



queen of pop

NADIA CORRENTI MEETS WORLD-RENOUNDED CHAMPAGNE EXPERT, EDUCATOR AND BRISBANE LOCAL BERNADETTE O'SHEA.

SITTING IN HER elegantly appointed living room, Bernadette O'Shea takes a sip of Champagne and swirls it around her mouth thoughtfully. "That's a 2004 base. There's a bit of 2003 in there, some lovely '02... There's no '01 but there is a lovely 2000. A touch of '99 but a lovely, lovely '98 in there. Beautiful."

Known for her savant-like palate and knowledge of Champagne, Bernadette is one of the world's most respected Champagne experts. Among her many accolades is a knighthood awarded by the French government for her work promoting Champagne to the rest of the world, and her book, *Champagne & Chandeliers: Grand Dining Celebrations*, was recently nominated for Best Drink

Book in the Le Cordon Bleu World Food Media Awards.

A full-time champagne consultant and educator, Bernadette lives with her excitable cattle dog Meunier, who she rescued as a pup. Named after a Champagne grape (naturally!), Meunier only understands French and lives a charmed life with Bernadette in her Queenslander in Wilston.

Meeting Bernadette for the first time is a pleasant surprise. I'm half expecting a hoity-toity, air-kissing, "daaarling" type. What you actually get is an incredibly down-to-earth, joyous lady who adores

visitors and enjoys nothing more than talking about her beloved Champagne.

"It's the absolute elegance, the texture in the mouth, the layers and the complexity of flavours," says Bernadette. "I started out liking only wine. I bought a wine book and taught myself about wine. I started with red, then [moved on to] white and sparkling wine. Then someone gave me a glass of Champagne, and it changed my life."

Bernadette has amazing tales about tasting the world's most incredible Champagnes, many of which are in her book. Take the 1907 bottle of Heidsieck that spent 80 years at the bottom of the Baltic Sea, for example.

"A ship was sunk on its way to the tsars of Russia with a shipment of Champagne. Also onboard was a shipment of cognac. When they salvaged the ship, the cognac was gone but the Champagne survived. There are three rules of cellaring any wine: no movement, no fluctuating temperature and no light. So at the bottom of the sea there was no movement, it was 3°C and there wasn't a speck of light."

Then there's the bottles of mind-bogglingly expensive, even priceless, Champagnes she's had the privilege of drinking, including the millennium magnum of Esprit du Siecle made by Moët & Chandon.

"It had 100 years of Champagne – the best wine of every decade – in the one magnum. They gave eight of them to various countries around the world, and two came to Australia," Bernadette recalls. "Very wealthy people bought them because they could afford to. When I was in Champagne they told me, 'Wouldn't it be lovely if a group of people formed a syndicate to buy a magnum so everyday people like us could drink this?' So I came back with that idea and formed a syndicate. We paid \$24,000, so it was \$1000 a glass, and all the money went to charity. It was the greatest thing ever made," she says, shaking her head.

Champagne is obviously the key to Bernadette's heart. but a girl's gotta

eat, right? "I wrote my book to show people that Champagne isn't just a drink of celebration and it's not just an aperitif. It's a serious, serious food wine. It's perfect with food because the acid cuts through salt, fat and sweet, sugary things. It's particularly good with Thai and Japanese food. Rose Champagne and Japanese food is the match to end all matches. It's extraordinary."

Foods to avoid include chocolate and chilli. "Chilli burns your palate. A big chilli dish like a curry means you won't get the delicate flavours of Champagne."

DID YOU KNOW?

We Brisbanites drink more Champagne than anyone in Australia.

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