

## Inside Feature The Historic Hunter Valley

Page 4  
insight on the history  
of Australia's  
celebrated wine  
region

by J. Herbert Silverman

## EDUCATORS TRAINING PROGRAM! See page 11

## Individual Highlights:

- French Wine Explorers 3
- Vinardino 2003 6
- Beer - From Lagers to Ales 8
- A View on Vodkas 9
- South American Wine Guide 9
- Events Listings 3/8
- Job Opportunities 7/10

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## International Sommelier Guild

### Merry Widows of Mousse

By Natalie MacLean

They were all young women whose families owned the great champagne houses at the turn of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. When they lost their husbands to war or illness, they did not do what was expected: step aside or sell the business. Nor did they marry again (though they were still in their twenties and thirties), handing over the reins to a new husband. Instead, these celebrated veuves, or widows, took control of their châteaux to produce some of the most prestigious wines in the world - wines that still bear their names: Veuve Clicquot, Pommery, Laurent-Perrier, Roederer and Bollinger.

In an era when few women were in business at all, these women headed what were, at the time, some of France's largest companies. Using bold, unconventional strategies such as direct marketing campaigns and exporting to unproven markets, each of them more than doubled production during their tenure.

Why did these women step up, rather than aside? It certainly wasn't because of material needs, most came from wealthy families, and selling the business would have provided a comfortable income for the rest of their lives. Nor did they take on the business as a surrogate for frustrated maternal affection: all but one had young children when their husbands died. What they had in common was a desire to honour both the memory of their husbands and their families, who had made wine for generations. And so they carried on that tradition to deal with their grief and to pass the family legacy on to their own children. Their brood-in-the-bone work ethic would not allow them to just sit and knit dolls for the rest of their lives. Instead, they seized the opportunity to fulfill an aspect of themselves that otherwise would have been neglected.

Probably the most famous woman of this group was Barbe-Nicole Clicquot Ponsardin, of Veuve Clicquot. Her husband died of a malignant fever in 1805, when Madame Clicquot was 27, leaving her with the business and an eight-year-old daughter. But she was not one to wring her hands: only weeks after the funeral, she arranged for the shipment of 25,000 bottles to Russia - an extraordinary feat, given the uncertainty of trade during the Napoleonic wars. Her shipment made it through, and years later, her champagne was so popular in Russia that Pushkin, Gogol and Chekhov all wrote about it. Later, in 1814, when the Russians invaded her hometown of Reims and raided her cellars, she said, "Let them drink. They'll pay for it later."

Madame Clicquot wasn't just a saleswoman; she also developed the technique called riddage or riddling, to remove sediment from the wine - a method that was quickly adopted throughout the Champagne region. The second fermentation in the bottle that gives champagne its carbon dioxide also creates sediment, which gives the wine an unsightly cloudy appearance.

To clarify it, Madame Clicquot drilled holes in her kitchen table and inserted the bottles upside down. The sediment gradually collected in the necks, where it was disgorged while still upside down, then the bottles were righted and re-corked.

## Touring the Vineyards of France - An Indispensable Experience for the Professional Sommelier

Possessing a solid knowledge of the vineyards and wines of France is a necessity for any professional sommelier. Most sommeliers learn about French wine by studying books on the subject, and of course, by tasting as many different wines as possible. But there is no better way to gain your knowledge of French wine than by traveling to France. Seeing the layout of the vineyards and meeting the passionate men and women who make some of the world's best and most famous wines is an indispensable experience that every professional sommelier should have.

French Wine Explorers ("FWE"), an American tour company specializing in wine and culinary tours of France, offers many exciting opportunities for professional sommeliers and students wishing to deepen their knowledge of French wine. FWE's 2004 schedule includes tours to all the major French wine regions, including Bordeaux, Burgundy, Champagne, the Rhône Valley, Provence and the Loire Valley. Private, customized study tours can be put together for groups of 4 or more people in any region or combination of regions.

All tours are accompanied by a wine professional working in the French wine business. Some are certified sommeliers with extensive restaurant experience; others are enologists or négociants; and many are professional wine educators. Their first-hand knowledge and experience give FWE guests an insider's view into the complex and rich world of French wine.

On an FWE trip, you'll visit the best and most famous estates of the region(s) you choose. From Classified Growths, like Châteaux Margaux or Latour to "boutique" wineries like Couliée de Serrant or Domaine de Trévalon, you'll have extensive tours with complete technical explanations, often accompanied by the cellarmaster, estate director or owner. Tastings are also extensive, often from the barrel, or with verticals of older vintages.

Guests on FWE tours are always pleasantly surprised by the warm welcome they receive from French winemakers. The experience of any FWE trip, be it a scheduled or a private tour, is always in-depth, personalized and geared toward the serious wine enthusiast or wine professional.

The splendid meals offer further opportunities for exploration, as you sample expertly prepared dishes matched with more great wines. On private tours, FWE can also arrange meetings with top sommeliers like Philippe Faure-Brac, Best Sommelier in the World 1992, including special meals and seminars on wine service and wine/food pairing. Cooking classes can also be arranged on private tours.

### Among the highlights of the 2004 season:

- Bordeaux Prestige Program** June 1-5, 2004: including tastings at all five First Growth châteaux, Château Petrus, Château d'Yquem & Château Cheval Blanc
- Best of Bordeaux** April 4-10 and Aug. 30-Sept. 5, 2004: including the finest Grand Cru estates of the Médoc, the Right Bank, Sauternes and Graves
- Burgundy and Champagne** May 24-30, 2004: a weeklong exploration of the Côte d'Or's finest estates and Champagne's most famous producers;
- Northern and Southern Rhône** June 7-13, 2004: featuring tastings at the best estates of Côte Rôtie, Condrieu, Châteauneuf-du-Pape and more, ending in a black-tie dinner dance with the winemakers of Châteauneuf-du-Pape.

## Upcoming Events

**IFOWS: 1<sup>st</sup> India Food & Wine Show**  
New Delhi, India  
January 8 - 10, 2004  
Ph: 0091-124-563-793  
<http://www.ifowss.com>

**9<sup>th</sup> Annual Niagara Icewine Festival** (see pg 8)  
January 16 - 25, 2004  
<http://www.niagarawinefestival.com>

**13<sup>th</sup> Annual Zinfandel Advocates & Producers Tasting**  
San Francisco, CA  
January 24-2004  
Ph: 530 274-4900  
<http://www.zinfandel.org>

**Loire Wine Fair**  
Paris des Expositions, Angers  
February 2 - 4, 2004  
(33) (0) 41 93 48 48  
<http://www.silviondesvalleesloire.com/>

**Prowein 2004**  
Düsseldorf, Germany  
February 29 - March 2  
Ph: +31 20 785 5100  
<http://www.mdna.com/>

**Taste of New Zealand Wine Fair**  
Sydney, Australia  
March 2 - 3, 2004  
(02) 4448-5161

## International Sommelier Guild

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Beginning in 2005, French Wine Explorers will also offer a French Wine Certification Program on selected dates, which can also be arranged as a private program for groups. These intensive two to four week (40-80 hour) programs will be offered in English in the Southern Rhône Valley near Avignon. Included will be in-depth study of the French wine regions and their wines, familiarization with French wine legislation and labeling practices, understanding the concept of terroir, professional-level tours of wineries, meetings with French sommeliers, and more. Participants will be tested at the end of their program, and those who pass will receive a certificate.



Guests tasting with the Baroness' personal Sommelier at Chateau Mouton Rothschild



Barrel tasting at Domaine Reboursaux, Burgundy

For more information about our programs, email us at [info@wine-tours-france.com](mailto:info@wine-tours-france.com) or call toll free 1-877-261-1500. More information is available on the French Wine Explorers web site <http://wine-tours-france.com/>

## Australia's Historic Hunter Valley

By J. Herbert Silverman

Australian wine imports to the U. S. continue to boom and while corporate names like Hardy, Jacob's Creek and Leouwin continue to make headlines, how many in the world are familiar with the colorful history of the Aussie wine industry? Unlike the great vineyards of France, Germany and Spain that were established by clerical orders in the Middle Ages, the Australian winemaking industry in New South Wales owes its origins to an unlikely mix of early colonists.

One of the first pioneers was an English aristocrat, George Wyndham. He arrived in the verdant Hunter Valley to plant his vineyards after walking the 150 miles from Sydney in 1827 to stake his claim. Today, the F3 Freeway (i.e. National Highway 1) running north from New South Wales' capital city to Cessnock lets modern day travelers duplicate the Wyndham trip in about two hours. This booming vineyard area is Australia's newest tourist destination, complete with luxury inns and gourmet restaurants.

Of the more than 120 wineries and cellar doors around Cessnock in the Pokolbin area, most have excellent cellar tasting facilities. There's also a fine choice of antique shops, craft galleries, orchid farms, even champagne hot air balloon flights. It's just a short drive to the soaring eucalyptus forests of the Watagan Mountains.

In the first years of the New South Wales Colony following Wyndham's lead, arrivals to the "Hunter" were a mixed bag.