vinetur

Frédéric Panaïotis, renowned cellar master of Maison Ruinart, dies at 60

Champagne industry mourns a visionary leader known for innovation, mentorship, and commitment to sustainability in winemaking

Wednesday, June 18, 2025



Frédéric Panaïotis, cellar master of Maison Ruinart, died on June 15 at the age of 60. His passing marks a significant loss for the Champagne industry, where he was widely recognized for his expertise and dedication. Panaïotis joined Ruinart in 2007 and led the house's winemaking and blending efforts for nearly two decades. He was known for his thoughtful approach and willingness to share his knowledge with colleagues and members of the wine trade.

Born in 1964, Panaïotis grew up in the Champagne region of France. As a child, he often helped his grandparents harvest Chardonnay grapes, an experience that would later influence his work at Ruinart. He pursued formal studies in viticulture and oenology at the Institut National Agronomique Paris-Grignon and earned a National Diploma in Oenology from the École Nationale Supérieure Agronomique de Montpellier in 1988.

After completing his education, Panaïotis gained experience working in both France and California. In 1991, he joined the Comité Interprofessionnel du Vin de Champagne (CIVC), where he contributed to research and development for the region's wines. He later worked with Veuve Clicquot before moving to Maison Ruinart.

At Ruinart, Panaïotis was responsible for blending all cuvées, including non-vintage wines and prestige labels such as Dom Ruinart and Dom Ruinart Rosé. He played a key role in shaping the style of Ruinart's Champagnes, with a particular focus on Chardonnay. Under his leadership, the house introduced several initiatives aimed at sustainability. These included adopting vitiforestry practices—integrating trees into vineyards to promote biodiversity and soil health—and reintroducing cork aging for Dom Ruinart Champagnes.

Panaïotis also established an historical oenothèque at Ruinart, preserving older vintages for study and appreciation. He oversaw the launch of Ruinart Blanc Singulier, a cuvée created to reflect changes in climate through the expression of Chardonnay grapes.

Frédéric Dufour, president of Maison Ruinart, described Panaïotis as a unique personality who combined scientific rigor with deep sensitivity. Dufour said that Panaïotis embodied the values of Ruinart and that his vision would continue to

influence the house for years to come.

Panaïotis was respected not only for his technical skill but also for his humility and generosity with his time. Many in the wine industry remember him as a mentor who was always willing to offer advice or share insights about Champagne production.

His death comes as a shock to colleagues and friends across the global wine community. Tributes have poured in from winemakers, sommeliers, and industry professionals who credit Panaïotis with advancing both the quality of Champagne and sustainable practices in viticulture.

Maison Ruinart has not yet announced plans for succession or memorial events. The company is expected to honor Panaïotis’s legacy by continuing many of the projects he initiated during his tenure. His influence on Champagne production and commitment to environmental stewardship are likely to be felt for many years within both Ruinart and the broader wine world.