

WINE

women and work

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Elizabeth Marett meets two professional women flourishing among the vines



At Stopham Vineyard near Pulborough, West Sussex, the dynamic Adderley Pelly is anywhere but on the sidelines.

Having started as a vineyard assistant in 2017, Adderley has risen through the ranks, first to Vineyard Manager and then to her current role as Assistant Winemaker – a job in which she produces the vineyard's range of award-winning still and sparkling wines.

But with only 14% of winemaking roles worldwide occupied by women, Adderley is in an industry minority.

"Sometimes people are surprised when I explain that I'm the winemaker," she tells me. "They've assumed they'll be meeting a man."

"At first I wasn't keen on accepting help, as I wanted to prove my worth. However, this became a bit tiring. Now I have the confidence to know that asking for assistance isn't an issue."

Can gender be a barrier in the job?

No, not in my experience. At Stopham, there is a real

freedom to express, create and bring whatever you can to the table, no matter who you are. Winemaking isn't a glamorous job – it's physically demanding, messy and wet. It can also be lonely and you need a lot of mental strength and resilience. You have to be prepared for that, but it's all worthwhile when you see the results of your hard work.

What skills do you bring to your role?

There is a lot of heavy lifting in winemaking, and so I realised that I would need gradually to build up my strength. In the meantime, my creativity and organisational skills have come in very handy and I've become pretty adept at making tools to assist with lifting and manual tasks. There is always a solution and digging deep to find it can be very satisfying.

How would you like the future to look for women in the wine industry?

I would love to see women confidently take hands-on, leading roles in the trade, without feeling that we have limits or are in any way replaceable. Winemaking is collaborative – at Stopham, we all contribute different strengths.



Lucy Letley is General Manager of Albury Organic Vineyard, a 20-acre vineyard near Dorking with a tasting room, gift shop and impressive range of guest experiences – from vineyard tours to cheese and wine tasting and beekeeping.

"Albury is a family business, founded by my father Nick," she explains. "I'm proud to work alongside a fantastic team that includes talented women in key roles."

"Alex leads vineyard operations, Sarah is part of the vineyard team and an expert wine tasting host, while Becky manages our events programme. Having strong female representation brings a collaborative, inclusive culture, along with a range of perspectives that genuinely benefit our operation."

Are there any specific challenges for women in the wine industry in 2026?

The industry has become more inclusive in recent years, but there is still a way to go. People are often surprised to see Alex or Sarah behind the wheel of the tractor, and visibility remains a challenge – women in technical and leadership roles don't always get the recognition due to them. Still, things are shifting.

What advice would you give for any woman wishing to begin a career in wine?

The industry has many different paths. So be curious,

ask questions and get stuck in wherever you can. Practical experience is invaluable, and it's the best way to discover where your strengths lie.

Which women in the wine industry have inspired you?

No discussion of women in wine can omit Jancis Robinson. As a wine critic and writer, her depth of knowledge and influence have shaped how people around the world understand and enjoy wine. I also admire Emma Rice, whose winemaking expertise has helped define the quality of English sparkling wine, and Julia Trustram Eve who did so much to raise the profile of UK wine early on.

What does the future hold for women in wine?

We no longer need to prove that we belong in the industry – we're already here, doing the work, and doing it well. Now it's about power, visibility and influence. I'd like to see more women leading innovation in sustainability, building brands with purpose and mentoring the next generation. The future of wine will be stronger if it's shaped by a diverse range of voices. Women should be at the centre of that.

■ Elizabeth Marett runs Wine Experience for monthly tastings in Dorking, bespoke wine parties and corporate wine events in the Surrey Hills. Visit: wineexperiencesurrey.co.uk



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