Julia Harding MW - a brand new asset

28 Dec 2005 by JR

I'm delighted to announce that I have with great pleasure broken a long-established habit and taken on a fulltime assistant. Seven years ago Julia Harding, a professional book editor who had recently got the wine bug, came to see me and said she would be interested in working for me. I laughed and said that I was such a control freak that I doubted very much that I would ever be able to delegate anything of any interest to anyone. (I had once had a temporary secretary but had to let her go as we spent all our time gossiping instead of achieving anything.)

Meanwhile Julia, already equipped with a Cambridge degree in Modern Languages and a French accent indistinguishable from the real thing, continued to work her way through the Wine & Spirit Education Trust courses. So when OUP said they wanted to publish a Concise version of the second edition of *The Oxford Companion to Wine* in 2001, Julia with her impeccably precise editing background seemed the ideal person to do it. She did the most amazing job of squishing this vast book by two-thirds, so that I can honestly say that the *Concise Wine Companion* is better copy-edited than the original work. You wouldn't believe the sort of questions she asks and things she spots.

She did so well in the WSET Diploma exam that Britain's leading multiple wine retailer Waitrose offered her a placement and then a fulltime job in their wine department from 2001. She got first-hand experience of wine selection and retailing here and from late in 2003 began to work part-time on the third edition of *The Oxford Companion to Wine*, taking special responsibility for updating all the entries on oenology and viticulture – a job she was particularly well qualified for since she had just passed the increasingly challenging Master of Wine exams, gloriously, at the first attempt.

Having started the MW in jan 02, she passed the exams in jun 03 winning the Robert Mondavi Award for best theory papers and by oct 04 had qualified as a fully fledged Master of Wine, being awarded the Tim Derouet Memorial Prize (top award) for excellence in all parts of the exam and dissertation.

She has just returned from a much-needed break in South America after copy editing the entire *OCW3* (to be published in oct 06), although her itinerary didn't look very relaxed to me. And she told me that up against the final deadline she had managed seven hours' sleep in one 60-hour period.

She sounds like a terrible swot (sound familiar?) but she is actually much happier tasting and travelling than poring over proofs and manuscripts – which is a shame since my aim in having an assistant at last is to do more tasting and travelling myself (well, I could hardly do more tasting, but at least more travelling). I shall have to ensure that she continues her exposure to the practical as well as the theoretical side of wine.

In practical terms we will be working out exactly what her role on this site will be but I sincerely hope that, as well as helping me on my books, she will add enormously to the content and form of www.jancisrobinson.com - which could certainly benefit from an eagle-eyed editor. I feel very privileged to have such a high-powered assistant whose recent immersion in the rigours of the MW exam, so much more scientifically demanding than it was when I did it in 1984, should be particularly useful.