

Ep 78: Wine Writing and Sparkling wine with Jess Lamb (Part 1)



Janina Doyle 00:00:07 Welcome to Eat Sleep Wine Repeat, a podcast for all you wine lovers, who, if you're like me, just can not get enough of the good stuff. I'm Janina Doyle, your host, Brand Ambassador, Wine Educator, and Sommelier. So, stick with me as we dive deeper into this ever evolving, wonderful world of wine and wherever you are listening to this, cheers to you!

Hello and welcome back to the first episode of 2022. Happy New Year to you all. Now I don't know if anyone's set any new year's resolutions. Now last year, I did say I was going to try and flow like water. Anyone who actually really knows me would know I still had a fair few tantrums, but I was better than the year before. So this year inspired by a Tony Robbins documentary. I just saw on Netflix, which I totally advise you all to go and watch. He said something that resonated with me, which was: Life happens for you, not to you. And as I record this currently from Mexico, this specific statement has helped me a lot. As many of you may realize things don't always go to plan when you're this side of the world. So anyone still searching for a new year's resolution of course, drink less, but drink better, always a good one, but you are more than welcome to take this one on board as well. Now, moving on to today's episode, I am chatting with the absolutely fantastic Jess lamb, a friend of mine and fantastic wine writer. So we're going to be talking about her journey into writing about wine and her taking the Wine Spirit Education Trust Diploma, specifically the sparkling wine exam. So the WSET is not just for the industry, even at the highest level, the diploma, anyone can take it. So hopefully this episode might inspire some of you that might be thinking about taking your wine education further, or for those of you taking your diploma right now, perhaps this episode may act as a extra help or support for your sparkling wine exams and equally, I just want to bring to you all different wine jobs and different opportunities that you can have if you are thinking about getting into the wine industry. So why not writing? So may I wish you all a Feliz Año Nuevo desde Mexico, and let's go over to the chat with Jess.

Janina Doyle 00:02:48 Jess, thank you so much for joining me. Um, how are you today?

Jess Lamb 00:02:52 Thank you for having me. Yes, I'm very well, thank you. We've just offline had a little conversation about getting ready to go away, various places and all the chaos that brings. So I'm sitting in my office amongst piles of bottles. I've got suitcases. I've got many, many dog toys scattered around on the floor. She can't decide what she wants to take.

Janina Doyle 00:03:19 This is the funny thing I'm so glad that we record this without a video, because just like you said the same, to be honest, just to put on my desk, the laptop and the recording equipment and the wines that we have for today, I literally have had to put everything just all on the floor. It is disgusting. I'm, I'm a disgusting human.

Jess Lamb 00:03:36 Yes. I am with you on that. 110%.

Janina Doyle 00:03:39 I'm so glad we're disgusting together, but right, we are not here to discuss our own personal habits and how we need to improve in life. We're here to talk about wine and the love that we have for wine. So of course, very boring, classic, but, uh, I'm hoping, um, an interesting answer will come from it. How did you get into the world of wine, Jess?

Jess Lamb 00:04:03 Okay. So I think I have to apologize to anybody that I've told this story to before. Because it's not the first time.

Janina Doyle 00:04:11 Oh well. It will be for many of our listeners, so it's fine.

Jess Lamb 00:04:14 Um, I fell for wine, I think when I was working in New Zealand. So I did a degree in English literature actually, and always thought that I would be a writer or something to do with, you know, words and media. And then actually I ended up taking a graduate job with an agricultural company and spent about five years working primarily with dairy cows, which, um, amongst other things involves quite a lot of looking at poo, quite a lot of looking at grass and things of that nature. And because there are a lot of dairy cows in New Zealand and there's a few, there are more animals there of all varieties than people.

Janina Doyle 00:05:04 I did not know that.

Jess Lamb 00:05:07 Oh god yeah. I think there's three sheep for every person in New Zealand or something crazy like that.

Janina Doyle 00:05:12 I mean that whole dairy industry has helped the world of wine, right. With the dairy production, stainless steel tanks and everything and yeah.

Jess Lamb 00:05:19 Yeah, absolutely. And really, really meticulous hygiene standards. So a lot of agriculture land that was converted into vineyards by farmers was all set up and ready to go because they had these amazing clean, sparkly, shiny facilities. So it was all very natural really. So, so yeah, so I was, um, down in New Zealand spending a lot of time with Hairy Kiwi farmers in strings vests. And I was really struck by the fact that you could spend your days with these people wandering around and looking at cows and having all these very agri discussions. But then in the evening they would take you out for dinner and you would have, you know, Central Otago Pinot Noir or, you know, a lovely Chardonnay, from Hawkes Bay or something like that. And they would talk really sensitively about them. And it just really struck me that these kind of rough and tumble men were just suddenly very sensitive and very proud and very interested in all the flavors and aromas in these lovely wines. And it kind of piqued my interest. And I think as somebody whose wine experience up until that point had very much involved Lambrini at Uni.

Janina Doyle 00:06:37 Sophisticated, I see.

Jess Lamb 00:06:40 Absolutely, you know, you'd mix it with juice. Yeah. If you were feeling really, really fancy, maybe you would stretch to a 10 pound bottle of Prosecco if it was a special occasion.

Janina Doyle 00:06:53 Going crazy. Yes. Yes.

Jess Lamb 00:06:55 But it was really interesting. Especially as someone who comes from a family who aren't really big drinkers. And so my experience of wine had been really quite limited up until that point, but it just kind of piqued my interest. And then a couple of years later, I was working as an

international sales manager for an interiors company and spending a lot of time in the states and got a bit burnt out. I thought, actually, no, I'm going to go back to writing. I'm gonna quit my job. No plans. I didn't really have any kind of backup. I didn't really have any kind of solid plan. I just quit, which is not a strategy that I recommend.

Janina Doyle 00:07:38 Tip number one. Don't do what Jess does.

Jess Lamb 00:07:39 Don't quit without a plan.

Janina Doyle 00:07:42 Well it's all worked out alright for you.

Jess Lamb 00:07:43 Well it has very, very luckily, but I am not willing to give that advice to everybody else just in case, because it's very risky.

Janina Doyle 00:07:54 Kids don't try this at home.

Jess Lamb 00:07:55 Yea, kids don't quit. So, yeah. And so I started writing and I was doing all kinds of bits and pieces really, and ended up getting into a contract to write some blog posts for a small merchant in the Southwest somewhere and thought, okay, this is pretty cool. I'm writing about wine, which is very interesting. I'm writing, which is the thing that I wanted to do in the first place. And it kind of started to click into place. And then, yeah, and then I just started to fire out emails to every kind of wine publication that I could think of. And I mean, in hindsight, I had no knowledge of the wine industry. And so my prospecting emails to the editor of Decanter for example, were probably a little bit optimistic.

Janina Doyle 00:08:46 I don't know, naivety works sometimes.

Jess Lamb 00:08:49 Well not in this case, Decanter call me, please.

Janina Doyle 00:08:55 Still waiting.

Jess Lamb 00:08:55 Still waiting five years later. And I was supported by a really lovely lady called Helena Nicklin, who is part of the Three Drinkers on Amazon now. Yeah lovely Helena. And she gave me my first proper commissions and really supported me and helped me into the industry. And then it grew from there really. And now I'm five years in and I've somehow through a combination of just sheer blind luck and a bit of hard work. I've managed to create a career, which I still on a daily basis can't really believe.

Janina Doyle 00:09:37 And you doing what you love. So at the moment you're working at Chelsea vintners, right?

Jess Lamb 00:09:41 Yes, I am. So I had planned always to remain freelance and just focus on writing, but then unfortunately, I don't know if you heard, but we had a minor global pandemic problem.

Janina Doyle 00:09:53 Oh did we? Oh do you know what? I must have been sleeping through that. Was it bad?

Jess Lamb 00:10:06 I mean it wasn't great. I've had better years. And it turns out that unfortunately freelance wine writers aren't really essential workers for most places.

Janina Doyle 00:10:14 I think you're essential. You are essential to us, but okay. So a little bit more difficult.

Jess Lamb 00:10:22 Yes. So essentially I had actually, weirdly been on a press trip to New Zealand, uh, with, with NZ wine growers. And I got back to the UK about four days before we went into the full lockdown time, the first time. And within that two weeks on returning from New Zealand, I lost every single freelance commission that I had had. I lost all my work and it's not an understatement to say that I had absolutely nothing left.

Janina Doyle 00:10:53 Wow. Okay.

Jess Lamb 00:10:54 Which was not great, as I am sure you can imagine. Um, so I had a very relaxed kind of summer.

Janina Doyle 00:11:06 Drinking wine going, how am I going to pay for it all?

Jess Lamb 00:11:10 Yeah. How are we going to feed my dog?

Janina Doyle 00:11:12 How are you going to feed yourself young lady?

Jess Lamb 00:11:16 And so I thought, look, as much as the dream of being full-time freelance is a lovely one and I had managed to make it work for however long. I kind of thought, you know, something's got to change here. So I had a few conversations with a few people and actually my now boss at Chelsea Vintners got in touch with me through Twitter and said, would you be interested in having a chat? We're not necessarily hiring, but we've read what you write. And we like what you do. And you know, let's see if there's a fit. And so that will seem to go really well. And they offered me a job, which was such a relief. I can't even tell you.

Janina Doyle 00:11:57 You are like, money. Anything.

Jess Lamb 00:12:01 And so I now work for CB four days a week as their business development manager, which basically means that I manage all the kind of marketing activity, which is good because in my previous work life, I'd done a marketing diploma as well. And I'd worked a lot in marketing, and I just love qualifications. I just love exams.

Janina Doyle 00:12:26 Yeah I don't.

Jess Lamb 00:12:27 And yeah, so it was nice to kind of go back to those skills. And I look after, you know, partnerships in hospitality and events and all those kinds of things, which is great. And CV are very interesting because there are very, very fine wine broker. So it's not a merchant sets up, it's buying and selling very, very premium wines for high-end clients, which is not a side of the industry that I've really had a huge amount of exposure to. And so, you know, whilst these definitely are wines that are in my budget or, you know, my everyday drinking, it's really, really interesting to have that view into that world of, you know, Romanée-Conti and vintage champagne and all the crazy expensive, crazy, fancy, fine wines of the world. So it's a nice balance between day job and you know, all the other things that I do on the side, it's two very different sides of the industry, which is quite fascinating actually.

Janina Doyle 00:13:32 So you say you kind of look after the, the marketing and the branding at Vintners, of these fine wines. How do you market the fine wine? What are you doing?

Jess Lamb 00:13:42 It's more marketing as a company rather than the wines. So the big selling point of CV is that they are a specialist in rare vintages, very mature vintages of sought after fine wines, things like that. So it's really for, you know, passionate collectors who want to build their cellars and want interesting things or, you know, anyone, anyone who wants to kind of build a bigger collection. So the marketing that I focus on is basically attracting new clients to the business who want us to find those wines for them. And yeah, and then also looking after the clients that we do have, and making sure that everybody feels loved and appreciated and all that kind of thing, which is obviously very important for,

Janina Doyle 00:14:34 Yeah, I see you being a very good love giver, that's it.

Jess Lamb 00:14:39 I like to think so.

Janina Doyle 00:14:40 Yeah. Well, when you're not giving all your love to your dog, but that's another podcast.

Jess Lamb 00:14:44 Yeah. Don't get, my boyfriend has some strong feelings about that. We won't go down that road.

Janina Doyle 00:14:48 Yes, I can imagine he's feeling very left out. So when you're not at Chelsea Vintners, you said you are obviously still doing some other articles. You do editing as well, which is fantastic. Where, where, where can people find, obviously you've got your blog. So that is jesslamb.co.uk. Isn't it?

Jess Lamb 00:15:03 Yes it is.

Janina Doyle 00:15:04 But where else are people going to find your work?

Jess Lamb 00:15:07 So the way that my life works is I worked for Chelsea Vintners four days a week. And then I have a free day, which is easier Friday, which actually I kept aside when I joined the business to study because I've just finished my WSET diploma.

Janina Doyle 00:15:25 Have you done the last one? Oh, fantastic. Yeah. I wasn't sure if you had done the last. Okay. Good.

Jess Lamb 00:15:31 Yeah. So as long as I pass it's over, which is lovely.

Janina Doyle 00:15:35 Still, fingers still closed.

Jess Lamb 00:15:37 Yeah. It's not a done deal yet, but I'm hoping it will be very soon. Um, so I've only just sat my final diploma exams in the last few weeks. So I'm now we're adjusting to having an extra work day with play with, and whilst in the run up to exams, I, wasn't doing a huge amount of freelance stuff. I'm now taking a few more bits on. So I do all kinds of really I've, I've helped a couple of wine startups with content for their websites quite recently. I've written a couple of articles for The Buyer quite recently. Yeah. So bits and pieces like that, really. So it's the full spectrum of words really, it's anything from research articles, to interviews to website content, media content, you know, as long as it's word based,

Janina Doyle 00:16:31 Why words? What is it that, when did you learn that that language had power?

Jess Lamb 00:16:37 Oh, that's a great question. I was one of those kids who just read and read and read when I was little. So, and we were quite remote in where we lived. And so a lot of the time you

couldn't go and see friends particularly regularly or anything like that. So I just used to, just a sad little child just reading by herself, but I just devoured books from a really young age and always loved it. And I think it, it's just the most natural thing in the world. I think it's just the way that my brain is wired. You know, some people really get science, some people really get maths and I just have always really got words and language and it just works for me on a very inherent subconscious level. That's hard to explain, but it just, it just, it just makes sense. And it's always been really easy for me to work with.

Janina Doyle 00:17:44 Ahh . Easy. So I was going to say for me, you know, I write, I do, I have a blog when I can get around to it and I try to write, but quite clearly speaking, is a greater skill for me, but I really struggle with writing. And so, I mean for you, is it just very easy to transmit your thoughts and put them on paper? Or do you have a system to get that down?

Jess Lamb 00:18:06 Um, I mean, going back to our earlier conversation about living habits, I would say that my approach is one off chaos.

Janina Doyle 00:18:17 So this is not really a tip for people.

Jess Lamb 00:18:20 No, don't do this. I mean, it sounds like a bit of a cop-out and it's quite a hard thing to elaborate on, but it just flows. And I mean, if I've got a title or if I've got something to do, I will do my research and I will do quite thorough research actually. That's one thing that I do focus on quite a lot. And once I've written my notes and once I've got all that in my head, I tend to sit in front of my laptop, staring at a blank piece of paper for about four, five minutes and then just whack it out.

Janina Doyle 00:18:53 Okay. Alright, well, so actually the tip for people, apart from the fact, is get good research. Number two is if it doesn't flow, find something else. Basically.

Jess Lamb 00:19:01 Absolutely. Absolutely. I think some people just love it and other people would just really find it a huge challenge. And I think, you know, writing should have real joy in it. And if it's not something that brings you joy, don't do it because I kind of, you can really feel how someone feels about what they're writing in their words.

Janina Doyle 00:19:21 Oh dear. I should probably stop them.

Jess Lamb 00:19:26 No, I actually love the things you write. I always read them.

Janina Doyle 00:19:29 Oh, you are so sweet. Liar. Do you believe in writer's block then. For you it flows. Do you believe in writers block?

Jess Lamb 00:19:39 Yeah, I think I do. I think that writer's block is something that is perhaps a little bit more relevant if you're writing fiction because there's so much more imagination and creation involved in that. And I think it's very easy to see how you can really get blocked if you're trying to elaborate on an idea or if you're trying to kind of bring something to life that's really not working, but I think, or I've always found that with nonfiction writing, with pieces that you can research and that you can, you know, find a really solid foundation before, before you even start writing. I think it's less of a thing. And you know, as long as you've got all the facts there and the information, you can always create something out of that because you've got the building blocks in your hands. So it might not be the thing that sets the world alight, but I think it's much easier to create something out of a thing that already exists.

Janina Doyle 00:20:41 Yeah. Yeah. And also get a good editor. My Mum does all my editing. She probably hates me. I'm like, Mum, I've sent you another article. She's like, oh, for God's sake. And then she corrects everything because I don't know. I never really picked up grammar very well in school, to be honest. I never know when to put the apostrophe. Is it before the S is it after the S, god damn it.

Jess Lamb 00:21:03 But it is so easy. And I mean, I am such a stickler for spelling and grammar and all those kinds of things, but even I never get it all right first time. And actually this is another piece of advice that is now coming out of my brain, is that whenever I finish something, I leave it for at least a day and just put it out of my mind and forget about it and then go back to it. Because it is incredible when you look at something that you've done with fresh eyes, how many mistakes you can see.

Janina Doyle 00:21:35 A few. A few. Right. So let's go on to WSET. Um, you, did you decide to do your WSET when you realized that you wanted to do wine writing, but actually in theory, there was not so much experience behind it. Did you want some, a piece of paper to showcase your knowledge of wine?

Jess Lamb 00:21:55 Yeah. Um, as I mentioned earlier, I am a massive fan of qualifications. Always have been. I just love it. Then I think for me, just for me as a person, it's important for me to have that validation. And particularly coming into wine as someone who didn't really know a huge amount about the nuts and bolts of it. I felt it was really important, especially when I started and I did my level two and my level three in quite quick succession. And it was just such a huge learning curve because it's quite, science-y a lot of the time. Yeah. There's a lot of geography and there's a lot of science and a lot of biology and all that kind of thing, which I'm not historically the most science-y person in the world. So it was very interesting to come back to something like that as an adult and really get into it and really enjoy it in a way that I just don't think you're emotionally able to do when you do things like GCSE.

Janina Doyle 00:23:05 For sure. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. And I mean, that's what I love about the wine world that I never really enjoyed geography, but now I can talk about mountain ranges and altitude and understand, I guess, photo synthesis so much more, you know, because I love the plants and I love the wine and therefore everything of the world kind of encompasses that. So, you know, I now know about wine regions or, or in fact capitals or cities or places that I never would have known about if it wasn't for the fact that there was a wine growing region, just next door.

Jess Lamb 00:23:38 Yeah, exactly. And I think it actually becomes a real pleasure to start understanding all those things in the context of something that you're really passionate about. And I just think one of the best things about wine, is that all the most beautiful, amazing places in the world to go to, pretty much are wine regions.

Janina Doyle 00:23:57 This is true. This is very true. So now tell me, we had a little chat about sparkling wine didn't we, because the sparkling wine exam you had was quite recent. Um, and I think that's kind of in your head and did you enjoy learning all about all the different sparkling wines?

Jess Lamb 00:24:13 I loved it. Sparkling wine is my jam.

Janina Doyle 00:24:20 Yeah, no, I think certainly sparkling wine could be my jam as well. It's a delicious, delicious style of wine of which there are many. So tell me, you know, for anyone taking their exam, um, what advice would you have for people studying the, all the different styles of sparkling wine?

Jess Lamb 00:24:40 I think one of the reasons that I enjoyed sparkling wine so much is because I find it, again in my head, it just kept, and I find it very easy, easy to taste all the different styles. I think that, so sparkling wine is defined by the production method and there are various different ways of making it, which were all quite singular and have their own unique characteristics. And I think that the styles of wine that they then result in are themselves very unique and very characteristic. And I just think it's a real pleasure to kind of learn about all those things. And in terms of the actual exam, especially at diploma, this, I don't want this to sound like a bit of a cop-out, but one of the, one of the great things about the sparkling wine module that you do, and also in fact, the fortified wine module as well, is that purely from the point of view of passing an exam, you are fortunate in that there are only so many wines that it can ever be, right? So as opposed to the big, still wines of the world exam, where it can be any still wine from any major wine growing region of the world, and it just completely blows your mind with sparkling and with fortified, realistically, there's probably, I don't know, six to eight key styles that you're likely to get. And so it's as much about a logical process of elimination and problem solving as it is anything else. And I don't know, that really resonated with me. And for some reason I just find it much, much easier to accurately taste and assess sparkling wine than I do any other style, which is probably a huge amount to do with the volume that I drink.

Janina Doyle 00:26:35 No, but I think you have a point don't you, because yes, you can't, especially with a traditional method sparkling wine, that can be a little bit more difficult to identify. But I remember from doing my exams, if it was more mineral lead's maybe a little bit chalkier, you might want to go to champagne. And of course now English sparkling wine. Yay. But if it's more ripe, rich fruit, you might want to go to Cap Classique in South Africa, or you might think of a California or something. And then if it was a course, a classic, slight rubber edge, it might be Cava. And then of course, if you're tasting something and it's really light and it's really floral and you don't notice any yeasty, bready, aromas, or flavors, it's going to be maybe Sekt, Asti or Prosecco. Right. So, I mean then of course maybe it might be a wine made with Riesling. And so it might be a bit smokier or, um, lanolin for Chenin. But I suppose actually when you work out that there's only a certain amount of different flavors you can pick up in sparklings and then you understand, as you said, the production method, you tend to be able to link them together. Right?

Jess Lamb 00:27:48 Yeah precisely. And I think that everything that you've just said is a perfect way of demonstrating the, what I'm trying to say, because it's that thing of every single style has something distinctive about it. So you just hit the nail on the head. So in my exam, I actually had a sparkling Shiraz.

Janina Doyle 00:28:05 Ah, that's interesting. Okay. That's actually really worth talking about, because I think when I say to people that you can get red sparkling and, or even sweeter Shiraz, sparkling, uh, people are like, what? So yeah. Okay. So you had a sparkling Shiraz. Yeah.

Jess Lamb 00:28:21 Sparkling Shiraz, which is a joy to have in a tasting exam because it could only ever, a red, it's just the best thing ever, because a red sparkling wine can only really be a sparkling Shiraz or, uh, an Italian Lambrusco and they're both quite different. And sparkling Shiraz has some real noticeable tannins. It tastes, smells, looks very much like an Australian Shiraz that's had bubbles put into it.

Janina Doyle 00:28:48 Yeah. Very dark and yeah. Purple-y Ruby red.

Jess Lamb 00:28:53 Yeah. Whereas Lambrusco is a bit lighter, a bit more nuanced and it's relatively easy to tell the two apart. So that was great. And then the second two, were a traditional methods, um, Vouvray, so Chenin Blanc. And then a Cava and exactly, as you just said, uh, Chenin was really quite leesy, had all the kind of texture and buttery, creaminess that you can get from a traditional method. But then also that lanolin, kind of sheeps wool character that Chenin is known for. And then with Cava because of the grapes that they use, it does often have this real smokiness, which was really detectable. So it's just that lovely distinction. And as I said, it's just something that really works in my brain. It's something that I find much easier to pick up than with other styles of wine, very often, which, which is great.

Janina Doyle 00:29:54 I'm going to point out to everybody listening. I've done several episodes on different styles of wines and I've actually literally listed them now down. So episode 74. So just a few episodes ago was actually on, with Lambrusco. Episode 51 is on Cap Classique. Episode 48 is Prosecco. Episode 42 Grower Champagne and Episode 27 Cava. So you can actually go and get far more detail on some of those episodes. But Jess I'm intrigued, what is your favorite style of sparkling? Do you have one?

Jess Lamb 00:30:27 Um, I am a real lover of traditional method wines, in all its forms., But you know, I love champagne. I think champagne is so much more often than what people perceive it to be. It's not just big from Grand Marque and those few very famous brands that we know and love. It's an incredibly nuanced, interesting subtle category if you drill down a bit into it, but then, you know, as we'll come onto that later, there are so many different interpretations of that style of wine making around the world. And you mentioned Cap Classique, which is your south African version, which I absolutely love.

Janina Doyle 00:31:09 And the value there.

Jess Lamb 00:31:10 Oh my God I know, Just incredible. And then you have, you know, the States, you have Australia, you have other areas of France, you know, Crémant is another incredibly interesting...

Janina Doyle 00:31:24 And good value.

Jess Lamb 00:31:25 Yeah absolutely. And I think I always love serving things like Crémant or Cap Classique to my friends who often aren't quite as well versed in all the different styles of sparkling. And it's really interesting to say to people actually, this has made in exactly the same way as champagne, often with the very same grapes, but this was 10.99 a bottle versus, you know, 30, 40, 50 quid. And I just love the reaction because people are always like, oh my God, this is incredible. I can't believe it.

Janina Doyle 00:31:58 Yes. If they feel like they've won. And yeah, that's so funny because I have a personal story. I was running, um, the Bromley wine society, which of course has been on pause. I pretended I didn't know what happened in the last year and a half, but I lied. I was totally here the whole time, and it was terrible. Anyway. So I put that on pause and it's still on pause, but my first ever Bromley wine society, my brother attended, great supporter. And he came with his wife and my brother is not really that into wine, the wife she is, but she doesn't necessarily know that much about things. And I served a bottle of Pongracz, which is a Cap Classique. And the bottle, the standard brut non vintage is 10 pound a bottle. And funny enough, you can get it on Amazon next day, delivery prime. Like that is amazing. Exactly. You don't even have to wait. So I served this, so I served this Pongracz and they both fell in love with it, to the point that they now, any celebration I come around their house and

there's bottles and bottles of Pongracz. She has a friend in Ireland, her best friend lives in Ireland and they can't get it. So she sends over bottles of Pongracz to her for her birthday. So it's become like, not just my family now is all like, oh my God, Pongracz Pongracz, then her family, and then her friends and her friends family. And it's just so wonderful, like from this one small moment of showcasing and incredible great value, traditional method sparkling and see how so many people's lives have been affected. See what we do, Jess, we bring joy.

Jess Lamb 00:33:32 And that is the joy of fizz.

Janina Doyle 00:33:37 Yes. Do you remember what questions you got in your sparkling wine exam?

Jess Lamb 00:33:42 Yes. I had a question on Asti production. And then I had one on the growing environment and the wines made in California.

Janina Doyle 00:33:54 Okay. Yeah.

Jess Lamb 00:33:55 Which was really interesting because there is a lot of really very good high quality traditional methods, sparkling wine made in certain areas of California. And then the final one was a more businessy question on how champagne producers can find best routes to market. Yeah. So, so quite often the examiners will work in a lot of wine business, and wine production and things, things like that. So it was an interesting, an interesting, slightly testing set of questions, but really interesting.

Janina Doyle 00:34:33 Well, I would say for everybody, and you mentioned about Asti and I haven't actually spoken about Asti and maybe I will go onto that at some point, but for everyone, I mean, this comes from Piedmonte up in the Northern part of Italy and it's such a fresh, soft style of sparkling and my personal favorite because it is made pretty much in the same way is Moscato d'asti. And I have one, I have one in my, I have one in my fridge right now, but because it does tend to have it's off dry to medium in terms of sweetness. It's not necessarily the most ideal sparkling just to pull out and drink for me. It's typically 5.5% alcohol.

Jess Lamb 00:35:14 Yeah. Well, I was about to say on the low alcohol, I was told a lovely story when I was learning about Asti, which was that because there's this quite a really low alcohol wine. Yeah. It's quite sweet. And it's also relatively low fizz. So it hasn't got those really sort of persistent, constant bubbles that you find in your champagne. It's more of a soft, a soft effervescence. And so a way that Italians really love to consume it, especially around Christmas is as the breakfast aperitif. Yeah, with Pantone.

Janina Doyle 00:35:47 Oh my God. That is so good for Christmas, everybody actually, to be honest, that is the one time when I believe in having lots of sugar in the morning, it's like, you can do that at Christmas time. Yeah. I can imagine. So for anybody, we say Moscato d'asti, so whether it be Asti or whether it be Moscato d'asti, it's made from the Muscat grape, and that's just such a beautiful floral peachy, aromatic style, grape variety. And it's tank fermented. So we mentioned like Sekt, Asti, Prosecco. It's always going to be the cleaner floral style of sparkling. It's not aged on the lees, so it doesn't have any of this, this bready nature. But it's tank fermented just like Prosecco. So the Charmat method, but it only has one fermentation. And that's why as well, it has that extra sugar sweetness in it. But it's definitely for anybody who wants to give it a go, I think you've hit the nail on the head Jess. Pantone.

Jess Lamb 00:36:46 Yeah. I think it's brilliant. I mean, I don't know if I'm allowed to make recommendations for specific wine. There is a fabulous company called the little fine wine company.

Janina Doyle 00:36:59 Ah, they do the smaller bottles, don't they.

Jess Lamb 00:37:01 Yes. They specialize in lovely half bottles of premium wines. And I can't remember what the brand is, but they only have one half bottle of Moscato d'asti listed on their website. It's about 10.95 for half a bottle, I think. And I have tasted it on a few occasions now and it is just delicious. And I think it's a great thing to order if you've never tried it before, if you, if you aren't sure that you're going to like it, just get half bottle, give it a test, see what you think, it's delicious.

Janina Doyle 00:37:33 Yeah. To be honest, I have never had anybody not enjoy a Moscato d'asti, and it's, it is something on a really sunny day. You could sit outside, uh, have a little bit of fruit on the table and just be knocking back these bottles of Moscato d'asti.

Jess Lamb 00:37:50 Oh easily.

Janina Doyle 00:37:52 Yeah. And just for anyone who says that maybe sweeter styles, they don't want, if you get classic Asti, Asti will actually be typically less sweet and higher alcohol. Whereas mosquito d'asti is lower alcohol, but higher in sweetness. So everyone go and explore that little region and that style because it is it's delicious, isn't it?

Jess Lamb 00:38:15 It is, it is lovely. And I think there's another really interesting point there that's just sprung into my mind when you mentioned sweetness, which is another thing that I always find intriguing about sparkling wine is that when we drink still, a lot of the time, people often are very specific about the fact that they'd like a dry wine, you know, dry Sauvignon Blanc or a dry Chardonnay, yet those same palates often drink a lot of Prosecco or favour Prosecco as their fizz of choice. And I always find it really interesting that people don't tend to realize that the sugar levels in Prosecco tend to sit anywhere from about 10 to 15 grams per liter. So they're actually off dry wines the majority of the time. But some of that sweetness is masked by the highest acidity, and by the bubbles themselves and makes it feel really refreshing. So actually you're drinking a wine that is much, much sweeter than you give it credit for.

Janina Doyle 00:39:09 Absolutely. And in fact, I always say this in many of these podcasts, have a look on the bottle. If you see Sec, which or in fact, sometimes they say English Dry. That doesn't actually mean dry, dry. In fact it has. Yeah, exactly. It's one of the wonderful wordings of the wine industry. And there will be more sugar in there than Brut. So everyone looked for Brut, if you want a much drier style, which you can get for Prosecco, but typically as you just said, the standard Prosecco is that you're going to buy between say 7 and 10 pounds, very often are the Sec aren't they, which has more sugar in there. So for people to know.

Janina Doyle 00:39:54 So that's the end of part one with Jess. But if you tune in next week, we're going to be looking at Tasmanian sparkling wines. Now going back to the conversation of Moscato d'asti, Jess mentioned thelittlefinewinecompany.co.uk, and I've had a look to see what Moscato d'asti she was talking about. Now, funnily enough, it is by the producer Vietti. Now that is exactly the bottle in my wine fridge right now. So there you go. That's two of us. So you should definitely give it a go. Now Vietti actually are a fantastic producer. They're known for doing these really quite cool artists labels. And they've been doing them since the 1970s. So once you recognize one, you'll recognize all of them. They

do incredible Barolos, they do beautiful Arneis. And in fact, they're quite a historic producer. They were one of the first wineries to produce Grand Cru single vineyard Barolos. And in fact, the first producer to ever make a single variety Arneis. Arneis is a white grape variety from Piemonte. And before that time, it was seen as massively inferior to Nebbiolo, the grape used in Barolo. And so they would actually in fact, plant the Arneis simply to distract the birds. So the birds would come and eat the Arneis and leave the Nebbiolo grapes alone. Well, of course, massive things have changed now. So we have Vietti to thank for that. Another producer, if you want to try a Moscato d'asti, which I highly recommend would be Michele Chiarlo. I have a love affair with these guys. In fact, they were the first winery I ever visited on my wine journey. Piedmonte as a wine region has so much to offer you, in fact, this episodes about sparkling wines, there are two you should know about. So first of all, Moscato d'asti we have mentioned to go a little bit deeper. This is the Moscato Bianco grape, which is also known as Muscat Blanc à Petits Grains, and this is one of the most noble of the Muscat family and actually has an incredibly long history. I believe one of the oldest of grape varieties in fact. Now, as the name suggests Moscato d'asti, the majority is grown in the Provence of Asti, but you're also find it in regions close by Alessandria and Cuneo.

Janina Doyle 00:42:21 But moving away from sweet, peachy and frothy, we have Brachetto d'Acqui. Now Brachetto is the grape variety. It's red. Now you can get it in a still style or passito in fact, but the sparklings are fantastic. The styles I've certainly enjoyed the most are slightly frizzante and with sweetness. And just like Moscato d'asti, they're typically at the 5.5% alcohol level. So yay for us. We can drink more. They're amazing with chocolate and also perhaps like fruit tarts to go with all that lovely strawberry and raspberry fruit notes. And just like Moscato tends to come from Asti and also Alessandria, that's also where you're going to find the Brachetto d'Acqui. Now, if you're looking for some reliable producers for these styles, go for the two B's, Banfi or Briada. And with Christmas out of the way, and Valentine's day coming up, this is always a fabulous little option to finish your meal with. Right? Well, I hope that's got you all sparkling inside. I shall leave you with a wine quote to finish this episode. And I do love speaking about sparkling wine, because it also means I can use a quote about Champagne because there are many. So to end the episode today, I shall give you a quote from Oscar Wilde, playwright and poet. And he said:

“Pleasure without champagne is purely artificial.”

Right, well, we don't want an artificial life. And he did say this quote before all the other fantastic sparkling wines of the world have cropped up. So as long as you're cracking open a bottle of fizz, you're winning at life. Thank you as always for listening, do like, share, subscribe if you haven't already. Share this podcast with your wine loving friends. You already know what's happening next week. So I raise my glass to you. Until then, cheers to you.