

## Philippe Dandurand, at the forefront of wine import in Canada



Within the framework of our tribute to wine-producing personalities responsible for the ever-increasing popularity of wine in Quebec, from the sixties, seventies and eighties until now, here is the first one that launches this new category on [SamyRabbat.com](http://SamyRabbat.com).

When, at the age of 23, I began my career in the field of wines and spirits, I worked for the Désautels agency, headed by the late Robert Perron. I was given the territories of Montreal East, Laval and the Laurentides. Back then, on the Laval and Laurentides territory, I was already constantly hearing the names of my two competitors, i.e. Philippe Dandurand and Gaston Godin. No matter the restaurant or the hotel that I was visiting, I got to know them through professionals of that time who accepted to teach me their working methods.

I thus learned that Philippe Dandurand was working afternoons and evenings, since he was living in Saint-Sauveur and almost had full control of ski slopes on weekends. He then intended to help people discover the virtues of Grand Marnier. Back then, he represented wines, such as Mouton and Duboeuf.

Of all the personalities in the field of wineries who crossed my path during my career, I can say that I learned a lesson from each of them.

From **Danielle Champoux**, of the Désautels agency, I learned how important it is to thank each and every one that I meet on my path.

From **Gaston Godin**, whom I had the privilege to know through the Meaghers Distillery, I learned how to begin my day with the furthest destination of my daily program.

As for **Philippe Dandurand**, he taught me his firmness, the discipline of his visits and his audacity as he never feared confronting his problems.

The world of wine is made up of thousands of links and we form a long chain of passionate individuals dedicated to the cause of this fermented grape juice!

It is during a SAQ strike that lasted six months that I decided to work for another wine agency. I then found myself with the Durand wine and spirits agency, a branch of the Meaghers Distillery. The latter was then managed by the late **André**

**Girouard**, to whom I owe a major part of my commercial training in the wine sector, except that I still had the famous Philippe Dandurand in my way.

At that time, it was very easy to speak with SAQ managers. We simply had to pick up the phone and to schedule a meeting. During the seventies, we were still having Cinzano during dinner. There were very few wine agencies and private imports were extremely rare. Private labels were popular, but so cumbersome to implement for customers.

One day, destiny put me in front of the famous Philippe Dandurand, face to face in a Spanish restaurant, where we were the only customers at lunch time and he invited me to take a seat at his table. Wow, I considered this was such a privilege to have this sacred monster sitting in front of me, he who was running the show on all territories. Once the meal ended, he offered me to work for his company. I was truly delighted, but I refused immediately, and he was surprised. I told him that we had the same problem, that is being highly demanding with ourselves, but especially with others.

Philippe Dandurand was everywhere, on the road, in AQA VBS meetings and, believe me, we never got bored with this very colourful person who never hesitated to fight on the front lines when he saw injustice. He also taught me to adapt very quickly should a major crisis occur at SAQ. And each time, I said to myself: *“Impressive, he has just taunted us once again with his class and his audacity!”*. When a rumour concerning him came to his ears, he personally called other wine agencies and asked who this gossip was coming from.

He created his agency under the name Sogexport Export, together with five associates, whose shares he later bought back. He worked as a sales representative and director and little by little, he created a rather interesting portfolio and a whole team of representatives who didn't have time to twiddle their thumbs, especially with such a demanding boss. He took evening classes at the HEC after work and did his classes in the field.

### **In the Field, the Rough Way**

He didn't rise in the field by magic. When he was young, that is between 24 and 30 years old, he managed a wood office furniture and metal locker company for schools, including fireproof material. He travelled throughout Canada and the United States, taking part in furniture shows. One day, during a demonstration to a group of important buyers from New York, he demonstrated a desk and noticed that drawers would not open despite what he had just mentioned to these people. In other words, the desk that was in perfect condition when it left the Montreal plant, no longer had all the specifications that he had promised. Upon returning to Montreal, he asked the director to make the trip from Montreal to New York with the truck driver. The director was surprised, since he had never seen such a request. He accepted, and the young Philippe Dandurand dressed accordingly and left for New York with said shipment.

Once at the loading deck in New York, he called a behemoth who took the furniture cases and threw them bluntly from the truck. His study had just ended at his American distributor's deck and he returned Montreal by plane. He described what he had seen, and they then did some tests by packaging furniture inside padded cases that they let fall from a height of some ten feet to ensure that they had the best possible packaging on the market. Guess what happened next. He was given all orders from then on. Once more, experience in the field is better than theory.

According to my sources, my character's inspiration came from Napoleon's and other celebrities' stories and biographies of which he remembered only qualities and weaknesses.

To find out if his customers were selling his wine bottles, he looked in their garbage cans early in the morning.

In the eighties, I tried unsuccessfully to stake out a place in well-known establishments, such as Thursday's, Friday's, Les Crocodiles and the Hôtel de la Montagne who were lords and masters in terms of wine. I ended up understanding the Americans' quotation according to which “If you can't beat them, join them or confuse them”. Just as a quick story, when Bernard Ragueneau, the restaurant emperor in downtown Montreal, got married in Senneville, I was invited together with his friends and restaurant owners from Montreal. I was sitting near Philippe Dandurand at the head table. From then on, I was legitimized and accepted in the industry. Thirty years later, Philippe Dandurand was made Chevalier du Mérite Agricole de la France at the guests' head table as the same time as me.

Philippe had his first job with Vins Leroy (Burgundy and Beaujolais), that were supplied by Duboeuf for the Beaujolais. Georges Dubœuf then introduced him to one of his friends in Bordeaux who was working for Mouton Rothschild (Mouton Cadet) The Rothschild family then recommended him to Robert Mondavi hoping that he would settle in Ontario and

generate interest with their friend Eduardo Chadwick for Errazuriz in Quebec and Ontario. When Rothschild insisted, he also introduced Sieur D'Arques Première bulle... which shows that relations in the field did bear fruit, but especially that he surrounded himself with fascinating and highly talented professionals both in Quebec and in Canada.

From what I remember about him, he could jump aboard an airplane without prior notice to settle a conflict with his suppliers, no matter where on the wine planet, to deal with the matter in person.

Here is an idea of businesses represented by his national agency that he led to the top in Canada in the field of bottled wine import in their countries of origin (4 million cases):

<b>AFRIQUE DU SUD</b> Kwv Rupert & Rothschild	<b>WASHINGTON</b> Charles & Charles Chateau Ste. Michelle	<b>ITALIE</b> Bolla Castello Monaci Donini Ferrari Folonari Fontanafredda Frescobaldi Lamberti Melini Re Manfredi Tenuta Rapitalà	<b>FRANCE</b> Abbotts & Delaunay Baron Edmond De Rothschild Canard-Duchêne Chapoutier Château Bellevue La Forêt Château Du Grand Caumont Château Sainte Roseline Dourthe Georges Duboeuf Georges Vigouroux Joseph Drouhin Kressmann L'epayrié La Belle Angèle Les Jamelles Marius Pâtisserie Du Vin Pfaff Shatter Sieur D'arques Taittinger
<b>ARGENTINE</b> Clos De Los Siete Diamandes Trapiche	<b>CALIFORNIE</b> Bandit Fancy Pants Folie À Deux Fre Wines Jargon Joel Gott Ménage À Trois Montevina Napa Cellars Newman's Own Seaglass Stag's Leap Sutter Home Sycamore Lane The Show Trinity Oaks Zinfatuation	<b>OREGON</b> Domaine Drouhin	
<b>CHILI</b> 1865 Cabo De Hornos Castillo De Molina Cousiño Macul Epica Errazuriz Gato Negro San Pedro	<b>ESPAGNE</b> Luis Cañas Pago De Cirsus Rolland & Galarretta Torres Villa Conchi Williams & Humbert	<b>PORTUGAL</b> Aveleda José Maria Da Fonseca	
<b>AUSTRALIE</b> Chapoutier Australie Château Tanunda Peter Lehmann Yellow Tail			
<b>NOUVELLE-ZÉLANDE</b> Villa Maria			

His tenacity in helping mindsets evolve for over 40 years has led the SAQ and licence holders, but especially consumer habits to change.

Although semi-retired, Philippe Dandurand got involved in a few foundations to rattle their cage... I feel sorry for them!!!

During our interview, I asked him what message he wanted to send the industry and here it is to our great delight:

*"The Canadian market is evolving deeply and quickly. Changes are probably the quickest and the deepest since I came in this industry over 50 years ago. In the midst of market dynamics, consumer taste, the electronic market, new potential competitors, etc., we must review our organizations, our structures, and even our mission in order to face changes that occur now and those that are awaiting us."*

## LINKS

[Vins Philippe Dandurand](#)

[L'histoire du pot beaujolais](#)

[Les différentes chroniques sur les Vins Philippe Dandurand](#)

Samy Rabbat