

Veve Clicquot Champagne: A History Lesson in Female Empowerment

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You know it as one of the most, if not *the* most, iconic Champagne brands. With its distinct font and simple but elegant yellow label styling, it is an immediately recognizable marker of a capital-O occasion. Breaking out the Veve? Ultimate baller move. Not to mention its flawless execution of everything a Champagne should be: powerful yet elegant; equally fresh in taste and aromatic in bouquet; bound by an exquisite mousse that is at once silky and vivacious. It is doubtlessly *la grande dame* of the Champagne world, if not the world of wine itself, one which in fact has a grande dame in the root of its story. Those who crave history lessons in empowering women, take note.



Because You're Worth ItThe very sound of the name Veuve Clicquot invokes an

air of *je ne sais quoi*; the mysterious sexiness of the “Veuve”—a lazy vowel bookmarked by those va-va-voom Vs—followed by the precise fricative metronome of the “Clicquot.” But the very name of Veuve Clicquot also tells another story; the history in fact. Or, since International Women’s Day and Women’s History Month are having a moment, should we say the *her*-story? I studied French for about six years of my life, but “veuve” is not a term one necessarily comes by in routine vocabulary lessons of family members. It’s a word, in fact, one would hope to not to have reason to know.

In French, “veuve” is simply, “widow.”

But the inherent sadness of the Veuve Clicquot, or shall we say the Widow Clicquot, herself begins and ends there. Though a widow, she was no crone, and hers is a success story of female empowerment, entrepreneurial spirit, and the good things that come with women in business.

The story of Barbe-Nicole Clicquot Ponsardin, the one-and-only Veuve Clicquot, is one that can be summarized in the very tasting notes of the Champagne brand she rose to prominence: powerful but elegant; strength and silk. She was a young widow of only 27 years at the untimely death of her husband, the then-owner of Maison Clicquot, in 1805. The Clicquot brand had been operating for 30 years at this point, and was already internationally quite successful by late 1700s standards.

However, two matters of providence lined up for the brand when François

Madame Clicquot (“VCP” stands for Veuve Clicquot Ponsardin); courtesy of Shutterstock

Clicquot passed away: First, that business and inheritance laws of the time, while prohibiting most women from owning businesses, made no such restrictions on widows specifically. (One imagines that these laws were forged with older women, who would likely just hand over to their sons, in mind, and not feisty twenty-somethings.) Second, that Madame Clicquot was precisely the kind of revolutionary who would retain her right to be involved in the wine business, and refuse to remove herself from the vineyards, even in an industry dominated entirely by men at the time. An icon for female entrepreneurs to follow centuries beyond her time.

And good thing for the Clicquot name that the brand’s founder, her father-in-law (to give due credit) was open to her ambition. She audaciously re-named the brand for herself, and by maintaining exacting standards and demonstrating her savviness as a businesswoman, in a few years’ time catapulted it from merely successful to an international symbol of luxury, where it remains to this day. A fearless and intelligent business woman, you have Madame Clicquot to thank for innovations that lead to clarified Champagne—the secondary fermentation process naturally left the wine cloudy

with yeast sediment—as well as rosé Champagne. (Hell yeah pink bubbles were figured out by a lady.) The processes she invented to achieve both of these qualities are exactly what continue to be in use today.



Rosé Champagne; courtesy of Veuve Clicquot/Facebook

The legacy of Madame Clicquot continues with the Champagne brand awarding The Veuve Clicquot Business Woman Award and New Generation Award every year since 1972, to recognize the achievements of female leaders among all fields who demonstrate

similar leadership and entrepreneurial ambition.

Women continue to make strides in every aspect of winemaking today, though it is still largely a man's vineyard out there. But this month let us not forget that the top-of-the-line bar was set some 200+ years ago by a woman, with the very beverage that has its use worldwide for congratulatory purposes, self or otherwise. This Women's History Month, Madame Clicquot, a toast to you.



Veuve Clicquot Brut Yellow Label (price varies), on Drizly

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