

Wine of Queens and Queen of Wines – How diversity will conquer Champagne

By Lucy Edwards

There are not enough women in the wine industry. That is FACT.

In 2020 only 27% of wineries in France are run by women. This certainly has increased since my birth year (the horrible vintage of 1987) [when there were less than 14%](#), but it highlights the fact that it's an industry that with not achieve parity any time soon.

As a woman working in the champagne business for the last 10 years, I have seen my fair share of sexism. Men offering to buy my wine in exchange for sexual favours, men with less experience being promoted before me, or male buyers telling me that my female palate was irrelevant (despite the fact that women are twice as likely to be super-tasters than men. [FACT.](#))

The unbalanced situation has been brought to light once more this month with the recent allegations made against the Court of [Master Sommeliers](#). Proving yet again, that it is much harder for women to achieve excellence in this field than men.

I recently was fortunate enough to sit down with a group of women who are making change in the most traditional wine region in the world: Champagne.

[La Transmission](#) is a group of extra-ordinary women from all over the region who have banded together to make a difference. Their aim is to represent the diversity of the region, not only through their gender, but also through the work that they do everyday with the “wine of Kings, and the King of wines”.

The group was initiated by [Maggie Henriquez](#), first female president of powerhouse Krug, and [Anne Malassagne](#) fourth generation owner of illustrious boutique house AR Lenoble. Together they gathered seven other trailblazers from the four corners of Champagne to represent the new face of Champagne: one that includes women.

[Evelyne Boizel](#) was the youngest of two children, and her father had clearly passed on the knowledge of the house to her elder brother. When her father passed away suddenly just as she was finishing her degree, she dropped everything to take on the challenge of running the family house alongside her brother, and passing on the heritage to future generations. The house now produces over half a million bottles and exports all over the world.

[Delphine Cazal's](#) dream was to be a doctor for Doctors Without Borders. When her father passed away, she came back to Le Mesnil sur Oger, where she diligently ran the small house. Despite her sudden change of career, with very little time she fell in love with the land, and the art of making wine and now makes one of the most exciting single vineyard cuvee from Clos Cazals (one of the 32 registered clos in Champagne). Watch this space.

[Vitalie Taittinger](#) had no intention of joining the family business. She enrolled in the Paris School of Fine Arts and upon graduating started working in graphic arts. It's only when she saw her father tirelessly fighting to buy the family house back from Starwood Hotel group in 2006 that she realised the importance of “transmission”. Although she now wanted to work for the family business, her father and the board were not willing to hire someone “with just an arts degree” (I'm sure many will recognise themselves here). She offered to work as a contractor for over a year until they realised that she was indispensable to the house.

As [Melanie Tarlant](#) said “We were not necessarily invited into the positions we are in now. We were not the ones given the silver spoon when we were born. We had to create our positions”.

And we must continue creating these positions, not just for ourselves, but for the future generation of young women.

No one knows this better than [Chantal Gonet](#), who went to L'Ecole Polytechnique Feminine back when the greatest engineering minds of France were separated by gender (not that long ago mind you). Although she had never seen managing the family vines as a preferred career choice, after working in Miami and Singapore she returned to Grand Cru village of Le Mesnil sur Oger. She was instrumental in transitioning the vineyard to organic viticulture and obtaining the HVE certification as well as many other initiatives ensuring the transmission of a healthier vineyard to the next generation.

According to [Charline Drappier](#), the youngest member of La Transmission and eith generation of the Drappier House, we need to encourage young women to join the ranks of the industry and feel completely at home in this male dominated field. This is done by regular interventions in universities and training facilities.

On the program of La Transmission for the next years are a myriad of tastings and courses with the aim of sharing these ladies' knowledge with the next generation of bright young women.

What I see as one of the most important missions of La Transmission, (and the other all female association [Les Fa'bulleuses](#)), is creating the new face of Champagne. One in which women are present and represented in equal proportion.

One in which young women can see themselves building career.

One in which female students can recognise a true career path that will take them to new heights.

For too long we have seen men take over generation after generation, leaving little room for women to make their mark on the industry.

These women who are running and building small or big houses may be the first to take on the challenge. But in the words of the first female VP of the USA, they must not be the last.

Although being represented at 50% in the wineries of France may be far off, to move towards parity we need to apply [Alice Paillard](#)'s motto:

“To trace your route straight and far, hook your carriage to the stars.”

So let's make champagne the Wine of Queens and the Queen of Wines. Because who says the Queen is less important than the King?