANSY

It's not unusual for company directors who travel a lot to be exposed to the risks of the roads. A few months earlier, Abel Demptos had been involved in a car accident. Fortunately, the outcome was not fatal. He was left with "*badly bruised knees and a broken right arm*". The life and misfortunes of a cooper in the late 1930s, **from the rue Saint-Louis in Bordeaux to Cape Town.**

*Abel Demptos,*





25 Novembre 59

Monsieur DUBOIS-CHALLON  
Chateau " Ausons " SAINT - EMILION  
Chateau Gombauds Guillaud Pomerol.

**Cher Monsieur,**

J'ai votre lettre du 29 et j'ai beaucoup regretté qu'hier je n'ai pas pu vous répondre aux différentes attaques téléphoniques que vous m'avez adressées.

Dès hier j'ai mis en mains la fabrication des barriques que vous me demandez mais là il n'y aura qu'une première difficulté de résolu.

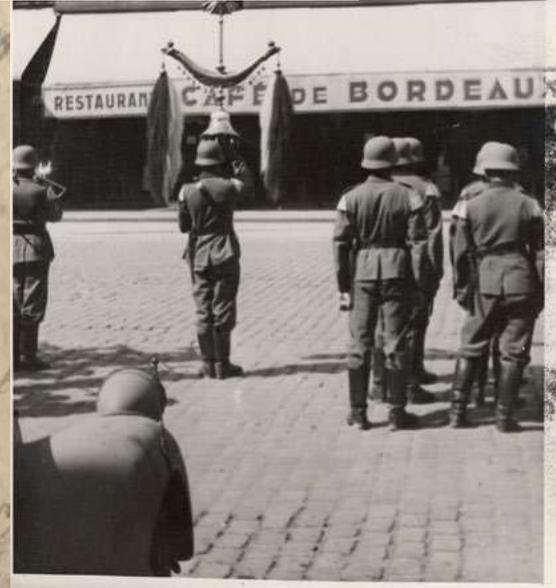
Je compte pouvoir faire un camion de 50 barriques dans la journée de vendredi (après-midi seulement) mais jusqu'à ce moment il m'a été impossible de trouver un seul camionneur pour faire ce voyage.

Avant hier deux camionneurs sérieux faisaient mes transports, tous deux ont été réquisitionnés avec leur camion et depuis je me débats constamment pour le transport des marchandises que j'ai à faire rentrer ou celles que j'ai à livrer.

Si vous voyiez que dans St-Emilion ou aux environs il y ait un camion qui puisse vendredi après-midi venir chercher 50 barriques, vous auriez la certitude de les avoir. Si vos recherches étaient heureuses faites-le-moi savoir par téléphone pour que je cesse les miennes. J'en ferai de même si je trouvais le premier.

Croyez, Cher Monsieur, que je ferai tout pour vous être agréable et, dans cette attente, veuillez agréer, mes meilleures salutations.

P.S.- Merci de l'intérêt que vous apportez à mes fils, jusqu'à présent ils n'ont pas à se plaindre de leur sort.



Tonnellerie Demptos did all it could to provide the estates with a few barrels and make a second vintage possible. Constant delays and scarcity became the norm.

It's war, the Second World War! For a fortnight, men and machines had been leaving for the front, when Abel wrote these few words to one of his friends. Trade had almost come to a standstill. No lorry, no wagon, no boat was available to meet the supply and delivery needs of Tonnellerie Demptos. Would they have to rely on horses, mules and muleteers to deliver barrels? The wartime economy profoundly altered the nature of the cooperage's activities and those of its manager. Abel Demptos was now responsible for civilian supplies in Bordeaux and the Créon district. The wineries were also affected, at the height of the 1939 harvest. Indeed, the grapes would not always find the barrels they needed, as shortages were commonplace. Tonnellerie Demptos did all it could to provide the estates with a few barrels and make a second vintage possible. Constant delays and scarcity became the norm. Le Clos des Jacobins in Saint-Émilion had to wait several more weeks for its barrels, as Abel Demptos writes, as he attempts to find a few available coopers, if they had not already been sent to defend France on the borders. In addition to the delays, Abel now had to include a new line called *taxe d'armement* in the calculation of the price of his barrels. This tax, introduced in April 1939, applied to coopers and to all commercial transactions to support the government's revenue for the war effort. Thanks to their equipment and their barrels, which were used as food containers or for various military equipment, the coopers were an integral part of the supply system. They played an important role in the country's civil and military organisation. Aware of this reality, many families, wives and mothers all over France, sent letters to the owners of cooperages in the hope that they would use their authority to ensure that a husband or son was withdrawn from the front and reassigned far away to military workshops "all of which were short of coopers", according to Abel Demptos.

Demptos took several steps to alleviate the concerns of the people who approached him. A few days later, Abel Demptos went to the office of Intendant Espinassous in Bordeaux. Arriving at 75 cours d'Alsace-Lorraine, he wanted to talk to him about a major barrel supply problem. The meeting lasted just a few minutes. On leaving, the cooper had an idea in mind that he needed to develop to help manage wartime supplies in Bordeaux where everything was lacking. The port was in turmoil and the wine in the barrels could no longer be exported. By the following day, 1 December 1939, Abel's idea had already matured. He was able to propose a solution to the intendant to effectively remedy the shortage of stave wood. Tonnellerie Demptos had a solid international network of suppliers and customers. It was this asset that its director intended to put to good use to benefit the army supply services. He proposed buying dismantled barrels from America, delivered in bundles, with the staves and bottoms marked to allow easy reassembly. These casks were in new condition, had not yet travelled and had only been used for ageing whisky in official American warehouses. The casks were made from selected oak staves. The staves were around 20 mm thick and the bottoms 25 mm. They were fitted together with six or eight iron hoops, depending on whether they were made manually or mechanically, and had a capacity of 190 litres. Last but not least, they met all the needs of the armed forces. Abel Demptos concluded by pointing out that he himself had used them for his professional needs. He undertook to make himself available to facilitate contact with the American firm, which had always given him complete commercial satisfaction.

# 1939

During a strange war, Bordeaux became the political and economic centre of France. The landscape on either side of the banks of the Garonne was in stark contrast. In this first month of summer, the air, at last much more pleasant, caresses the leaves and greets the first flowers on the vines, heralding the coming harvest. The winegrower goes through them, watching them blossom in a landscape that seems peaceful and eternal, punctuated by the melody of the surrounding church towers. But war, the Second World War, entered this pastoral theatre, bringing with it its scourges.

In the provincial capital, unrest and tension reigned. The whole of eastern France moved west. Bordeaux became a refuge to which both the people and the elite flocked. Paul Reynaud's twilight government took up residence on Rue Vital-Carles. Albert Lebrun, the last president of the collapsing Third Republic, moved into the Hôtel de Nesmond. History was repeating itself. The gilded walls of this prestigious seventeenth-century hotel remembered having welcomed the government of President Raymond Poincaré in 1914, during the Great War. It was not long before the Republic capitulated. France's fate was sealed by the signing of a treaty in the beech and oak forest of Compiègne, far from Bordeaux, and the French people were left to wonder their own fate.

Months later, in the hinterland of Saint-Caprais-de-Bordeaux, the "Tonnellerie Abel Demptos et ses fils" was plunged into a suspicious silence. Normally bustling with life, noise, smoke and heat, the turmoil of war forced the cooperage and its coopers to slow down. One day in February 1941, Abel Demptos was sitting at his desk. As usual, he was writing several letters. The first of them seemed quite trivial given the atmosphere in France. Abel is replying to a colleague in Châlons-sur-Saône, Burgundy, to whom he had sent his best wishes for the New Year. Between various considerations, such as the much lower price of Burgundy barrels at the time, Abel shares his hopes and uncertainties. With his wife Marie, he saw his two sons, his heirs, Pierre and Louis, go off to war. Both of them were prisoners in the same camp in Germany, and assured their father and mother that their spirits were not dampened by the circumstances.

Before the war, Pierre and Louis had played their full part in running the family business. In this same letter, Abel reveals his dismay at his mission as manager, which he must pursue and carry out come what may, to ensure the continuity of the cooperage that one of his ancestors had founded more than a century earlier, in 1825. Needs were great, but the cooperage was unable to meet them because of a crying shortage wood, hoop poles and staves. Although the Demptos workshops in Saint-Émilion and Cambes continued to operate, Abel had his doubts. He didn't want to be the one to break a link in the chain of generations of coopers, and see the end of the family cooperage that had been known and recognized in Bordeaux, Aquitaine, France and around the world for over one hundred and sixteen years.

Abel Demptos's letters, written throughout the first part of the war, are an unvarnished reflection of a whole historical context that many companies and cooperages throughout France experienced. He never ceases to point out the lack of means of transport, the lack of planning, the lack of solutions proposed by the State services. These were the reasons behind France's impending defeat. This country, which contemporaries considered to have the best army in the world, lost part of the war through its lack of organisation and bureaucratic management, which paralysed all decision-making chains.

The Battle of France was over. The Armistice. Abel Demptos hoped for the return of his sons, who would be able to resume the family cooperage business with him. On 9 January 1941, he sent a letter to one of his fellow coopers in the Cher department. One of the subjects was an order from a cooperage in Gironde for staves to be shipped by rail. The other subject was much more personal: the return of prisoners, French soldiers and sons who had gone to war. Abel was delighted to hear that his colleague's two sons had returned, before expressing his dismay that his own still had not, as they were captives in Germany. In the end, Pierre and Louis returned home a few months later. Their return paved the way for a future, and everyone hoped for happier days despite the continuing war.

# 1945



In the small village of Barsac, further up the Garonne, on 4 September 1944, two families, two clans, came together in the Church of Saint-Vincent. Louis Demptos and Rose Jeanne Sanders were united before God. Louis' wife came a family of Belgian origin who had previously settled in Lille and whose father, Daniel Sanders, was a wine merchant. Eleven years later, he bought Château Haut-Bailly, a Grand Cru in the Pessac-Léognan appellation, and restored it to its former glory. As in previous centuries, coopers' families followed atavistic marriage strategies, forging marital alliances between wine families. For the young couple, there was the question of settling down and starting a family. Louis and Rose did not settle in Cambes, Saint-Caprais-de-Bordeaux or Barsac. Instead, the young couple chose to set down their bags in the Chartrons district of Bordeaux, within the cooperage offices, which were no longer located at number 7 rue Saint- Louis, but at number 7 rue Paul Berthelot.

The new head office was a classic bourgeois building in the Chartrons district, with two floors where professional and family life intermingled. The newly-weds lived on the first floor. On the ground floor, the offices overlooked the street. Simplicity and rusticity were the hallmarks of the Tonnellerie Demptos environment. Behind the premises, a vaulted alleyway ran under the neighbouring buildings and extended into a wine cellar belonging to the Demptos family on rue Barreyre. Two other wine cellars were located on rue Cazalis and rue Marsan and were stocked with barrels and second-hand casks that wine merchants came to hire on a daily or longer-term basis, depending on the wine and requirements. Some of the coopers in these cellars come from Spain and Portugal. After having doubted the future of his company, Abel Demptos realised with relief that he would not be the last of the Demptos coopers. His two sons had finally returned to him to continue their work. Such were the **seasons of a war**.

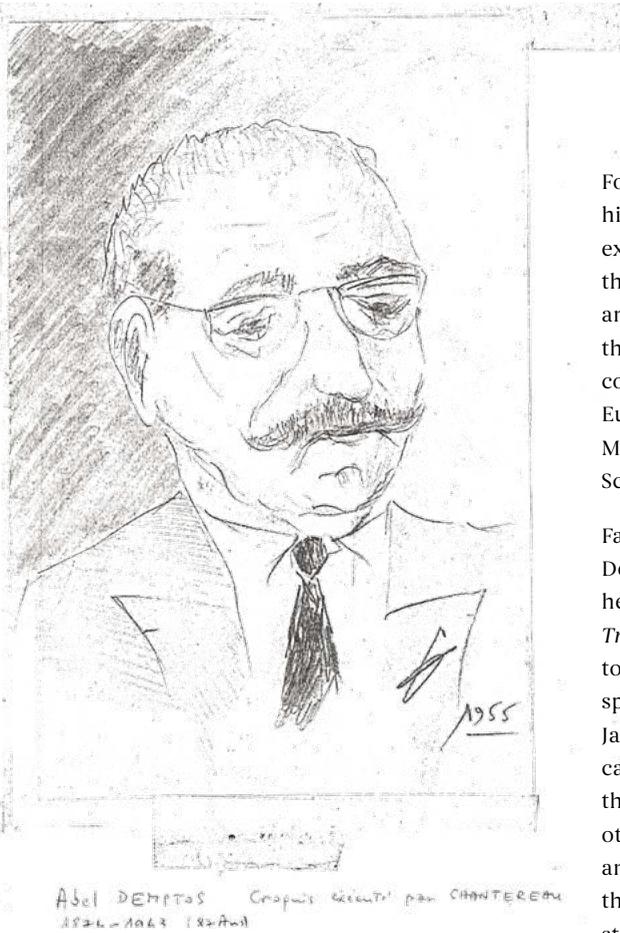
# Chapter six

THE SUN NO LONGER  
HAS AN APPOINTMENT WITH THE MOON.



Bordeaux, 1950s. While the people of Bordeaux were listening to Charles Trenet sing *Le Soleil et la Lune*, the capital of western France was struggling to emerge from the aftermath of the Second World War.

The city still felt like a dark place, with bogs festering in its very heart and the Port de la Lune no longer as vibrant as it once was. Yet the future was already in the making.



Number 7 rue Paul Berthelot was still the head office of Tonnellerie Demptos. Abel, Pierre and Louis came and went depending on their appointments. As they crossed the threshold of what is both the family home on the first floor and their workplace on the ground floor, Mr Chantereau kept watch. He was there to welcome customers and strangers alike. His natural bonhomie made him the perfect host. In addition to this role, he was responsible for recording orders, supervising deliveries and keeping the cooperage's daily accounts. Although Mr Chantereau sometimes had a tendency to stammer, he was above all a dedicated man with a talent for drawing. In 1955, he unofficially painted a very lifelike portrait of his boss Abel Demptos in his seventies. Beyond the artistic gesture, this sketch by an employee of the cooperage demonstrates the nature of the specific relationships that can exist within a family business, where the importance of direct hierarchical links, established over the long term, is paramount. Throughout his time at the head of his cooperage, from the photo pose he took with his coopers in Cambes in 1911, to the handling of day-to-day business, Abel was known to be close to and appreciated by his employees.

Following in their father's footsteps, Pierre Demptos and his brother Louis Demptos were much more mature and experienced than they had been before the war. Following their return, they had accumulated enough experience and training to take on the burdens of the history and the responsibilities of the present and the future of a company whose influence extends beyond France, beyond Europe and beyond the seas. Mail continued to arrive from Martinique, Switzerland, Germany, Spain, Ireland, England, Scotland, Algeria, South Africa and Australia.

Far, far away from Bordeaux and Cambes, Tonnellerie Demptos had a rendezvous with the world in the southern hemisphere. In August 1961, Australia hosted *The Sydney Trade Fair*. Countries from all over the world met in Sydney to present their industrial products and their cultural specificities. The Italians exhibited their paintings, the Japanese presented their portable television, the Russians came with Sputnik, the British with their hovercraft and the French showcased the French art de vivre, amongst other things. Inside the French pavilion, on the ground and first floors, a number of French companies showcased their expertise. These include the Renault car brand on stands 25 and 26, Saint-Gobain on stand 6 and, just next door, on stand 7, a sign reading "Abel Demptos et ses fils". Demptos barrels never saw the sun set. Since the end of the nineteenth century, the cooperage industry had an invariant, a historical constant, that of directing its gaze towards the four cardinal points, from the West to the East.

He was a man in the West, in the twilight of his life here on earth. Two years after taking his name and his barrels as far as Australia, the sun set on Abel Demptos in 1963. At the honourable age of 87, he passed away, leaving his sons with the immense task of perpetuating his work and that of his ancestors. Abel Demptos's entrepreneurial career was marked by his commitment to his profession through trade union organisations, and his work to ensure that the family cooperage survived between and during two world wars. Throughout its history, Tonnellerie Demptos has constantly had to balance the weighing scales of time, between the short-term commercial objectives that need to be achieved, and the long-term strategies that will lead to tomorrow's successes. Last but not least, Demptos had succeeded in forging a legacy of successors, and in addressing the issue of passing on the family tradition.

This is a question that coopers had been asking themselves for decades. Under what conditions will their heirs, their apprentices, still be able to embrace the knowledge, skills and age-old techniques that have changed very little over the centuries? In the 1920s, the *Chambre syndicale des Ouvriers Tonneliers et similaires de la Gironde* (Gironde Chamber of Cooperage Workers and Similar Trades) was shedding a sombre light on the future of their profession in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. *"The profession of cooper has always been a trade of misery, for which - as the old saying goes - the stupidest member of the family was destined, in a form of veritable "forced labour", before concluding that "the cooper's trade is not a trade for the future, it's a rough trade, and mothers should think carefully about what the future holds for their children [...]"*. From the 1930s onwards, Abel Demptos was able to involve his two sons in cooperage life, one of whom, Louis, far from being "the stupidest in the family", completed his education with business studies in Bordeaux. When, in the course of a company's history, management becomes two-headed, complementarity is the key. For this new generation of coopers, Louis devoted himself to seeking out external markets, while Pierre directed production operations in the workshops. Working together from the outset, Louis and Pierre Demptos launched the international expansion of what had become their cooperage, even though the structure was still considered to be traditional.

By 1965, the conditions were right. With its head office still located at 7 rue Paul Berthelot in Bordeaux and its production facilities in the hinterland, Tonnellerie Demptos was ready to move forward. Its capital was 714,000 francs, divided into 4 sections. 200 shares of 170 francs, of which 4,184 were divided equally between the two brothers. Pierre was Chairman and Chief Executive Officer, while Louis was a director. For the past ten years, Tonnellerie Demptos had been a limited company and had no holdings in other companies. In the first quarter of 1965, the market for barrel sales contracted. Traditionally, this period did not generate much turnover, as sales were mainly handled before and during the harvest season. However, sales of Demptos barrels in France, and especially in the Gironde region, rose significantly. This upturn in sales was due to the disappearance of a number of competing cooperages that were no longer adapted to the market, with a sharp increase in the price of staves and the emergence of new techniques for storing wine outside barrels. Barrel ageing was still an essential complement to the typicity and character of great wines, but it is an expensive technique that does not tolerate mediocrity.



After the war, when economic conditions became difficult, many of France's great vineyards, and particularly Bordeaux, chose to keep barrels only as a matter of tradition and on the margins of their production activity. As well as avoiding the hazards inherent in wood, which can generate acidity, mold and other odors, vats made of bare cement, glass-lined cement, enamelled steel, plastic and stainless steel offered a more cost-effective and less demanding way of maturing wine. In this context and with this economic model, if a cooperage was to survive, it had no option but to choose quality. Indeed the wood market continued to support the maturing and storage of great red wines and high class brandies, which were still made in oak barrels. If Tonnellerie Demptos escaped the fate of its competitors, it was because it had three trump cards up its sleeve. The first of these was pragmatism, the intelligence to adapt that is one of the keys to economic survival, by choosing highest quality barrels. The second advantage was that it had a sufficiently large stock of raw materials to cope with market fluctuations. The third and final advantage was its customer base, made up of leading wine merchants, owners of Grands Crus, and producers of cognacs and armagnacs.



The increase in foreign sales was also remarkable for Demptos barrels. The efforts made in preceding years to target the international market were bearing fruit. This success was supported by foreign wine and brandy producers, who sought to improve the quality of their products by applying French methods of maturing wines and spirits using French woods, which enjoyed a certain reputation. The majority of sales were made in South Africa and Australia, with a representative in each these countries. The remainder was exported to Spain, Portugal, Great Britain, the United States and Mexico.

This growth led Tonnellerie Demptos to outsource part of its production to subcontractors. In 1964, it produced more than 10,000 barrels. Barrel hire also helped to support the business. Barrels are depreciated over ten years, although they can be used for up to 30 years. Over the preceding three years, Louis and Pierre Demptos had made major investments totalling 244,000 francs to provide their cooperage with the tools it needed and a high-performance working environment. These investments enabled the construction of a hangar, the acquisition of a new wine cellar, the purchase of equipment and tools, and the refurbishment of the company's offices, buildings and facilities in Bordeaux, Cambes and Saint-Caprais-de-Bordeaux. Finally, 15,000 francs were allocated to the purchase of two Citroën 2CV vehicles. In Cambes, a metal shed was built to store wood to be worked and completed barrels. There was also a need to invest in a new kiln and to refurbish some of the masonry. In Bordeaux, resources were allocated to extending the cellars and workshops at 14 bis rue de Marsan.

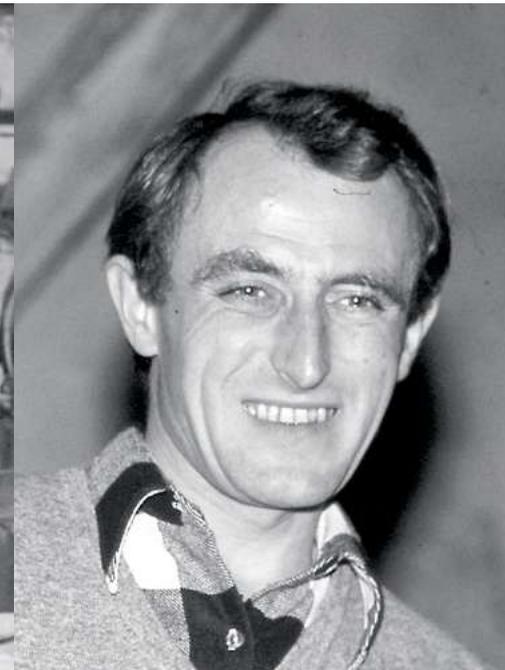
In the two years from 1962 to 1964, the number of coopers increased significantly. Tonnellerie Demptos no longer employed forty workers, but fifty, whose working week was 54 hours, longer than normal. The reason for this was simple: orders were increasing. It was a prosperous time for Tonnellerie Demptos, whose cash flow grew steadily thanks to banking facilities granted by the "Banque française pour le commerce extérieur" and Crédit Lyonnais. Louis and Pierre Demptos predicted an increase in sales outside France over the next two years. However, they remained cautious about their valuation and cash flow. The economic dynamism of Tonnellerie Demptos was in stark contrast with the rest of the sector, which was struggling to keep its head above water. How did the company succeed in improving its performance in this context?



PHILIPPE DEMPTOS



PIERRE DEMPTOS



JEAN DEMPTOS

Two factors have been identified as providing an answer and a logical explanation. Following in their father's footsteps, Pierre and Louis Demptos pursued an aggressive international sales policy. The implementation of this policy can be explained not only by Louis Demptos's mastery of the English language, but also by his business studies which, compared with previous generations, gave him new keys to unlocking growth solutions. The other factor is geographical. The interplay of hemispheres and inverted seasons means that the cooperage could take advantage of a full order book all year round, thanks to distributors spread across the globe and staggered harvests. Defying the tropics and time zones, Louis Demptos canvassed the Mediterranean and South Africa, where he built strong links with members of the de Solla family, distributors of Demptos barrels. He also ventured as far as Oceania, forging trade links in New Zealand with the Carter family. Everything is always open to question. Since its beginnings and throughout all the eras it had lived through, the cooperage born in Saint-Caprais-de-Bordeaux had learned, grown, sometimes run out of steam, but it had always been able to find the creative spark it needed, the breath to achieve the final goal to project itself into a new future.

The future of a family cooperage, in all its various forms, is embodied by the latest generation. In the Demptos family, the succession was assured by Philippe, son of Pierre, and Jean, son of Louis. From the mid-fifties, when he was just eleven years old and had no desire to study his school books, Philippe was already in contact with wood and flames. Unlike his father, Philippe was destined for a completely different form of training. He didn't study business theory, but learnt his trade at an early age in the family cooperage, writing letters for his father. Without even a driving licence, he drove his father on the roads of France and Navarre, from Spain to Portugal. As for Jean, the cousin, his kingdom lay in the heart of the production workshops alongside his cooper elders. From the 1960s onwards, they were both partners in the management of the company alongside their fathers, until Pierre and Louis gradually stepped aside to make way for this new duo, this new generation. Philippe Demptos was appointed Chairman and CEO, and Jean Demptos Managing Director. The sun never sets on Demptos barrels around the world. **The sun no longer has an appointment with the moon.**

# Chapter seven

THE DARKEST HOURS ARE JUST BEFORE  
THE SUN RISES.



Tonnellerie Demptos is an extension of the people who shape and run it. Its destiny is linked by its name to its family and its members. Just like them, the cooperage has weathered the fine days, and just like them it has weathered the stormy seasons.

## The Grands Crus of Bordeaux and Cognac were constantly on the lookout for the supplier whose barrels would provide the ultimate alchemy.

Who is Philippe Demptos, the new CEO? To get a glimpse and understand what drove him on a daily basis, we need to turn our attention to his Catholic faith. In a way, it guided his human and entrepreneurial approach. Although he was at ease at school, the education he received there guided his path. Philippe was a pupil at the Saint-Joseph de Tivoli Jesuit College in Bordeaux. The Jesuits teach a certain vision of man and the world. This religious order was founded in the 16<sup>th</sup> century by the Spanish theologian Ignatius de Loyola. Its aim was to create places where theology and the development of knowledge could be taught. As a result, many colleges spread around the world through the work of its missionaries, particularly in the Americas. A product of this teaching, Philippe Demptos became a travelling captain of a company. The world was his territory. Jesuit teaching worked its effect on him. The Americas are countries that Philippe Demptos courted and for which he had a number of projects. Strength of mind, high standards, respect for rules and others, strength of body: these were the hallmarks of Jesuit teaching. Until he came of age, he was a member of the Scouts de France, and here again there was an alchemy between spiritual exercise focused on the group and physical exercise, which Philippe continued with rugby, from which he would retain the mark of a broken nose. You can't understand the history and spirit of such an old company without knowing the origins and spiritual foundations of its directors. Tonnellerie Demptos is much more than cellars, workshops and thousands of barrels; it is an entity of spirit and flesh.

In two decades' time, Tonnellerie Demptos would see the light of a new sun, of a new century, shining on its barrels. For the time being, the post-war years until the oil crisis of the early 70s highlighted the fragility of traditional structures and trades in the face of the new economic and commercial paradigms of the second half of the twentieth century. It's not uncommon to hear, here and there, that the cooperage industry as a whole came close to disappearing. Thousands of coopers put away their aprons and dropped their mallets. In the end, even things that we think are immutable, tied to the long passage of history, can fade away. France lost its workshops, its workers.

Jean Demptos, who like his grandfather Abel Demptos, was involved in cooper unionism at regional level, believed that many of his colleagues disappeared because they had failed to adapt and modernise their approach. For centuries, the same tools, the same gestures and the same reflexes had gone into making a barrel, as one worker at the Cambes workshop put it: a barrel *"is made up of staves and two bottoms. No glue, all pressure"*. According to Jean Demptos, one of the reasons for the difficulties at the time was that the business required too much capital investment, not to mention fluctuating demand. In Cambes, for example, Tonnellerie Demptos had a permanent stock of 2,000 square metres of wood from the forests of Allier, Nièvre, Cher, Limousin and Armagnac. Tonnellerie Demptos remained a semi-artisanal cooperage. Although it was still a family-run business, it had all the assets needed to become a benchmark on the regional, national (with a new workshop in Eauze since 1975) and international scene. Demptos barrels were at the heart of markets California, Australia, South Africa, Egypt, Lebanon, Greece and Finland. One of the reasons for Demptos's economic success was its focus on high quality. Top-of-the-range barrels were and continue to be highly prized. The Grands Crus of Bordeaux and Cognac were constantly on the lookout for the supplier whose barrels would provide the ultimate alchemy.

So, for almost 150 years, the Demptos name had been building a reputation. Mention of the name granted access to the great estates and châteaux in France and abroad. Pride and a strong sense of belonging drove the employees working for Philippe and Jean Demptos. This favourable position opened the door to diversifying the business. Jean Demptos hoped to capture the market for bottles, corks and capsules. A second project was also underway. A process of rationalising the production apparatus was in progress. Pierre, Louis, Philippe and Jean decided to centralise their activities.



Despite investment, the cooperage's infrastructure had become obsolete over the years. The offices were too old, too small, and the workshops could no longer meet the new objectives. The questions they needed to answer were where should activities be centred? What type of building should be constructed to house the administrative offices, storage and production areas and the forty or so employees? The Demptos brothers made their choice. Their new flagship for the coming decades would be built under familiar skies and on familiar land, the Clos de Luzanne, where it all began in Saint-Caprais-de-Bordeaux. The Clos comprises a fifteen-hectare estate, with a ten-hectare uncovered storage area, a vineyard, grazing land for cattle and ploughed land. A bourgeois house, owned by Pierre Demptos and known as the Carthusian monastery, completes the estate. This family heritage was incorporated into the company in 1952 in the form of a S.A.R.L. It was on this land of memory that the future was to be built. On blank sheets of paper, the plans for the future cooperage were drawn up and then erased. Construction would take several months. It was financed with little long-term credit, drawing instead on the company's own funds. The most likely estimate for a future inauguration was around the 1981 harvest. In the words of Jean Demptos, the light and shade of the workshops would give way to a factory *"as big as an aircraft hangar"*.

The directors of Tonnellerie Demptos were full of optimism and a certain faith in their future. Indeed, it was not unusual for young men eager to learn the science of barrel-making to come to the cooperage, especially as coopers were now relatively well paid. The cooperage trade would endure, and Jean Demptos, an optimist, declared: *"The oak barrel will disappear the day a brilliant chemist finds something better than these barrels"*. He was also proud of the fact that he didn't do any intensive prospecting, that the name was enough. This was not untrue. In a press article, a journalist by the name of Josette de Degos wrote of the Managing Director: *"And he measures the extent of his wood stock with the eyes of a child"*. During the 1981 harvest, the new head office of Tonnellerie Demptos finally rose from the ground. It was bigger and brighter. Saint-Caprais-de-Bordeaux once again resounded to the familiar sounds of the cooperage, but this time on a completely different scale. However, there were some reservations about this new flagship. On the one hand, the members the Demptos family were not overly enthusiastic about the idea of moving away from the pastures and vines of Clos de Luzanne. On the other hand, the oldest workers found it hard to leave the old premises they have known all their lives. The new building was too modern, too vast, too airy and too bright.

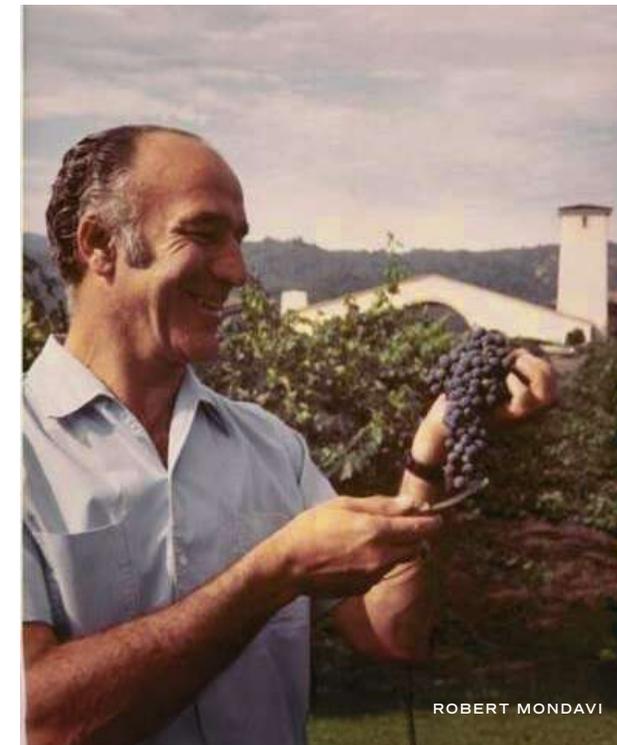


A few weeks after the inauguration, just as the future was emerging from the ground, a man returned to the earth on 20 December 1981. It was a day filled with sadness. The Demptos family had just lost one of its members at the age of sixty-nine. Some forty years earlier, he had begun training in his father Abel's cooperage with a view to succeeding him and his brother. He had been taken prisoner during the Second World War while doing his duty, like all his generation. Together with his brother, he laid the foundations for the internationalisation of the Demptos brand. He watched helplessly as the Cambes workshop caught fire. He put a new generation of coopers in a position to succeed him, in the person of his son and nephew. As a new decade dawned for his cooperage, the sun set on 'Monsieur Louis', as he was known to his colleagues. Philippe Demptos continued the work of his peers and strengthened their exports. From his stronghold in Saint-Émilion, he set out to conquer the world. During his youth, he spent a lot of time in Spain with the members of a well-known cooper family, Don Donato and his wife Pilar Murua, who regarded him as their own son. Philippe forged many links and built up a network that enabled Tonnellerie Demptos to produce and sell thousands of French oak barrels in Iberia.

Speaking both Spanish and English, he used his skills to look towards the Spanish and English-speaking Americas. Philippe had noticed that American wines were becoming increasingly popular. There was a market out there that Demptos barrels needed to seize. Philippe knew that this mission would take him several years. There would be constant trips back and forth. Chile, Argentina, Uruguay and California became his new areas of conquest. Philippe's ambition was to be one of the first French coopers to enter the American market. In the race that had begun, only one thing was ahead of him: his travel trunk. Eighty kilometres north of San Francisco, Philippe Demptos was in a car driving along the *Saint Helena Highway*. Watching the Napa Valley landscape unfold, he could see the rows of vines stretching between two mountain ranges, the Mayacamas to the west and the Vaca to the east, generating an early morning fog over the plain. This valley gave the vines every opportunity to express themselves in a variety of soils. At the bottom of the valley, the soils are richer and more fertile, favouring the expression of roundness and suppleness in the wines. The foothills, with their gravelly soils, give birth to powerful, more structured wines, while the mountains make the vines suffer with their poor soils, producing mineral wines with pronounced tannins.

America is the continent of the pioneers. They once roamed its immense territories, setting up outposts of Western culture and founding new trade routes. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, John Patchet was one of these American pioneers who created the first vineyard in the Napa Valley terroir. Philippe Demptos had been developing an idea for several years. This idea materialised in the project to build and install a cooperage in America, in the Napa Valley. It would be difficult to bring this project to fruition on his own. Philippe knew he had to build up a network of acquaintances and partners. As a representative of a certain kind of family entrepreneurship, this specificity helped him to build meaningful relationships. On the other side of the Atlantic, the Demptos family often had guests in their homes, even for business purposes. The contracts established in this way were based less on lawyers than on direct human links. In the same way, Philippe Demptos was very well received by the players in the Californian wine market, which was family-run in many instances. They were ready to make room for the Demptos name in Napa Valley.

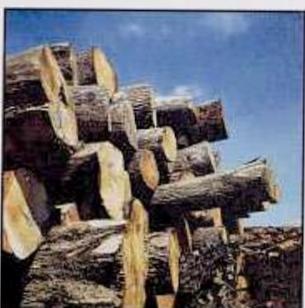
Robert Mondavi and his wife Margrit were instrumental in his integration. The Mondavi name was about to make a lasting mark on the American and world wine markets. Some fifteen years earlier, this New World winemaker had acquired the To Kalon vineyard in Oakville after working for another prominent Napa Valley name, Charles Krug, who had run the first commercial winery in St Helena. Robert Mondavi built his American wine empire through a very proactive commercial strategy. Ever since his travels in Europe, he had been convinced that ageing in small oak barrels, like the huge traditional redwood vats in California, was essential if Californian wines were to become the best in the world. During his pilgrimage along the American road, Philippe Demptos met another family, the Jaegers, owners of Freemark Abbey Winery and Rutherford Hill Winery. Thanks to them, he was able to introduce his barrels to the New World market. Philippe Demptos' extensive travels bore fruit. Supported by his new American allies, the Demptos name took root in California.



ROBERT MONDAVI

Old France set foot on this continent once again in 1982. The history of North America remembers the first French settlers in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, who explored this territory for the fur trade and adopted the ways of life of the various Indian tribes. These French were often the first Europeans to explore these immense territories further and further. A happy alchemy existed between the French and the American terroirs. A hypothetical atavistic mark of a certain French spirit, Philippe Demptos unconsciously had within him the intelligence to adapt and merge with America. Offering an alternative to French oak, he chose to use American oak for the barrels that would be made on Californian soil, while exporting his know-how. The creation of the "Demptos Napa Cooperage" was the result of a syncretism of two wills, two traditions, two quests to give Robert Mondavi's wines the most perfect setting possible.

After many discussions, the Californians and the experts at Demptos came to the conclusion that they could use American oak barrels but dried in the French style, i.e. naturally and in the open air, because, according to Philippe Demptos, "*long periods of drying by the natural elements - wind, rain and sun - remove the excess tannic components from the wood*". He appointed a Scotsman, Will Jamieson, to head up his new cooperage. Jamieson was an indentured cooper from Keith, near Aberdeen, one of the largest cities in north-east Scotland, a land Philippe knew well having spent time as a young man training there. Philippe built himself and his creative work through travel. Travelling allowed him to broaden his sources of inspiration, to sow the seeds of his creativity and his imagination by shifting his perspective away from his familiar and even family reality. His energy was equal to the confidence he had in the future of his cooperage, especially as the taste of the world wine market seemed to be returning to wood. Robert Parker, the American wine critic and creator of the world's taste in wine, was behind this renewed interest in ageing wines in barrels.



The commercial strength of Tonnellerie Demptos can be judged by its economic performance and its new establishment in California, but not only that. Another factor came into play in the seventies and eighties. Power lay in the ability to mobilise and invent new, high-performance research tools. Scientific and oenological research became, in the same way as fire, water and hands, a quality factor in the creation of a barrel. Despite centuries of mastery, barrels have not yet revealed all their secrets.

Oenology had entered the language of coopers. A major paradigm shift in the history of cooperage was shaking up traditions. Although the marriage of barrel and wine had been established for centuries, this union was a subtle balance. Wood, an imperfect material, can become a constraint for the nectar it is marrying. The evolution of this paradigm transformed the barrel from a container into an oenological tool for maturing wine. Philippe and Jean Demptos understood the historical and economic stakes. The alliance between people and barrels had to change. In the 1980s, Jean Demptos and his Californian colleagues took part in the convention of the *American Society for Enology and Viticulture*, which since 1950, at the instigation of researchers from the University of California and local winemakers, had been promoting dialogue between winemakers, oenologists, coopers and chemists. During the convention, Jeff Jaeger and Jean Demptos would represent the *Demptos Cooperage Company* on stand 60. The bridges built between these different professions were strengthened in 1985 with the first edition of a newsletter for the wine world, published by the Demptos cooperage in Napa Valley. The purpose of this bulletin was to inform customers and provide them with the barrels best suited to their needs.

On the other side of the Atlantic, interest in scientific and oenological research was accelerating. Coopers and winemakers were keen to improve their understanding of the positive properties of wooden barrels compared with cement and stainless steel vats, which were still less expensive to use for maturing wine. Since 1974 in Saint-Émilion, Château Angéus had been working with Bordeaux professor Pascal Ribereau-Gayon, director the Institute of Oenology at the University of Bordeaux II. Ribereau-Gayon made a major impact on the world of oenology with his *Traité d'Oenologie*, published at the end of the 1940s. His was an assistant to Louis Pasteur, “the father of oenology”. Numerous experiments were carried out in collaboration with Tonnellerie Demptos in the 1980s to determine the right alchemy for ageing a great Bordeaux wine. The studies carried out revealed, for example, that a wine becomes “*finer, more complex and richer*” when aged in new barrels. Conversely, the same wine “*appears much leaner and drier*”, losing its balance and roundness, when aged in seven-year-old barrels. As a result of comparative studies, barrels slowly replaced cement and stainless steel vats for the ageing of Château Angéus wines.



At Saint-Caprais-de-Bordeaux, Jean Demptos continued to oversee barrel production. But not all was well in the best of all possible worlds. While the sun never sets on Demptos barrels around the world, a shadow, a danger was looming. In the absence of Philippe Demptos, the human, administrative and financial management of the cooperage was falling apart. Disorganisation and repeated mistakes were attacking the family business. The Chairman-CEO's confidence in Jean's choices turned into blind trust. The lack of control, through repeated absences, contributed to the emergence of various problems, not without consequences. The telephone lines were hot between Saint-Caprais-de-Bordeaux and Australia. As result of a lack control and supervision, the agent operating for the Demptos brand in Australia had embezzled substantial sums of money. The company's finances were soon affected. Much closer to home, in Montguyon, a large number of Demptos oak logs disappeared from the wood splitting yard. In the workshops, management of the coopers was not optimal. A festive spirit, too festive, reigned, and breaks dragged on, inevitably affecting stock management. What's more, at harvest time, when business was brisk, most of the coopers took time off to go dove hunting.

It was important to re-establish a new working environment within the cooperage. The directors, Philippe and Jean Demptos, needed to surround themselves with people and bring in an outsider with a less emotionally-invested outlook to introduce more rigour. Philippe chose Jean-Pierre Laubisse, whose name was not unfamiliar to the cooperage. His own father had been the company's chartered accountant since 1945. It was the son's turn to put the company's finances and organisation in order, as the banks were not happy about the deteriorating situation. 1985 was a year of internal reform, efficiency and modernisation. Jean-Pierre Laubisse launched several projects. Not without difficulty, he streamlined human resources management by requiring that everything be in writing from then on. As in traditional human groups, the oral tradition predominated, which was becoming a problem for the foremen. So internal regulations were drawn up. The man of reform undertook many other important projects: computerisation, with the appearance of the first computer screens; the creation of efficient social management; the strengthening of production control; the raising of technical standards; and the promotion of rigorous financial management. New tools were introduced, with the manufacture of specific machines and tools to avoid the physical pain that a cooperage worker can often experience, putting a strain on the human production chain. Finally, the company's accounts were streamlined. But not everyone was enthusiastic about these reforms. Doubts arose within the family management of the cooperage. Philippe and Jean Demptos were divided over the changes.

Several months passed. Customs and habits deeply rooted in the mentality of certain coopers are held back the modernisation process that had been implemented. Dialogue and education were essential for the new standards to be slowly infused and accepted, but in some cases this is not enough.

Jean Demptos was no longer on the same wavelength as his Chairman and CEO. In 1986, they discussed their vision of the future. Even under the control of a family, a company can be torn apart by several different wills. Already, when the decision was taken to build the new cooperage at Saint-Caprais-de-Bordeaux, some of its members had been reluctant about the idea. Now the two cousins were facing headwinds. Jean Demptos finally decided to step aside and sell his shares to Philippe Demptos. Although Philippe was not happy about the decision, he saw it as an opportunity to fulfil his ambitions much more freely than before. The light still shines on the road ahead, but its rays come from a black sun.

The financial situation became untenable. Markets in South Africa and Argentina were contracting as a result of political and economic instability in those countries. The banks were no longer so keen to support the cooperage and demanded that it reduce its debt. It was therefore decided that a number of properties should be sold to bring in fresh money. The Bordeaux properties were sold. Activities were centralised in Saint-Caprais-de-Bordeaux in the search for greater efficiency. The shadow that seemed to loom over the Demptos cooperage in the decade of the eighties had not yet spread all its black mantle.

People's destinies are linked to their work. History teaches us this. The body of the Tonnellerie Demptos was suffering, but another body, made of flesh, suffers in silence. It lets nothing show, but by the autumn of 1988, Philippe Demptos was ill. His body betrayed him. One day that same season, he went as usual to his cooperage. He had to inform his staff of his situation, without alarming them. The words he used were disguised as optimism. Without going into too much detail, he announced that he was ill and that his role, his responsibilities and his presence in the cooperage and its workshops would undergo some changes. He would be absent a little more often. His absences would not be the result of far-flung trips to California or Australia, but of a final journey to the end of his life. Philippe Demptos was suffering from lung cancer and retired to his home in Lignan-de-Bordeaux, a few kilometres north of Saint-Caprais-de-Bordeaux. The days of conquest were behind him. From one day to the next, Dany Rivière, a close employee, received a phone call from Philippe, telling her to go to the village pharmacy to get some painkillers. On 21 February 1989, Philippe Demptos, the travelling cooper, travelled into another world. Winter had taken him. He was only 43 years old. In the end, the cooperage and the Demptos family were completely swathed in shadow. The news of Philippe's death spread.

A few days later, the funeral guests gathered around the coffin of the late Philippe Demptos, people from all over the world with whom he had built real ties. The music in the nave of the church, a requiem, rose up, gripping the large crowd with deep emotion. The final movement of Gabriel Fauré's requiem, *In paradisium*, accompanied Philippe Demptos's farewell to his wife Claudine, his children Gilles, Claire and Albane, his family, his coopers and all those who have worked with him from near or far. He returned to the earth for eternal rest in the small cemetery of Saint-Caprais-de-Bordeaux in the shadow of his church.

What entrepreneurial legacy did Philippe Demptos leave behind? It is always difficult to summarise and capture the substance of a life's work, especially when it is short-lived. The former Chairman and CEO, heir to 5 generations of coopers, offered a corporate culture based on warm and trusting relationships with his employees. He followed in the international footsteps of Pierre and Louis Demptos, and succeeded in his plan to set up a French cooperage in California, which on the eve of his death had nine thousand barrels and sales of over three million dollars. Philippe was known as a man who was extremely generous to those around him and even to his competitors. At a meeting of the cooper federation, he befriended the head of another cooperage. Business was difficult for this cooperage. It was unable to increase its share of the export market. Faced with this situation, Philippe Demptos decided to offer his assistance to help the cooperage out of its predicament. Philippe's offer was never put into writing.

Without its leader, Tonnellerie Demptos was at a crossroads. Who would succeed Philippe Demptos? Did the family business have what it takes to carry on the torch that had been passed down unbroken for nearly two centuries? Pierre Demptos was too old. He was a grieving man, a father devastated at having lived long enough to bury his son. Jean Demptos, Philippe's cousin, was not coming back. As for his brothers, none were up to the challenge. Philippe's children were far too young to succeed him. The future of the Tonnellerie Demptos was uncertain to say the very least, but **the darkest hours are those that come just before the sun rises.**



# Chapter eight

IN TONNA AETERNITAS EST



Nobody was prepared for the sudden death of Philippe Demptos. Since 1825, there had always been a member of the founding family to perpetuate the dynasty. Now, for the first time in its history, the future the Tonnellerie Demptos was uncertain.

In the summer of 1989, the *Los Angeles Times* ran the headline: “American winemaker acquires French barrel-making company”. The “American winemaker” was none other than Bill Jeager, co-owner of the Rutherford Hill and Fremark Abbey wineries. It was Jeager who helped his business partner Philippe Demptos set up the Gironde cooperage in Napa Valley. After the death of his friend, Bill Jeager bought a majority stake in Demptos Napa Cooperage. The American winemaker’s action did not stop with this purchase. Bill Jeager sent his son Jeff, National Sales Director at Rutherford Hill, to Saint-Caprais-de-Bordeaux in France to manage Tonnellerie Demptos on an interim basis and help the family find a potential buyer. At the time, the Gironde cooperage was the only source of wood and barrels for the American company.

It was crucial for the Jeager family to ensure that the parent company remained in relatively good health and that the future buyer was the right one. With his wife and children, Jeff Jeager was welcomed to the Clos de Luzanne by Claudine Demptos, Philippe’s widow, for several months. Tonnellerie Demptos was put up for sale. During the difficult negotiations to come, the memory and will of Philippe Demptos would not be sacrificed on the altar of negotiation. Several cooperages were in the running. An attractive offer from one competitor in particular caught the eye. However, Pierre and Claudine Demptos remembered Philippe’s reservations about this rival cooperage. Several other proposals were studied, and one was finally selected.



The sun was rising in the east, and it was in this direction that salvation lay for Tonnellerie Demptos. In July 1989, the name of the buyer was known. Behind this name, a new family of coopers became the custodians of the Demptos heritage. *Tonnellerie François Frères*, founded in 1910 by Joseph François, was located in Saint-Romain, Burgundy. The news now had to be made public. Pierre Demptos, aged seventy-nine, was to bring to an end an epic dynasty of coopers who had left their mark on the Bordeaux, French and international cooperage industries. On August 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1989, he announced the name of the buyer in a letter, a last letter that was the ultimate decision by a cooper for his cooperage, which was no longer his after 164 years of work. The following month, Jérôme François, who was just twenty-one years old and a student at Sup de Co Dijon (now Burgundy Business School), took up his post as the new Chairman and CEO. The great-grandson of a cooper, from childhood he hung around workshops, stacking wood and painting barrels, driven by a desire to get his hands dirty like everyone else. After listening, after taking the path of a certain continuity, one of his first acts was to rebuild a new direction for Tonnellerie Demptos, which kept its name.

Jean-Pierre Laubisse was reappointed Chief Financial Officer. Jean-Claude Molina was in charge of production and supplies. Paul Granger was Head of Sales, supported by Dany Rivière, who ten years earlier had been recruited by Philippe Demptos following an interview conducted in English, supplemented by tests on *Incoterms* and export regulations. The new foundations were in place and a new wood yard was built for this new start. A new banner was perhaps now be guiding the company’s destiny, but its soul remained intact and the Demptos name would continue to appear on the wood of the barrels. A new hope was born.

The takeover of Tonnellerie Demptos by Tonnellerie François Frères, now Groupe TFF, was not an aggressive takeover of a predatory competitor to create a clean slate. Family-run businesses have a different way of doing things. A family is an identity, a spirit, a know-how, a way of being. The Burgundy company wanted to preserve the identity of the Bordeaux company. Building on these foundations, other elements were added to help structure the resumption of a forward march, embodied by new personalities. Jérôme François presided over the destiny of Demptos for twenty years. Some sensible decisions were taken, such as the closure of their cooperage business in Eauze, as well as the Saint-Émilion workshop where Messrs Penchaud and Morano had provided service in the midst of this renowned vineyard since 1945.

Without forgetting the French clientele, the emphasis in the mid-1990s was on exporting to the eastern Mediterranean and its string of countries, Greece, Turkey, Lebanon and Israel, where King Solomon once enshrined the nobility of wood. As for the Maghreb countries, they were not favourable breeding grounds for the Demptos brand. On the map of the fields of conquest, Jérôme François was targeting, as he put it, “the countries where people speak with their hands”, in other words all the countries with a Latin culture. These countries are Italy, Spain and, on other side of the Atlantic, Argentina and Chile. At the time, these latter countries were fertile ground for the trade, as they were going through an oenological revival. Since the 1970s, the oenological approach had become a central issue. In 1991, in association with the Institut d’œnologie de Bordeaux, now the Institut des Sciences de la Vigne et du Vin, Tonnellerie Demptos set up a new research department with the aim of strengthening the dialogue and understanding between people, their beverages and wood.



This department was the result of a series of meetings. Yves Glories, an eminent oenologist and university lecturer at Bordeaux University, introduced Jérôme François to a certain Nicolas Vivas, Doctor of Science and oenologist, a recognised and active researcher at the CNRS (national centre for scientific research), who became director of the department. He is the author of several works on oenology. In just a few years, the research department added new scientific partners, including the CNRS and INRA. Research topics included wood selection methods, interactions with wine, toasting and wood. The superiority of natural open-air drying was also demonstrated. The aim was to adapt their product range to meet the oenological requirements of Demptos barrel users. Later, at end of the 2010s, the research department, created almost twenty years earlier became the Demptos Research Centre (CRD), headed by Nicolas Vivas.

After a process spanning several decades, oenology blended with the barrels. This association was personified by the oenologist. Like the interpreter of a new Esperanto, he or she expressed the demands of the winegrowers to the coopers, and the demands of the coopers to the winegrowers, to make a barrel in keeping with its environment and its time. In January 1994, an oenologist joined Tonnellerie Demptos. Born into a farming family in the Dordogne, Dominique Gornès had just graduated from the Bordeaux Institute of Oenology. It was on the advice of a friend of the late Philippe Demptos, Hubert de Boüard of Château Angélu, where he cut his teeth, that he joined the cooperage in Saint-Caprais-de-Bordeaux. Initially tasked with liaising with the French wine industry, his mission evolved, extending beyond the borders of France to support and develop the export market.

The 21<sup>st</sup> century has not yet had time to yellow the pages of history, written by the people of a Demptos cooperage that has seen 200 autumns, 200 winters, 200 springs and today its 200<sup>th</sup> summer.

Just as in the Middle Ages and at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Spain was a land of ambition for the Demptos brand. The demand for barrels in this country was constantly growing. Indeed, the Gironde cooperage could not keep up with the growing demand from across the Pyrenees. Winegrowers in the Spanish province of Rioja were showing a growing interest in French oak barrels. Demptos barrels enjoyed a certain reputation there. Winegrowers like Marcos Enguren, who wanted to explore the possibility of using French oak, asked around to find out which cooperage was likely to offer the best barrels. The answer was often the same: the best barrels “*are those made by Demptos*”. Between 1980 and the early 1990s, Demptos barrels made a name for themselves in Spain, opening the door to new opportunities.

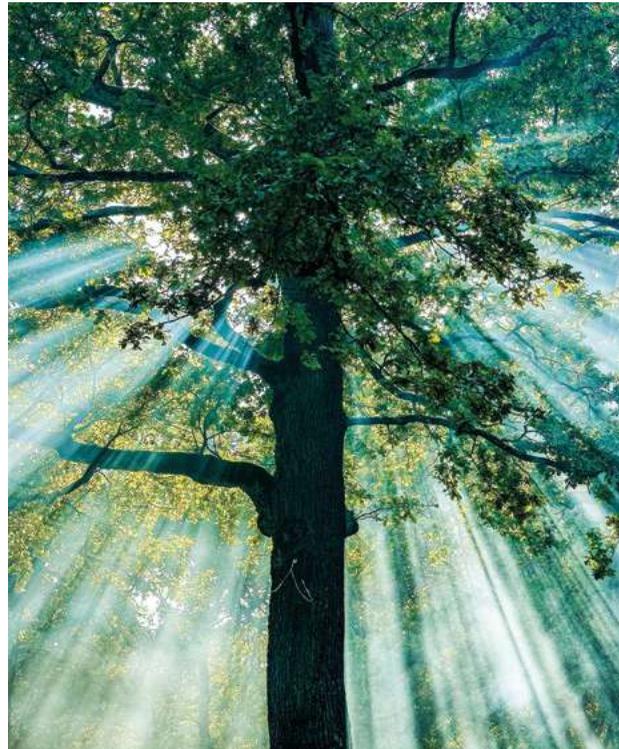
On 23 October 1995, a young graduate of the Purpan engineering school in Toulouse joined Demptos. A few weeks earlier, François Witasse had responded to a job advertisement in the *L'Express* newspaper. Now in charge of exports, he proposed a project to enable his barrels to strengthen their presence in Spain. He decided to put it to Jérôme François. The year was 1998, and the idea of building a Demptos cooperage with a Spanish accent was initially rejected, but not completely abandoned. The financial director, Jean-Pierre Laubisse, helped François Witasse put together a financial analysis that would make the project viable. The following year, the Chairman and CEO was convinced that the project was worthwhile. A new Demptos cooperage was built in the Rioja region, where the ancestral fleur-de-lis and French emblem were already blooming on the flag of the Spanish province. In March 2000, Demptos opened its own establishment in Spain, the Tonelería Demptos, headed by François Witasse who, as well as being behind this new entrepreneurial venture became a partner in the François family. With his quality positioning, François Witasse became the head of the most profitable cooperage in Spain, winning a share of the market from his Spanish and even French competitors. His new responsibilities did not make him the kind of manager who sits at a desk, however, and he continued to travel, particularly to South America, where people speak with their hands.

The threshold of the 21<sup>st</sup> century was crossed with Demptos barrels as part of TFF group and under the direction of Jérôme François. A new sun continued the work of time, the work of the centuries, with the embrace of its warmth on the wood revealing itself to mankind. Throughout history, kingdoms have vowed to last 1,000 years. Some have achieved this by combining the strength and wisdom of the oak. At this stage of the eternal season, History smells of green wood. Will it now have the courage to seize a past that is, in the relativity of time, the present of just a few hours ago? The 21<sup>st</sup> century has not yet had time to yellow the pages of history, written by the people of a Demptos cooperage that has seen 200 autumns, 200 winters, 200 springs and today its 200<sup>th</sup> summer. But let's dare to capture the angels' share that escapes from the barrel of history.

Since 2000, Tonnellerie Demptos has been expanding into western and eastern Europe. Through a joint venture with Trust Hungary, it entered the Hungarian market. South Africa was added to the list in 2003, followed by China with Yantai Demptos Cooperage in 2006. It has also strengthened its position in the spirits market. Demptos barrels, which used to be used in wine production, are now increasingly ageing Bourbon and Whisky.

In 2012, Jérôme François, who had taken over from Philippe Demptos, wanted to pass on the heritage of his cooperage to François Witasse for the coming years. At the same time, the Demptos brand began a new rebrand, under a single banner and logo, to accompany the development of new products, new research and stronger, clearer positions. Having acquired a sense of history, its actions for the future are carried out outside itself, in symbiosis with its civilisation, its geography, its nature and its terroir. In 2010, Tonnellerie Demptos sponsored a work of creation, a work inherited from the civilisation of wood and the children of Solomon: the Cité du Vin de Bordeaux. The universal and living cultural heritage of wine now has its own showcase with global influence.

Just as wine and spirits have their own casks, Demptos oak underwent a change of foliage in 2017. Using the services of architect Fabien Pedelaborde, who previously designed the Demptos stands at the Vinitech trade show in Bordeaux, the cooperage reinvented itself through its buildings. Through architecture and wood, it now offered its vision of a craft painted with eternity. Fabien Pedelaborde has always believed that *“Demptos is a house of high pedigree comparable to brands such as Hermès or Baccarat. We have taken a global approach to reinventing distribution, from the arrival of the wood to the shipping of the barrels around the world. The aim is to ensure that everyone, whatever their role, can find themselves in an improved, perfected, re-qualified configuration. The people who work in the workshops were also at the heart of our reflections and concerns in terms of passage, pathways and volume. We looked at everything to ensure that it was in harmony with their movements.”*



In the beginning was a vine and then came the first barrels. After growing up among the vines, Pierre Demptos pledged his allegiance to oak for several centuries. His descendants have taken their cue from him to root their cooperage even deeper in many of the world's latitudes and seasons. From the rue Saint-Louis in Bordeaux to Cape Town, Tonnellerie Demptos has weathered crises and wars, but has endured. The Demptos brand has always followed the light of the stars to rise. Even in its darkest hours, a new sun would appear. Now in its third century, the Demptos cooperage wants to pass on to young people the whisper of the civilisation of wood for the barrels of tomorrow. As a company with deep roots in its terroirs, Demptos has made responsibility towards eternal nature one of its missions for this century. Generations of coopers have come and gone, just like generations of oak trees. The lines of history cross and continue. Tonnellerie Demptos is now the same age, the same two hundred seasons, as the oak from which it has been making its barrels since 1825. **In tonna aeternitas est.**

## EPILOGUE

In the course of its history, Tonnellerie Demptos has seen many suns. Some have been bright, some black, some have set and many have risen. Beneath the suns, in the history of Man and his creations, there are the oaks that are felled. But when an old oak falls on its last bed of dead leaves, young shoots catch the light and grow to continue the race of time. The depths of history are nothing more than a springboard for high hopes and aspirations. From the end of the Demptos dynasty to the present day, the corridors of time lead the people who embody the cooperage to a new heaven of eternity, because everything that has been achieved is now a memory, part of a shared history. To be there is to remain, to be there is to perpetuate, because that is where eternity lies. Under the sun of the eternal season, all that was will be for the Children of Solomon.



*“For those who love,  
time is eternity.”*

HENRY VAN DYKE

As we close this book and this epic tale, which is first and foremost human and nourished by passion and commitment, we realize that it's up to us to carry on and honor the legacy of our elders.

By writing the chapters yet to come, by continuing to forge the companionship between wood and wine, let's strive to preserve this common good so that we, too, are able to pass it on in our role as guardians of skills and artisans of eternity...

François Witasse — President

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### Publication director

François Witasse pour Demptos

### Art director

Studio Graine – [studio-graine.com](http://studio-graine.com)

### Publishing director

Nicolas Bolchakoff – [historien-entrepreneur.com](http://historien-entrepreneur.com)

### Coordination

Charlotte Schmidt et Dominique Gornes  
pour Demptos

### Photography

Julie Rey, Charlotte Bommelaer, Serge Chapuis  
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### Illustration

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