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Wine tour

I can smell raspberries - with a hint of Chanel No 5

Gemma Bowes joins a new tour of Bordeaux's vineyards that aims to give women the confidence to become wine experts in a male-dominated field

Gemma Bowes

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Take your pick ... grapes ready for wine harvest. Photograph: Charles O'Rear/Corbis

'Yah, it's respect to the fruit all the way, man,' laughs Melanie Tesseron, bouncing her fist on her heart in faux rapper style and shaking the hangover out of her blonde locks. In a plummy gravelly voice she orders us to 'come, come!' and obediently we follow this glamorous 29-year-old Londoner (and self-confessed Heat addict) in hot silk dress and heels through the vines.

Something is amiss. Here we are on a wine tour of Bordeaux, visiting some of the world's most exclusive vineyards to learn about appellations, terroir, grape varieties and the region's impossibly complex wine classification system. But there's no sign of the stuffy gentleman wine buffs, sneering at us through their balloon glasswear because we can't detect the top notes in the cabernet blend. Increasing numbers of Bordelais vineyards have replaced them with vivacious, erudite women who, as in many other industries, are wielding more power and reaching higher positions than ever before.

The Ecole du Vin, Bordeaux's prestigious wine school, has launched a three-day women-only tour of the vineyards with the aim of giving female visitors the confidence to develop their knowledge in a relaxed setting. This idea of getting more women interested in wine - particularly expensive wine - is also a smart business move. Women now make 70 per cent of wine purchases globally.

The rain pours in waterfall sheets as our little coach party of wine-loving women, almost all best-friend pairs, swings through green slopes with vines pulled tight over their soft soily curves like braces over a belly. It's the first weekend of October, picking time, but poor weather means many producers have been holding out for a few more days of sun to ripen the grapes to perfection.

First stop, straight from Bordeaux airport, is Chateau du Seuil, a très chic 18th-century castle surrounded by forests and meadows in the southern Graves region.

The Welsh owner, Nikki Allison, greets us in her smart kitchen with a glass of rosé and we settle on leather sofas in the adjoining lounge for an introductory talk by our guide. Few people can make a description of soil sound fabulous, but Wendy Narby, our

super-glam wine specialist from the Ecole du Vin, does. As a wine merchant and a former wine producer, she is an expert, a dedicated wine guzzler and a brilliant teacher - able to explain the minutiae of wine production clearly and in depth without being boring or confusing, or giving us a dumbed-down overview.

1 2 3 • Next page

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