

THING OF BEAUTY | RICHARD LORD

Women of wine

Encyclopaedia The Oxford Companion to Wine, edited by masters of wine Jancis Robinson and Julia Harding, is the definitive guide to the world of wine. Hong Kong-based Korean-American wine expert Jeannie Cho Lee, who in 2008 became the first Asian master of wine, explains how it changed her life.



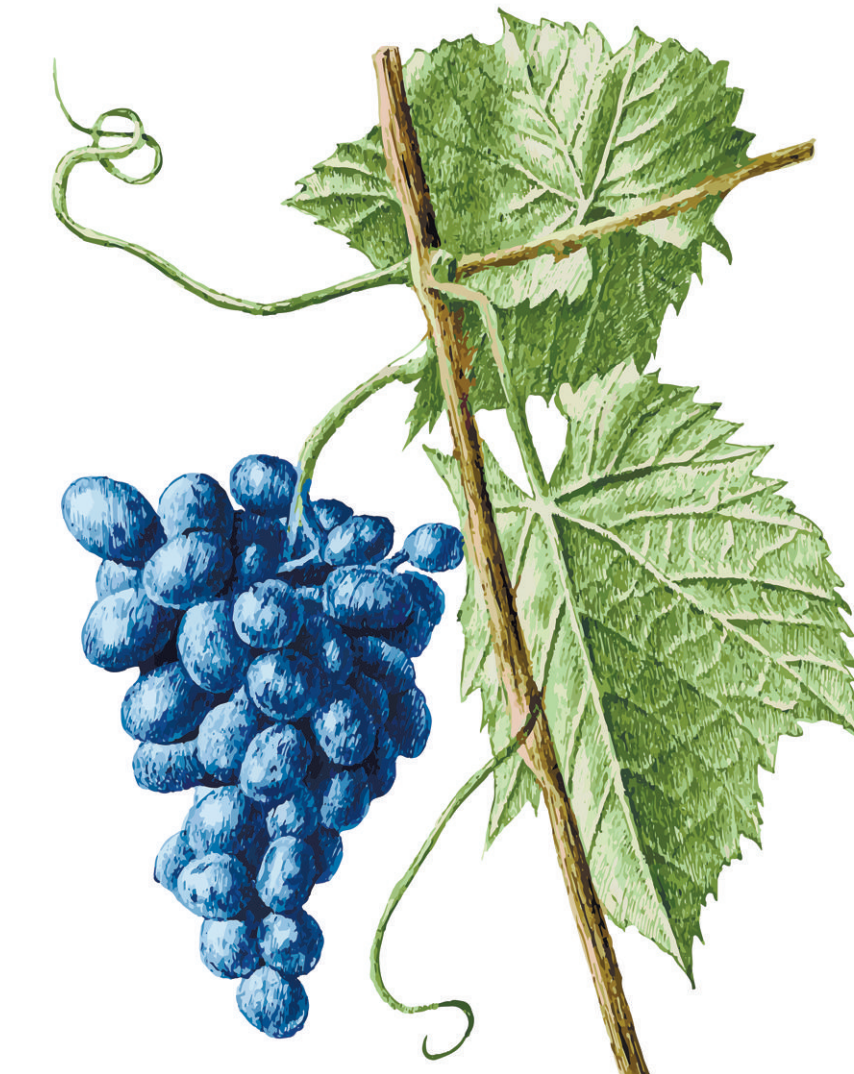
Jeannie Cho Lee

Jancis Robinson started editing *The Oxford Companion to Wine* with the first edition, in 1994 (the fourth and most recent edition was published in 2015). Everyone who studies wine seriously has it – it’s our go-to resource for everything “wine”. It has a reputation for reliability and accuracy.

I finished my WSET (Wine & Spirit Education Trust) diploma in 1998. My parents were living in New York and I was in Hong Kong. I had two kids and I took them to visit their grandparents, at a time when Jancis had come to New York to launch the second edition.

I had never met her – actually, I’d never met a master of wine. A friend was wine committee activities director for the Harvard Club of New York City and was organising a launch event for Jancis. He said to me: “I have a budget for taking her out after her talk – would you like to join?” I thought it would be a big group but it was just the three of us.

I had tons of questions for her. She was so down to earth and dedicated but had a wonderful work-life balance. When she studied to be a master of wine, she was pregnant with her youngest daughter. Her



story inspired me. She asked if I was going to do the master of wine and said she’d sign my application – you needed someone senior in the industry to sponsor you. She also gave me a signed copy of the second edition.

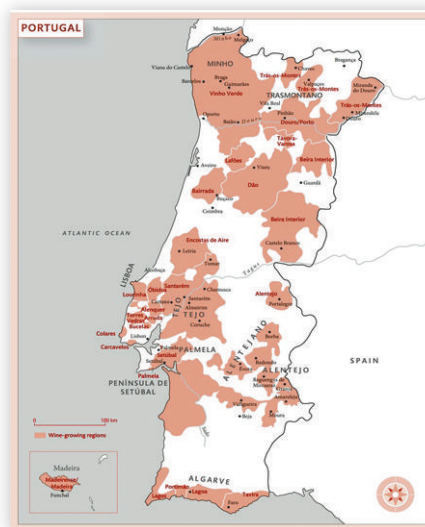
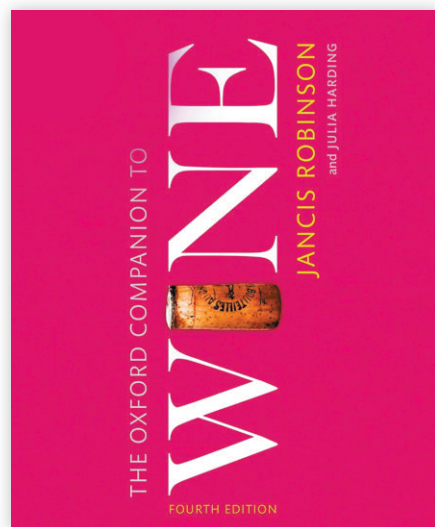
Wine writing was something I was doing on the side for fun. When she told me to apply for my master of wine, I went away and studied. In 2001, after two years of going through *The Oxford Companion to Wine*, I decided to apply.

Jancis is so kind. Whenever I went to

London for tasting sessions, she would ask me to stay with her. She is a special person and she has a very supportive family. She was an inspiration: I loved that she could be erudite and up to date, and have a wonderful, rich personal, social and family life.

I passed my exams in 2007 and became a master of wine in 2008. By then my second edition was absolutely unusable: I had written on it and folded it, and the binding had come apart. I’ve since got the third and fourth editions. I still consult it.

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Picture: Jonathan Wong

The Oxford Companion to Wine is her “go-to resource”, says Jeannie Cho Lee, and wine critic Jancis Robinson (right) is “an inspiration”.