Introducing Alex

21 Feb 2012 by Jancis Robinson

We are delighted to announce a new monthly columnist at JancisRobinson.com. Alex Hunt MW may already be known to some of you for his trenchant contributions to our Members' forum, or as an admired taster on the London circuit.

I first met him in the late 1990s in my capacity as a judge of the Oxbridge wine tasting match when he was one of the liveliest members, and captain, of the Oxford University tasting team and extremely stimulating company at the post-match lunch. He was studying philosophy and psychology at Oxford and earned a bit of pocket money driving a van for Oddbins, then the go-to employer for intelligent young wine lovers.

He was so interesting, positively fizzing with ideas on the arts and how our brains and palates work, that I must say I was rather horrified to see him next in a pinstripe suit working in the very conventional wine trade. In 2000, after graduating with a first-class degree, he joined Mayfair Cellars, somehow managing to straddle both sales and buying roles. Things came badly unstuck for Mayfair (see here; nothing to do with Alex) and in 2006 he moved to Berkmann Wine Cellars, the company founded by Joseph Berkmann, the veteran restaurateur, wine writer and wine merchant about whom I must write one of these days. Until last year Alex was in sole charge of all the buying for this substantial wine supplier but he recently recruited an assistant, after extensive blind tasting tests of applicants.

He was of course an obvious candidate for the Master of Wine exams and in 2004 whizzed through them at a lick, being awarded the top prize for tasting, the Madame Bollinger medal. But he encountered some difficulties with his dissertation and it was not until 2010 that he could call himself an MW, having ditched his original and intriguing thesis about the philosophy of wine criticism in favour of one about rising alcohol levels in California which could more easily be shoehorned into the very particular matrix required by the examiners. (You can read about Richard Hemming's travails on the same path here. Alex, by coincidence, is currently Richard's mentor for the tasting half of the exam. Richard reports being cheered by Alex's advice to adopt a zen attitude to the art of tasting.)

Alex has contributed articles to *Decanter*, *World of Fine Wine* and *The Drinks Business*, and is a valued wine judge, with experience ranging from the arch-rivals Decanter World Wine Awards and International Wine Challenge in London to South Africa's Old Mutual Trophy Wine Show. His non-vinous interests include cooking, film and, especially, music – listening, performing and producing. He performs in an indie band, with my colleague Tim Atkin's stepbrother as it happens, and was, for example, roped in as musical director of the 2010 wine-trade pantomime Vinderella, composing a song that I couldn't get out of my head for weeks.

We are delighted to have Alex as a regular monthly contributor to add to Alder Yarrow and his provocative column Alder on America, which is generally published in the middle of each month. We plan to publish Alex's column at the end of each month and will be hyper-alert to any possible conflicts of interest with his day job. Since Alder's February article was published a little early, Alex's first column will appear tomorrow.