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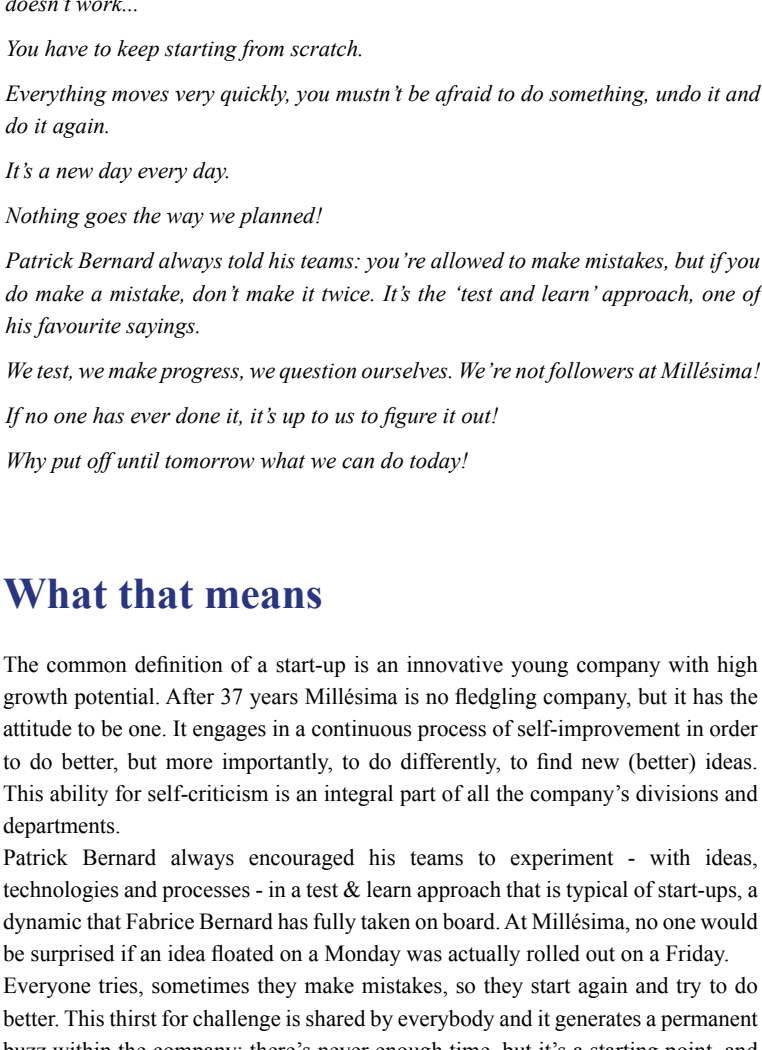
MILLÉSIMA

BORDEAUX

DNA

A Start-up Mindset

[Questioning yourself, a thirst for adventure, continual improvement]



What they're saying on the inside

To me, that's what a start-up is all about: having a go and then starting again if it doesn't work...

You have to keep starting from scratch.

Everything moves very quickly, you mustn't be afraid to do something, undo it and do it again.

It's a new day every day.

Nothing goes the way we planned!

Patrick Bernard always told his teams: you're allowed to make mistakes, but if you do make a mistake, don't make it twice. It's the 'test and learn' approach, one of his favourite sayings.

We test, we make progress, we question ourselves. We're not followers at Millésima!

If no one has ever done it, it's up to us to figure it out!

Why put off until tomorrow what we can do today!

What that means

The common definition of a start-up is an innovative young company with high growth potential. After 37 years Millésima is no fledgling company, but it has the attitude to be one. It engages in a continuous process of self-improvement in order to do better, but more importantly, to do differently, to find new (better) ideas. This ability for self-criticism is an integral part of all the company's divisions and departments.

Patrick Bernard always encouraged his teams to experiment - with ideas, technologies and processes - in a test & learn approach that is typical of start-ups, a dynamic that Fabrice Bernard has fully taken on board. At Millésima, no one would be surprised if an idea floated on a Monday was actually rolled out on a Friday.

Everyone tries, sometimes they make mistakes, so they start again and try to do better. This thirst for challenge is shared by everybody and it generates a permanent buzz within the company: there's never enough time, but it's a starting point, and what's important isn't here and now: we're looking ahead to what the future holds, a future that is still unwritten, a future that we're shaping right now and that we hope will pleasantly surprise us.

This start-up mindset is intrinsic to the company's origins: sales and marketing innovations are in a way the cornerstone of Millésima. In fact, as Patrick Bernard likes to remind us, Millésima was the first to sell grands crus classés using direct marketing to private French customers and then to private customers outside of France, then Bordeaux grands crus classés and fine wines from the major winemaking regions in France and abroad. It was also the first and only company to provide custom advice over the phone or to offer tastings prior to each purchase.

Day to day

Having a start-up mindset from day to day means:

... launching the very first website in 1997, barely two years after the Internet arrived in France.

... Millésima's first foray into social networking, at a time when Patrick Bernard didn't really believe in the impact of these new means of communication: first videos in 2008, Facebook page in 2009...

... regular redesigns of the website, to reflect the latest technological developments and to keep up with the increasingly high demands of Internet users: page loading speed, ergonomics, user experience, mobile compatibility, etc.

... the first European e-commerce site in the AWS (Amazon Web Services) cloud.

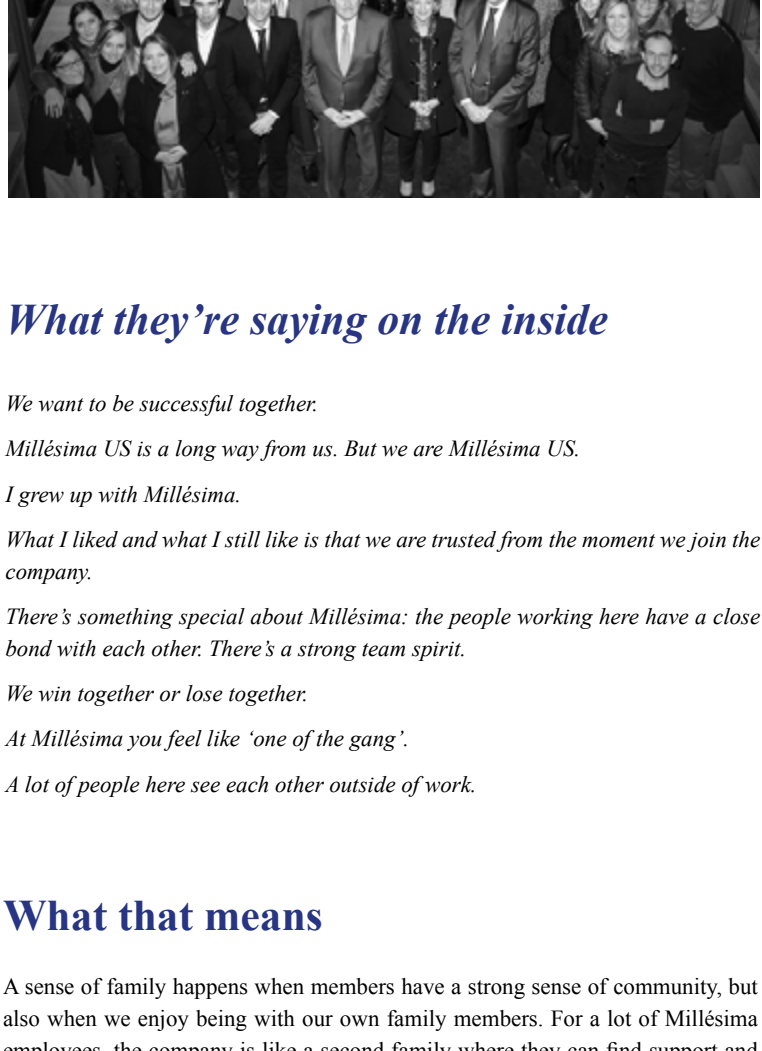
... one of the first SAS mode sites at IBM.

... creating an e-commerce app available on the Apple Store without paying any commission to Apple.

... the «Millésima La Plage» app designed in April 2017 and rolled out just two months later, with a shop, teams and a strategy: obtaining customer emails.

Passion for Wine

[Influence, quality, sharing]



What they're saying on the inside

We want to be both explorers and influencers. Our guarantee: here, we taste every wine.

You have to get close to the winegrower so they think of us and not of anyone else.

At Millésima, people discuss wine over dinner.

You have to keep on tasting every day.

You have to love people and love wine to do this job.

What that means

Millésima's original name, «Vins des Grands Vignobles», was chosen carefully by Philippe Debayle, one of the founding partners in 1982: from the outset, the company has in fact only ever sold grands crus, high quality wines. «Selling» doesn't do it justice though, it doesn't say anything about the passion for their product that Millésima's teams cherish and share: all the wines sold by the company are tasted in-house, during daily tastings where the sales and marketing teams all work together.

You can only discuss something properly if you are very familiar with it. But this is much more than simply technical and subjective knowledge, acquired through experience and training. This taste for great wine, this dedication, this desire to introduce people to surprising new discoveries, is also reflected in the regular addition of new products to the catalogue, sometimes from the other side of the world, sometimes from terroirs much closer to home, but always high quality. No matter where the wine comes from, all wine that arrives at Millésima is stored in the same place: the Paludate cellars. This guarantee also benefits the customer, who can rest assured that the bottles ordered are handled with the utmost care.

Day to day

Being passionate about wine day to day means:

... Ensuring the product is stored correctly.

... Guaranteeing the origin and authenticity of all wine stocked and sold by Millésima since 1988.

... Organising event-based tastings since 1988 to share exceptional wines with producers, journalists and hand-picked guests.

... Organising tastings for the purchasing and marketing teams and for sales staff to select wines.

... Not limiting ourselves to a single terroir and expanding into selling Burgundy, Champagne and Port in 1995. Today, more than 40% of the wine sold by Millésima is from vineyards outside Bordeaux and from international vineyards.

... Creating a YouTube channel in 2009 to showcase the work of the producers and the connections between Millésima and these great estates.

... Providing all wine lovers with custom advice and content via social networks as well as by phone and email.

... Providing training to all employees.

... Organising WSET (Wine & Spirit Education Trust) training courses.

Sense of Family

[Family business, sense of belonging, helping each other, long-term approach]



What they're saying on the inside

We want to be successful together.

Millésima US is a long way from us. But we are Millésima US.

I grew up with Millésima.

What I liked and what I still like is that we are trusted from the moment we join the company.

There's something special about Millésima: the people working here have a close bond with each other. There's a strong team spirit.

We win together or lose together.

At Millésima you feel like 'one of the gang'.

A lot of people here see each other outside of work.

What that means

A sense of family happens when members have a strong sense of community, but also when we enjoy being with our own family members. For a lot of Millésima employees, the company is like a second family where they can find support and encouragement. The fact that the management trusts its employees means they can tackle their work with confidence. In return, this trust is reciprocated and shared by all. We pull together, we discuss, we disagree too, we try to move forward together. We work as a team and we encourage in-house promotion, because we like to see our nearest and dearest grow.

Patrick Bernard's paternal, or even paternalistic - in the best sense of the word - personality certainly helped to create this sense of mind, the very emotional feeling of belonging. These family ties were strengthened and reaffirmed when the company was passed down.

Patrick Bernard sees Millésima - his «fifth child» as he sometimes says - from a long, or even very long term perspective, which allows for major investments, such as the work recently undertaken in the wine cellars in Bordeaux. This outlook is shared by his son Fabrice, who took over the company in 2016, and by his daughter Hortense, who runs the American division. Indeed, both of them feel that their second generation is just one link in a long chain. The fact that Millésima is part of the Bernard Group, also family-owned and founded by Fabrice's great-grandfather and now run by his uncle Jean, is obviously not unrelated to this point of view.

Day to day

Fostering a sense of family day to day means:

... Encouraging kindness and respect among all employees.

... Organising special events for employees.

... Working closely with the teams: greeting everyone in the morning, discussing activities and projects, staying informed and being kept up to date.

... In difficult situations (personal or professional problems), support the person through dialogue, listening and teamwork.

... Financing a Master's in Marketing at Inseeq for an IT employee who wants to further their career.

... Offering all employees, without exception and regardless of which department they work in, the opportunity to take part in panorama tastings.

... Setting up a voluntary collaborative project where the whole team joins in, like a big family.

... Being a «talent spotting» company.

A Taste for the Finer Things

[High standards, excellence, customer focus, high-end/luxury]

What they're saying on the inside

We are dedicated to offering our customers the best service and the best products.

We set high standards for ourselves and for others. We like a job well done.

We sell luxury products. And we offer a luxury service.

We have to stand out for our quality.

We try to build customer loyalty by giving the best possible advice. The quality of our advice sets us apart from the competition.

We have to be committed to fine wines.

We want rare wines and the most beautiful wines available in France and throughout the world, basically what everyone is after!

The company's strategy is to only sell fine wines.

What that means

A taste for the finer things is undeniably a key aspect of Millésima.

While the company uses modern technology, sophisticated databases and dedicated software to stay ahead of the game, it hasn't compromised on style. Our target customers are particularly discerning when it comes to appearances. Words are carefully considered and chosen; the design of messages and catalogues is conceived to follow the latest trends in the luxury sector. You obviously don't sell fine wines the same way you sell table wines. By buying the wine directly from the producers, Millésima guarantees the authenticity of its products. These products need to be matched by top quality service. Having only ever been in the estate's cellars and then the Millésima cellars, these fine wines have been lovingly treasured. They enjoy first-rate storage and delivery conditions. Advice is something else Millésima refuses to compromise on. This is the focal point around which the company has built both its image and its success. Our customer advisors know what they are talking about: they've tasted the wines they're recommending, they know their customers' tastes if they have ordered before and they can guide new customers as well as chat with connoisseurs. They also reassure anyone who is hesitant to buy online without knowing «what's behind the site»: 200 year old wine cellars, containing over two and a half million bottles...

Day to day

Having a taste for the finer things from day to day means:

... focusing on grands crus and exceptional products that contribute to the international reputation of French gastronomy.

... publishing a splendid catalogue featuring beautiful reproductions of engravings of the 28 finest châteaux in Bordeaux, to mark the 10th anniversary of the «Société des Vins des Grands Vignobles» in 1993.

... having incredible historic wine cellars in Bordeaux at Quai de Paludate, concealed behind a beautiful 19th century façade, recently reorganised to enable faster shipping.

... creating an «Imperial Library» in 1991 to accommodate 12,000 large format bottles in the heart of the cellar.

... welcoming foreign customers in their own language, engaging them in a friendly conversation about wine.

... producing carefully and inventively presented catalogues that are always up-to-date.

... taking photographs with a unique and distinctive identity, presenting the products in a stylised setting.

... establishing an in-house communications agency with its own photo studio with a dedicated photographer and a creative studio allowing Millésima to fully control its own image.

... creating a video media department producing high quality content and images.

Taking a chance on the Future

[Innovation, anticipation, curiosity]

What they're saying on the inside

It's very competitive. We have to move faster, or somewhere else.

Being a trailblazer is a must.

We're always on the lookout for new trends.

Millésima is like a watch: it never stops moving.

We never rest on our laurels, we've never said: this works so let's keep plodding along. No, we up our game and go faster.

What that means

Never taking the road more travelled, never taking anything for granted: this approach to business defines Millésima's strategy perfectly and is not often seen in more «traditional» SMEs. There is no R&D department at Millésima: innovation is everywhere. Or more to the point, everyone is responsible for it, in his or her own way. Everyone has the right to «rock the boat», to use Fabrice Bernard's favourite expression.

It's not a question of taking indiscriminate risks - Millésima is part of a family group that cares about its sustainability - but rather of pushing the boundaries of curiosity, of going further, or elsewhere, of exploring new territories. At Millésima, qualifications are not the be-all-end-all, but rather a desire for something new, an ability to surprise and to step out of your comfort zone.

A long-time employee in the company often shares this story: when planes started to get bigger, with bigger wings and a larger wingspan, they had to find a way to get them close to the airport terminal. Lots of engineers worked on the issue. To no avail. Then one of them came up with the idea of bringing the airport terminal closer to the planes. And so the air bridge, or jetway, was invented.

That's how we see innovation at Millésima: rethinking the system, looking at things from a different perspective. Staying one step ahead.

Day to day

Taking a chance on the future day to day means:

... Patrick Bernard poured all his resources into the 1984 vintage in 1985, it wasn't a very good year and sold for too much money, but it enabled him to secure allocations for the 1985 and 1986 vintages, which proved to be excellent....

... In 1993, he decided to sell not only Bordeaux, but also Burgundy and Champagne, and he succeeded in doing so in 1995 whilst getting on the wrong side of all the Bordeaux producers!

... Crossing French borders without leaving Bordeaux, by recruiting bilingual and multicultural advisers as early as 1992 to sell to customers outside of France.

... Continuing to expand the range by investing in new wine-growing regions: Italy, Spain...

... Believing that Facebook could generate sales and bring in new customers.

... Trying out Instagram, the «Facebook of tomorrow».



Download Our Values