



Wine Royalty

REIGNING BRITISH CRITIC JANCIS ROBINSON, A WINE ADVISER TO THE QUEEN, HAS INFLUENCED WORLD OPINION FOR ALMOST 40 YEARS. HERE, SHE TALKS ABOUT THE PAST, THE FUTURE AND THE SURPRISING HEALTH OF HER HARDWORKING LIVER.

INTERVIEW BY RAY ISLE

Q. You've mentioned that a glass of 1959 Chambolle-Musigny "lit the flame" for you in terms of wine. When did you have it?

A. It was when I was reading Maths and Philosophy at Oxford. I had a boyfriend whose father gave him a very generous allowance, some of which was spent on taking me out to eat. We shared this seminal bottle of Burgundy at a restaurant called Rose Revived, which still exists.

Q. You've had a long career. What have been some of the most significant changes in wine since you started in the mid-1970s?

A. Are you calling me a dinosaur?! If I tell you that when I started writing about wine, everyone was mad for white in general, especially a rare grape variety called Chardonnay, you

GRAPE VARIETIES PROFILED
IN ROBINSON'S MONUMENTAL
BOOK *WINE GRAPES*:

1,368

AMONG THE MOST OBSCURE:

**Agdam Gyzyly Uzumu,
from Azerbaijan**

will get some idea of how long I have been in this business. The red wine boom is an obvious change of direction from the mid-'70s, as is the trend I am now witnessing in most of the wine world, where both producers and consumers are tiring of very concentrated, alcoholic wines and are looking for more freshness and wines that are shaped more by the vineyard than by what happened

ROBINSON: COURTESY OF CHARLIE BIBBY/DECANTER

in the winery. I've seen people fall in and then out of love with oak. Another very significant change has been the shift in interest away from a handful of international grape varieties toward indigenous varieties—great for biodiversity. Then there are the very noticeable effects of climate change, and the increased awareness of the importance of sustainability.

NUMBER OF WINES ROBINSON
TASTES IN A YEAR:

about
10,000

Q. Looking to the future, are there any regions that haven't quite gotten their act together yet that you see as potentially exciting?

A. I'd bet that Mexican wine will be much better known in 10 years, and also the wines of Cyprus and Crete. And, of course, China will be making decent and much more varied stuff.

Q. China's predicted to become the world's biggest producer of wine grapes in a few years. Will that affect wine in the UK or the US?

A. I suspect most Chinese wine will stay in China—after all, there are millions of consumers who haven't ever tasted wine, and yet wine has a more glamorous image there than in practically any other nation. Compare and contrast that with how the average French person views wine: as an old man's drink.

Q. And what about the whole natural-wine movement: Is it a good thing or a bad thing?

A. Is there even a short answer to that question? I'm relaxed about it, but save me from zealots—especially Parisian sommelier zealots.

Q. Do you think there are under-\$20 wines that can age well in a cellar?

A. I'd say a few red Côtes du Rhône and some Spanish old-vine Garnachas. And, of course, some of the world's cheaper Rieslings—the odd dry one from Clare Valley in Australia, and some from Germany's under-celebrated producers.

Q. Your husband, Nick Lander, is the restaurant critic for the *Financial Times*. What did you drink on your first date?

A. Our first date was in 1980, when he was importing some not-very-good California wines into the UK. I can't remember what we drank or who chose it. I was much more interested in him than in the wine list.

Q. I've heard you have a secret way to deal with the risks of drinking too much wine.

A. Yes, milk thistle. It's a plant extract that is supposed to help your liver process toxins, and it's been part of my life for many years. My co-author of *Wine Grapes*, Dr. José Vouillamoz, specializes in medicinal plants in his day job, and he recently attended a conference by a world expert on the topic. Professor Hostettmann from the University of Geneva said that milk thistle was the best liver-protecting—or liver-boosting—plant available, and that he takes it himself before serious dinners. I had an ultrasound the other day and asked particularly about the state of my liver. I was told it was in great shape! Nick found this hard to believe.

7 favorite wines

**2012 LYRARAKIS
ARMI THRAPSATHIRI
CRETE (\$16)**

"A recuperated grape variety. This is a full-bodied white from an impossibly high, rocky vineyard on a far eastern Mediterranean island."

**2011 SALOMON
UNDHOF KÖGL
RIESLING (\$29)**

"The king of white grapes has to put in an appearance, and the 2011s at this popular estate, 222 years old this year, are particularly alluring. This Riesling is ripe but not flabby."

**2004 R. LÓPEZ DE
HEREDIA VIÑA
GRAVONIA CRIANZA
RIOJA BLANCO (\$34)**

"One can only marvel at the combination of price and vintage in this classic, barrel-aged white Rioja."

**2012 YALUMBA
OLD BUSH VINE
GRENACHE (\$19)**

"It's proof of the rehabilitation of Grenache, from one of the great old family companies that have kept Australia going through thick and thin."

**2010 CLOS OUVERT
PRIMAVERA RED
BLEND (\$20)**

"This is from old vines on a small vineyard in a southern region of Chile that was until recently scorned by the mainstream. It's a light red blend of four varieties, including Cinsault and Mission."

**2013 JULIEN SUNIER
FLEURIE (\$32)**

"Beaujolais deserves a comeback, and the 2013s are seriously worthy of attention. And this one will age; no hurry to drink this Burgundian red by a young winemaker from Dijon."

**2010 CORISON NAPA
VALLEY CABERNET
SAUVIGNON (\$80)**

"Cathy Corison is my heroine. She makes such great wine—the essence of Napa Valley minus the bludgeoning force, plus a sensible price tag. And I love the 2010s."