

Circle Update

October 2016

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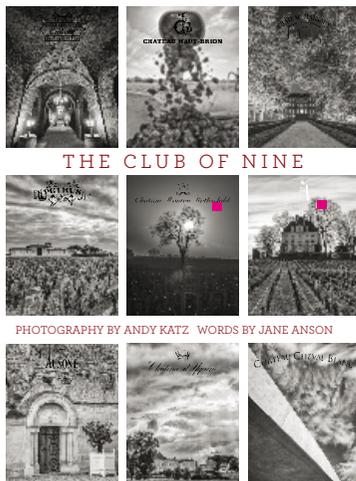
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Book news

Compiled and written by *Wink Lorich*

Jane Anson has contributed the words to a new photography-led book by Andy Katz coming out later this



year in English, and with a separate edition in Chinese. *The Club of Nine* is about the nine 'so-called' first growth châteaux of Bordeaux: Lafite, Latour, Mouton, Margaux, Haut Brion, Yquem, Petrus, Cheval Blanc and Ausone.

The book will be available on Amazon for \$60/£42 with trade

discounts offered of 30%. Details will emerge on Andy's website: <https://andykatzphotography.com/>.

Sarah Jane Evans MW has joined the editorial board of the Classic Wine Library series from Oxford-based publisher Infinite Ideas, joining CWW member **Richard Mayson** and US-based Joshua Greene (editor of *Wine & Spirits* magazine). The nine launch books are available in paperback and ebook format and all but one are written by Circle members. See reviews beginning on p30 of the three latest releases. The publisher plans to have 40 titles in print by the end of 2016 and welcomes suggestions from prospective authors.

Hugh Johnson has been celebrating the launch of the 40th edition of his famous *Pocket Wine Book*, as well as a completely new book, an anthology of sorts. See the article that follows about the launch and two reviews.

A launch double and 40 years of Pocket Wine

It's rare to see Jancis Robinson MW at a book launch that is not for one of her own books. But, there she was, along with several other eminent colleagues who had gathered to pay homage to Hugh Johnson for the launch of the 40th edition of his *Pocket Wine Book* as well as his new tome, *Hugh Johnson on Wine* – reviews on the next page.

The event was rather appropriately held at the wonderfully historical Royal Geographical Society in Kensington ('dedicated to the development and promotion of geographical knowledge'), founded in 1830. The launch was low key and intimate with Hush Heath Balfour Rosé English sparkling offered before the talks and afterwards there was a tasting of six wines from Laithwaite's. Hugh has been involved with the Laithwaite family and its various wine companies since 1973 when he was wine correspondent for *The Sunday Times* and they founded The Sunday Times Wine Club together. Keeping it in the family is Hugh's style – it just so happens that his son, Red Johnson, CEO of the British Bottle Company, is involved in furthering exports for Hush Heath, among other English sparkling wines.

Before the official talks from Hugh's publisher and the man himself, I was able to sneak in a short conversation, where he regaled me with how he had at last been able to visit Arbois in the Jura... And how the highlight was finding a classical concert going on in Arbois' golden church, as he described it (the stone the church is built from is a yellow marl). "What a wonderful organ", he said. This is a man who has always embraced all that is culture and not – as some of us, I fear – become so over-obsessed with wine that he doesn't see the rest.

So, what could he give me as an exclusive quote for *Circle Update*, I wondered? "Writing is almost a drug," he responded. "If I'm feeling uneasy in the evening, I wonder what I've done during the day [and then] I realise that I haven't written anything. So I do – it's not always very good – but I prefer scribbling to anything else. I keep on winding the old handle."

Group publishing director for Octopus, Hugh's publisher, Denise Bates said that it was the first time she had



Photo of Hugh by this issue's featured photographer, **Steven Morris**.

celebrated 40 consecutive issues of a book. She told us that 1977, the year of the first publication of the *Pocket Wine Book*, was the year Elvis died and was also the last time the French used the guillotine! She described Hugh as "not just a national treasure, but an international treasure".

As for the author himself, despite being relatively small in stature – to the extent that he chose to speak from a balcony above the room – he has never been a shrinking violet and always finds interesting ways to talk about his work along with his subject. Hugh began by reminding us that this year marks the 50th birthday of his very first book, named with, as he put it, a four letter word, *Wine*. Speaking about the 40 years of the *Pocket Wine Book*, he told us that his original publisher, James Mitchell, had advised him simply to keep going. He had found a subject that had built-in obsolescence and noted that apart from *Bradshaw's Railway Guide*, he couldn't think of any other publications that needed updating every year.

Hugh explained that the first *Pocket Book* he wrote was from memory, but the second one required some research. Today that research is done by an "A Team, marshalled by editor Margaret Rand" (many of whom are CWW members). The chief difficulty, he said, was not so much finding new producer names to include, but summoning up the courage to chuck out the old names.

"Have I ever been lucky?" He concluded.

Even in his oldest pieces, written as Giles Congreve, an early *nom de plume*, his style appears fully formed. There is a slight bias in content to the 1990s and 2000s. Regardless, every article is entertaining, expert and erudite. But many are prescient too, capturing trends and offering an opinion on them almost before they appeared. Occasionally, updated observations have been added in the margins, and, with typical open-mindedness, he is not above correcting himself or saying when he called it wrong. I was also delighted to find that there are magnificent illustrations by the late Paul Hogarth included. Those are almost as indispensable as the writing itself because they convey the joy of wine better than virtually any photograph.

In these short pieces and passages, nay, stories, collected from his many books, magazines, and journals, he manages that rare three-card trick of being authoritative, up-to-date and entertaining. His articles are expressed succinctly, economically and always with gentle humour. This book contains over 180 of them, and if I have a criticism, it is that this isn't enough. What did he leave on the cutting-room floor? Still, a great storyteller knows when to leave the audience wanting more. So read the book from cover to cover, or just dip in for inspiration or two, again and again.

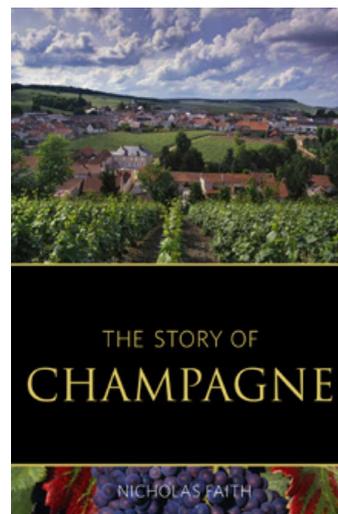
There, I've taken a page to say what Hugh could have better stated in a sentence. In other words, if you only buy one book about wine this year, buy this.

Scribble on, Sir. Scribble on.



Photo of Hugh, courtesy of Octopus Publishing.

Nicholas Faith – *The Story of Champagne*
Review by Andy Henderson
 Infinite Ideas Classic Wine Library, £30.
 224 pages, paperback.



Nicholas Faith's book is unique: he provides a depth of historic detail but gives tight focus on changes in the 40-odd year crossover from the 20th to the 21st century – maybe Champagne's most critical commercial era.

Reims Cathedral and the huge chalk pits below mark the crossroads of Europe and for centuries have been the meeting place for commerce and combat. They pinpoint Champagne. This story takes us from before to after the 'taming of the fizz', through the culture and romance, the international markets, into World War Two and onto 2015 when the Champagne region was recognised as a UNESCO World Heritage site.

Champagne is the first 'agro-industrial' winner defined under 'Living Cultural Landscapes'. Those chalk pits, Les Caves, are now 600 kilometres of essential cellaring for Champagne's creation. They are one of the three UNESCO awarded 'sites' in Champagne. Incidentally, this excellent book is in memory of Pierre Cheval, the father of Champagne's nomination for World Heritage status.

The author's feel for the region resonates; he sees the people as 'hard-headed and hard-working, fully aware that no one *needs* to drink Champagne. It is their story I tell in this book, their efforts to produce, improve, sell and protect their wine.' And this he achieves effortlessly.

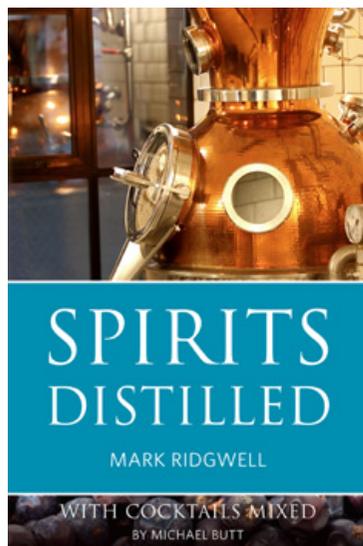
Quick to the point: 'when [champagne] arrived,' he writes, 'it was regarded purely and simply as an aid to seduction... or a recognition of freedom from the constraints of everyday life.' Here is an exemplary storyteller with quotes and anecdotes throughout reflecting both his knowledge and access to those who influence, control and risk change.

Nicholas Faith's empirical approach could almost have had him greeting Napoleon as he alighted in the Avenue de Champagne – the second UNESCO site. And he surely attended the Parisian nightclub when Michel Budin launched Perrier Joüet's Belle Epoque, in celebration of Duke Ellington's 70th birthday.

However, whilst he circulates with insouciance, never forget this is the journalist who squeezed out the story of the dubious practice of 'sales *sur lattés*' and later wrote about it in the original edition of this book, published in 1988. So, here in this fully revised new edition, we have the full explanations and now he writes that Champagne houses are: 'crucially, far more honest about their wines – and the grapes they contain – than they were.'

Fascinating information from new perspectives in a thoughtful layout make for compelling reading. It includes a boxed layout of topics, such as Bottles – shapes and sizes, including the huge Primat. Then, there's the Forgotten Quartet of grape varieties (Moutard Champagne 6 Cépages is a rare example). However, the glossary could have made reference to these useful boxes. Firms listed include the 16 Champagne Academy Grandes Marques Houses, but it does not actually give an entry to the Academy.

Above all this is an enjoyable read; essential for students, a great aide for tourists and probably the most important Champagne book of the year.



Mark Ridgwell –
Spirits Distilled
With Cocktails Mixed
 by Michael Butt.
Review by Colin
Hampden-White
 Infinite Ideas Classic
 Wine Library, £30.
 224 pages,
 paperback.

Nobody can be geeky all of the time, but those of us who profess a passion for spirits do quite like to be geeky some of the time. To get to this stage there are very good books which look at the methods of distillation, from Armagnac to whisky. There are also good books which offer a little history and background to a range of spirits, and there are books that can give you recipes for drinks that can be made from the different spirits. And I feel sure that there are quiz books focused on alcohol.

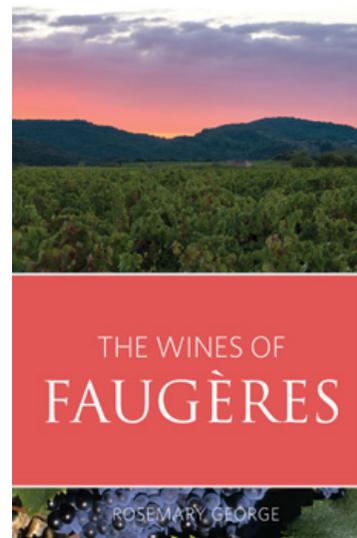
Spirits Distilled by Mark Ridgwell has taken the full array of spirits books on offer and spliced them together in one. By doing so he has created a not so large book that is informative to the novice and a good reference to the expert. For more in-depth study of the specifics of distilling, history or cocktails, other books may be more wholly informative.

There are very few books trying to be all things to all men. This book has made an admirable attempt; it covers the making of the different spirit groups in good detail whilst not getting too heavily into the science. It is educational on tasting and the use of different spirits, including their use in the classic cocktails. There is even a little quiz at the end of each section to see how much one has really remembered.

I found the book not only informative, but also easy to

read. It is separated into easily-consumable chunks. This not only makes it a book one can put down and pick up again easily, but also one to use as a quick reference book. It does not have lavish layouts and large pictures on glossy pages; they would make it far larger and more expensive. I live in a small flat in central London; space comes at a premium, and I have certainly made space for this addition.

Rosemary George
 – *The Wines of*
Faugères
Review by Liz
Sagues
 Infinite Ideas Classic
 Wine Library, £30.
 218 pages,
 paperback.



I've got a soft spot for Faugères – I remember drinking quite a lot of it over several years, long before I became involved in wine in any way professionally. It was our 'house wine' when we rented a gîte in the Dordogne and cost a pittance at the local supermarket.

It was also the origin of a long-standing joke in the family. The words 'Ste Agricole' appeared fairly prominently on the label and we convinced a rather naïve niece that it was a wine dedicated to a vinous saint and therefore heaven smiled on us when we drank it in quantity. As a result, Ste Agricole rather than Faugères was how we always described it.

Even then, well before these schist-soil vineyards in the hills north-west of Béziers were granted AC status, the wine was a cut above most French supermarket bottles, so I'm always delighted now to meet good, serious examples.

And all this makes Rosemary's book a particular, personal pleasure, both for evoking memories of happy times past and for teaching me a great deal more about everything to do with Faugères. Much more than that, she makes a valuable and sometimes gently provocative contribution to professional literature on wine areas in the south of France.

In the Classic Wine Library tradition inherited from Faber & Faber, the book is a serious, text-heavy compilation, starting with the story of this small part of the Languedoc from the Greeks to the 21st century and then dealing with climate, grape varieties, viticulture and winemaking (a lot of it organic) before a domaine-by-domaine tour through the appellation – that tour is the meat of the book, more than half of its content. The amount of work involved there is impressive indeed, and it's intriguing to see the differences as well as the similarities between vigneronns united by a rather special terroir.

After that, and before the final factual, statistical pages, Rosemary draws together all the threads into a more opinionated view of Faugères, where it is today and where it might go in future. She's convinced that the future could be great: "it has the potential to be one of the best appellations in the Languedoc, if not in the whole of France."

Rosemary, I know, had to complete this book quickly, but the information in it is immensely detailed and there's very little hint of undue haste. Just one quibble – I understand and accept her use of French expressions, but I wish the publisher hadn't felt the need to italicise so many of the more common, well-understood ones. Reading would be easier without that.