

Etc. Next Life

Natural-Born Swiller

A nose for business led Jennifer Simonetti-Bryan to a new career in wine. *By Alexandra Wolfe*

A boozy lunch changed Jennifer Simonetti-Bryan's career—in a good way. Entertaining clients in London in 1999, the then-26-year-old Citigroup automotive analyst became fixated by how the acidity of her Sancerre balanced out her fatty salmon entrée. "I kept interrupting people, saying, 'Taste this!'" she says. For her, it definitely beat discussing capital structures.

After that fateful lunch, Simonetti-Bryan started taking wine classes. When Citi transferred her to New York later that year, she enrolled in the Windows on the World Wine School. After the program ended, she left banking and took a job at New York merchant Burgundy Wine Co. for a third of her former salary. "My family thought I'd completely lost my mind," she says. "But I was selling to corporations for executive dining rooms and couldn't imagine anything better." She worked for another wine company before ending up as an educator at liquor stalwart Rémy Cointreau.

Meanwhile, Simonetti-Bryan was pursuing what *The New York Times* has called "wine geekdom's biggest prize": a Master of Wine qualification. The four-day exam, which includes three blind 12-wine tastings, tests a person's understanding of the science and business of wine. She prepared for six years by studying from 5:30 a.m. to 8:30 a.m. before work and again from 7:30 p.m. to 10:30 p.m. In 2008 she became the fourth American female Master of Wine. A year later the Teaching Co., which produces *The Great Courses* DVDs, called. They had noticed her in media appearances and thought she could do instructional wine videos for them. Simonetti-Bryan auditioned and got the nod.

In early 2010 she left Rémy Cointreau to concentrate on building her personal brand. In addition to her instructional DVDs, Simonetti-Bryan, now 37, is writing two wine books. Including fees for consulting services—she advises clients on everything from starting a private collection to opening a wine bar—she makes more than \$100,000 a year. "The Master of Wine is very much about understanding the business of wine," says Michelle DeFeo, a Rémy Cointreau vice-president. "Jennifer was a de facto industry analyst"—with a very good nose. **B**

Simonetti-Bryan has built a business—from books to private counseling—through her wine expertise



Simonetti-Bryan tasted 10,000 wines when training for the Master of Wine exam



D WISHFUL DRINKING

\$30,000

Salary at Burgundy Wine, her first job in the industry; she made \$90,000 at Citigroup

\$40,000

Cost to achieve Master of Wine title (enrollment, publications, books, wine)

7,000

Number of her instructional DVDs sold in the first month they were offered

30

Wine regions visited around the world; her favorite wine is white Burgundy

DATA: JENNIFER SIMONETTI-BRYAN