

## Jancis Robinson - the long version

29 Aug 2008 by Jancis Robinson

Jancis on her life in wine...

After a virtually wine-free childhood and teenage years in a village of 40 people in northern Cumbria just south of the Scottish border, I was introduced to wine at Oxford where I read Maths & Philosophy while being delightfully exposed to fine food and wine for the first time. I had long been fascinated by food so it was a very short step to fall in love with wine – something that happened over a glass of Chambolle Musigny, Les Amoureuses 1955. But at that time the subjects of food and wine were regarded as inordinately frivolous so I spent three years in the travel business, as a graduate trainee with Britain's biggest holiday company. A blinding aversion sent me off on a year in Provence, surrounded by vineyards and people to whom eating and drinking were indeed what life was all about. On my return to London I was determined to find a job in either food or wine.

My wine writing career began on 1 Dec 1975, virtually pre-history as far as modern wine is concerned, when I started as assistant editor of the British wine trade magazine Wine & Spirit. Since then I've been lucky enough to travel all over the world of wine (which nowadays includes Asia - a continent I never thought back in the 1970s that wine would help me explore) learning that our expanding wine world is inhabited by some of the most colourful and interesting characters that ever walked the earth.

Perhaps more important is the fact that what the producers, which were almost purely domestic, fascinating and heartbreakingly worthy, is nowadays far more reliably delicious than I ever saw. When I started out, it was remarkable if a wine smelt clean and not of sulphur or any other stinky. Today, hardly any wines are technically faulty (even though an awful lot of them are dull).

There's a lot to be said about price and value as they relate to wine. I don't believe there is an absolute correlation between which price and quality. There are many delicious wines that don't cost a great deal, while there are hundreds of exceptional bottles carrying price tags that have been compared out of the air to some highly overvalued or wrong ones.

Should only by any chance want to know in even more detail about how I got from being someone who couldn't taste but somehow managed that way on to a wine trade magazine to writing a subtitle with subscribers from more than 80 countries, you could plough your way through my autobiographical memoir known as Tasting Pleasure in the US and Confessions of a Wine Lover everywhere else.

For the brief version of my bio, see [this](#). For a longer summary see the bottom of this section, or choose one of the following options below: [wax](#), [prolific author](#), the [grazing mainenance](#), [non-bimbo breadwinner](#), [well-rounded person](#), [warm and cuddly human being with an unusual name](#).

...and

1987 - Honorary Doctorate of The Open University, a great British institution founded by the Labour government in 1971 whereby people of all ages and conditions can study for a university degree. At the ceremony at which I was awarded the honour of being able to call myself Dr Robinson, there were scores of graduates with various disabilities and one who was collecting his degree on his 80th birthday.

1988 onwards - I got hooked in to the Oxford University Press book factory to edit the first (and second and third) Oxford Companion to Wine an honour for me and for wine. I led, to follow in the distinguished path pioneered by the late Sir Paul Harvey and the first ever Oxford Companion, The Oxford Companion to English Literature published in 1928.

1984 - took (and, more amazingly, passed) the Master of Wine exams, becoming the first non-wine trade person to earn the letters MW after their name. There are now over 200 MW's worldwide and exams are held each year in London, the US and Australia. This flexibility official qualification involves almost a week of exams, both theoretical and practical (as blind tasting). One day I'll explain why on earth I subjected myself to this ordeal - though I think being pregnant helped rather than hindered, as whereas my doing especially well in the tasting papers. For more information on the Institute of Masters of Wine (IMW) see [www.institute-of-mw.com](#)

1975-78 - I rapidly ran to the of the wine trade exams organized by the Wine & Spirit Education Trust. This outfit is based in London but is now the world's dominant wine educator. I joked at the time there'd probably be a question in the final, Certificate exam: 'Vignobolus is a) red, b) white or c) rose' and there was in fact one that went 'Vignobolus is a) French, b) Spanish or c) Italian'. The WSET seems to be in a state of constant change but it does cover the ground in a very professional way, and their courses always include tasting as well as more and instruction.

1987-91 - Maths and Philosophy at St Anne's College, Oxford. I was one of the first three undergraduates ever to tackle the strange new into science hybrid.

1981-83 - Curlews and Country High School for Girls. Head girl, following in reverent Margaret Foster's footsteps.

...prolific author

I am never quite sure how many books I have written. The first once happened, as everything else in my career, by accident. A book package read an article about me in The Guardian and asked me to do a synopsis of an introduction to wine for him. Once I'd done it, he said his bosses disapproved of alcohol. Unwilling to waste the effort, I showed it to a friend in publishing who introduced me to the literary agent Candice King of AP Wine (of whom I am one of the oldest authors) who promptly sold it back to my friend.

Here's a list of the books I can remember, most recent first with those currently in print in bold. See also books & DVDs and How to find old wine books.

American Wine (2012 Michael Beasley/University of California Press) with Linda Murray

Wine Doctor - A complete guide to 1,300 wine varieties, including their origins and flavours (2012 Allen Lane/Corgi) with Julia Harding and José Vouillamier

The Coactive World Atlas of Wine (2010 Michael Beasley) with Hugh Johnson

How to Taste/How to Taste Wine (new edn Nov 2008, Simon & Schuster/Coronet Octopus)

The World Atlas of Wine (9th edn 2007, Michael Beasley and, subsequently, many other publishers around the world) with Hugh Johnson

The Oxford Companion to Wine (2nd edn 2006, OUP and, subsequently, several other publishers) editor

Jancis Robinson's Wine Course (2nd edn 2003, BBC Books and Abbeville Press)





