



FÉDÉRATION DES  
**TONNELIERS**  
DE FRANCE











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## THE STRENGTH OF **KNOW-HOW**

**France is known all over the world for its culture, good taste and sophistication.**

This lifestyle has given the world so many famous wines that French coopers have built up a wealth of expertise over the years.

Because they have forged such close ties with generations of winemakers, their barrels are now unquestionably the very best, proof of the trust placed in them, to enable exceptional wines over the world to give their best and achieve excellence.





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## AN AGE-OLD **ALLIANCE**

Proud of being the guardians of such unique skill, the French coopers assert this strength.

They have come together naturally throughout their history. Traces of the first corporations of Master Coopers and Compagnons du Devoir (an organisation of craftsmen and artisans) were seen as early as the 9th century.

The growing interest in new barrels for ageing wine, which began in the early 1970s, was a turning point in their profession. On the basis of this undisputed expertise, they became the exclusive suppliers of the most prestigious wine houses, in France and abroad - a privilege that strengthened their ties yet further. A new era began for their national federation.

Today it includes some fifty companies grouped into three regional unions active in the field and always close to their members.



## A FEDERATION IN **ACTION**

The Federation of French Coopers is organised in commissions (regulatory, social, technical, training and communication) to work on adapting an ancestral profession to the actual world.

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**Its aim:** provide collective solutions to the needs of all its members.

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**It works mainly on:**

- ▶ monitoring regulations and the economy,
- ▶ changes in labour laws,
- ▶ good technical practices and product safety,
- ▶ transmission of the cooepage know-how by specific training,
- ▶ development and promotion of the profession towards wine world and the general public.





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## MEN AND WOMEN OF **PASSION**

**Coopering is a profession in its own right.**

Coopers are sensitive to the forests and experts in oak. They work closely with the oenologists who choose to age their wines in the noblest way, patient and loyal, keen epicureans of wine wherever it is produced.

Spread mainly in the three major wine producing areas, Burgundy, Charente and Aquitaine, French Coopers make up their small world of **2,000 people**, driven by the same love of their job.

They are proud to belong to a long line of demanding artisans and enlightened business people, often handing down their vocation from one generation to the next.





## SUCCESSFULL COMPANIES

From the smallest business to listed companies, the members of the French Coopers Federation are mainly small enterprises, with a large majority of family-owned businesses.

- ▶ A third of these cooperage companies employs about 5 people.
- ▶ The half employs on average 25 people.
- ▶ A few have about 150 employees.
- ▶ One company employs 300 people.



Altogether, the members of the french federation<sup>1</sup> account for about **€400 million in anual sales**, with a production of over **600,000 barrels a year**. French coopers export around 65% of their production. From Chile to China, from South Africa to New Zealand, producers of high quality wines throughout the world elect to age their wines in barrels made in France. The main markets are the United States, Italy, Spain and Australia.

It is the only activity in the french wood industry with a positive export balance. It also plays an essential role with its leading position in its activity, in the international wine world.

<sup>1</sup> - For the annual figures, see our website [www.tonneliersdefrance.fr](http://www.tonneliersdefrance.fr)





## THE KEYS TO KNOWLEDGE

Located in the heart of the vineyards and close to the cooperages, three schools<sup>2</sup> pass on the knowledge of the master coopers in France. They prepare students for the cooperage diploma in a system of work-integrated learning.

- **In Burgundy**, the Compagnons du Devoir and du Tour de France, part of the vocational training centre and agricultural promotion in Beaune
- **In Cognac**, the campus of the Cognac producers co-managed by the training centre and the Chambre de Métiers et de l'Artisanat de la Charente (CMA 16)
- **In Bordeaux**, the Centre de Formation Professionnelle et de Promotion de la Gironde in Bordeaux-Blanquefort

In addition to this basic training, each company passes on its knowledge, values and spirit in situ.

And because cooperage is a profession requiring constant adaptation, the Federation supports a number of further training modules to update skills.

<sup>2</sup> - For contact details of training centres, see our website [www.tonneliersdefrance.fr](http://www.tonneliersdefrance.fr)












A vertical photograph of a forest. In the foreground, there is a field of tall, golden-brown grasses and some green foliage. The background is a dense forest of tall, slender trees with green leaves. A soft, hazy light, possibly from fog or mist, fills the air between the trees, creating a dreamy atmosphere. The lighting is soft and diffused, with some highlights on the grass and leaves.

« The greatest worker in nature is time. »

***Buffon***







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## NOBLE MATERIAL

The pedunculate oak (*Quercus robur*) and sessile oak are used mainly, for the nobless they bring to wines and spirits.

This raw material - 200 years old, rare and sought after, of extremely high quality, is taken from the finest forests.

The wood is given to the “mérandier” who handsplits and cuts it into staves using an ancestral technique that ensures a strength and a waterproof barrel.

The cooper stacks these staves so that they can age slowly. They are left in the open air exposed to the elements, where they dry and mature evenly over several seasons. All the water is eliminated, and with it the strongest tannins.

Wood is a living material and its quality and type of maturation will impact and modify the wine they are in contact with.





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## AN EVOLVING TRADITION

Today, barrels are made in much the same way as they have always been.

Precision is essential. However, new technology has arrived in the workshops: coopering barrels is an eternal dialogue between traditional, modern and innovative methods.

The staves are hollowed out, cut to size, curved and jointed.

They are then assembled into the barrel shape, using hoops.

Then comes the toasting and its crucial stages: bending and 'bousinage'. Fire and water permit to fix the form of the staves and release or transform the aromatic components of the wood, which will later add to the complexity of the wine.

The barrel is nearly finished. Once heads fit into the crozes the barrel is ready for waterproof test.

The cooper ensures all the finishings and can then put his signature.

Barrels come in many shapes and sizes, and go under a variety of different names: barriques bordelaises, pièces bourguignonnes, tonneaux or foudres. But whatever the shape or capacity, they are made using these traditional steps.







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## A VARIETY OF **SIGNATURES**

It is first and foremost thanks to their links with the vineyards, and with France's most prestigious producers and oenologists, that the French Coopers have developed their skills. They made a point of honour of experimenting a lot to raise the ageing of the wine towards perfection.

The vocation of a good barrel is to release the full potential of a grape variety and terroir. And yet this shared expertise hides as many signatures as master coopers. Barrels are made using the same steps, but each cooperage has its own specific methods and techniques that make all the difference when you come to taste the wine.

The choice of forest and the grain of the wood are the first step to make one master cooper distinct from another. The chosen method, time and place of maturing are also distinctive, as they affect the humidity of the staves, the elimination of undesirable elements and the necessary improvement of the tannins.

The toasting stage also plays a vital role in the complexity the barrel can add to the wine. Depending on the intensity and duration of the heating process, the components of the oak can be altered in a different way.

All these parameters act on the quality of the barrel's aromas and tannins, which in turn affect the taste and quality of the wine.







A photograph of a wine cellar. In the foreground and middle ground, several large wooden wine barrels are stacked. The barrels have metal hoops and some have markings like '6C09'. The ceiling is made of rough, textured stone with a small light fixture. The floor is covered in gravel or small stones.

## AN HARMONIOUS AGEING

The selection and maturation of the wood, and the type of toasting method therefore make up the discreet imprint that the barrel will leave on the wine, with the consent of the oenologist or cellar master.

During ageing, the wine gets richer thanks to the tannins and other components in the oak. Its aromas develop, its structure changes. It becomes rounder, longer and deeper. Through the staves of the barrel operates the carefully-controlled redox reactions that improve the wine's ageing capacity.

This gentle process lasts several months, at the end of which the alliance between wood and wine finally reveal an harmony, an infinite variety of nuances and a subtle balance.

This is then an happy marriage ! The promise of something exceptional.

A WEALTH OF SENSATIONS AND PERCEPTIONS

FINESSE • ELEGANCE • NOBLE

RICHNESS LENGTH • POLISHED • GENEROUS  
PINEAPPLE • DELICATE • OPULENT

SILKY • MELTING • VANILLA • TOASTY

PAIRING • SYMBIOSIS • CHERRY  
AROMATIC • WOODY • LEATHER HARMONY

SANDALWOOD • ROUNDNESS • CEDAR •  
S W E E T N E S S TOASTED • COFFEE • ROASTED  
FRESH • RAISIN SEC • CACAO

C O M P L E X I T Y

BURNT • COCONUT • CINNAMON

CANDIED FRUITS • BUTTERY  
BALSAMIC • PEPPERY • TEA FRESHNESS

STRUCTURE CARAMEL • SMOKY • CHOCOLATE  
LIQUORICE • MOCHA • CHICORY

FRUITY • TEXTURE • FENNEL • ALMOND • CLOVE

BRIOCHE • CREAM • FLORAL  
TOBACCO • HAZELNUT • SPICE BALANCE











**Photo credits:**

*Christian Bon, Serge Chapuis, Michel Joly, Stéphane Klein.*

*Tonnelleries Billon, Dargaud-Jaeglé, Mercurey, Millet, Rousseau, Seguin-Moreau.*

*Domaine Drouhin-Laroze.*



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