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French Winemaker Jailed for Large-Scale Counterfeit Champagne Scheme

Didier Chopin sentenced in Reims as authorities intensify efforts to protect industry integrity and consumer trust in Champagne

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French winemaker Didier Chopin has been sentenced to 18 months in prison, with an additional 30 months suspended, after being found guilty of selling counterfeit Champagne. The verdict was delivered by a court in Reims on Tuesday, September 2.

Chopin, who operated through his holding company SAS Chopin, was accused of passing off hundreds of thousands of bottles of carbonated still wine from Spain and France as genuine Champagne. The prosecution described the operation as a “cynical and premeditated scam” that deceived large numbers of customers and resulted in fraud estimated at several million euros.

The court heard that Chopin added artificial aromas and carbonation to still wines to mimic the taste and appearance of authentic Champagne. The fraudulent activity came to light in 2023 when employees at SAS Chopin discovered the deception. Following the revelation, Chopin fled France for Morocco, where he attempted to start a vegetable farming business. He was later arrested in Morocco on unrelated charges involving bounced checks and spent seven months in jail there.

During the trial, Chopin’s lawyer argued that his client’s time in Moroccan prison under harsh conditions should be taken into account and requested a suspended sentence. However, the court imposed a firm prison term and issued several additional penalties. Chopin is now permanently banned from running any company and is prohibited from working in the Champagne industry for at least five years. Both Chopin and his wife were fined €10,000 each, while SAS Chopin received a €300,000 fine for embezzlement and misuse of company assets. The couple must also pay damages to the Comité Champagne trade association and several wine buyers affected by the fraud.

Chopin’s wife received a two-year suspended prison sentence for her role in the scheme, which included fraud and unauthorized use of a protected brand name. Speaking briefly to reporters outside the courtroom, Chopin said, “I made a mistake, I am ruined and I have nothing else to add.” The second part of the trial, which will address customs violations related to the export of fake Champagne, is scheduled for February 3, 2026.

The case comes amid increased efforts by authorities in the Champagne region to combat crime within the industry. In July, three individuals were jailed for human trafficking after exploiting more than 50 seasonal workers during the grape harvest. The victims were housed in poor sanitary conditions that endangered their health and safety. Following that ruling, the Comité Champagne emphasized its commitment to

protecting both workers’ welfare and the reputation of the Champagne appellation.

The crackdown on fraudulent practices reflects growing concern among producers and regulators about maintaining quality standards and consumer trust in one of France’s most prestigious wine regions.