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THE WORLD OF FINE WINE



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ALSACE GEWURZTRAMINER / MALBECISTAN / BEKKERS / REBULA / TANNAT

AMÉLIE BERTHAULT

by Jon Wyand

Question 1: Is it sexist, on hearing the term “winemaker,” to visualize a tough, weatherworn male figure, glass and pipette, or secateurs, in hand? Something like the Vigneron Indépendant logo, portraying a pear-shaped figure shouldering a barrel as he trudges along.

Increasingly in Burgundy, that is changing as each new generation take over. They even have their own organization, Femmes et Vin de Bourgogne, with 39 members. So, it seems to me that there is a false impression to be overcome. Do we assume that females make more “feminine” wines? I once asked Ghislaine Barthod if her Chambolle-Musignys were more feminine in style than those of her male counterparts. “I think you should go and taste them all and come back and tell me what you think,” was the reply. She is still awaiting my analysis.

Do lady winemakers worry about their nails? A nail bar in Gevrey might indicate as much, but Sylvie Esmonin’s hands tell a different story. Whenever I’m in the vineyards, the labor force seems equally divided between men and women. Physical strength does not seem to be an issue for any of the *vignerottes* I have met.

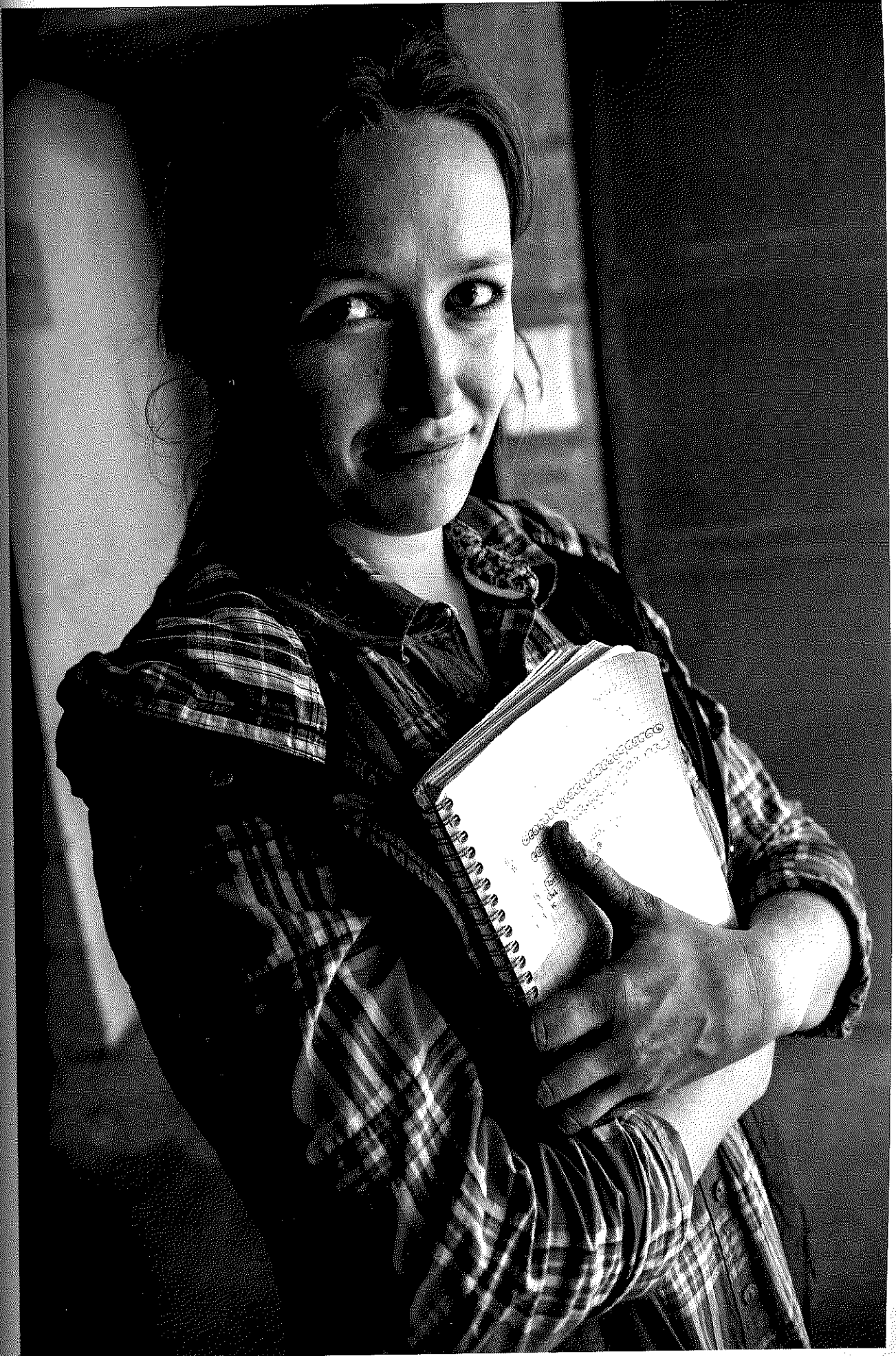
Question 2: Why do I have to make a conscious effort not to portray attractive women as they are? Because I worry that their appearance is all that the mostly male wine consumers will see. Ever since spending more than a year shooting around the Hill of Corton, I have seen what hard, dedicated, unforgetting

work is necessary to make wine. Yet it is rare to give that a moment’s thought as we sip the fruit of any winemaker’s labors.

The challenge in portraying young female winemakers is to reflect their capacity to overcome male stereotypes in every way. And the sooner we all banish those, the better, for there are many impressive daughters on their way.

Here (*opposite*) is one: Amélie Berthault, from the less familiar village of Fixin, at the northern end of the Côte d’Or. She is as Burgundian as any male winemaker, as focused, as self-deprecating, and not altogether at ease with the media attention being given to her as a talented winemaker.

When I arrange to meet after the harvest, arrangements are left flexible. But in October, when I track her down to her cellars near Fixin’s *lavoir*, an embarrassed groan is audible when she hears my voice from the top of a ladder as she fills barrels. There is still too much going on, it seems; the harvest has been good and a notebook she carries tells the story of her efforts to juggle her cellar space and barrels. I meet her father Denis, who is acting as her assistant, and win points by taking a rare picture of them together before departing with the promise of a calmer hour the next afternoon. Even with the usual strained and stained hands of a winemaker at harvest time, Amélie smiles a lot—it’s her default expression, masking her determination and thoughtfulness. Winemakers seldom smile so naturally. I’ll have to watch that tomorrow. ■



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Photography by Jon Wyand