

'One surprising break was six months working with Mother Teresa in India, but the call of wine was stronger'



Anabelle Cruse-Bardinet

Owner/winemaker Anabelle Cruse-Bardinet, 49, has been revamping small, idyllic grand cru classé Château Corbin in St-Emilion for more than a decade. 'I have this sensation that I've done the last thing on the list,' she says, pushing back her long blonde hair as she shows off the new cellar of cement tanks.

You could say her career is no surprise. She grew up in the Médoc at Château Laujac, where her winemaking father had a herd of 500 cows and a 70ha vineyard. She's part of the famous Cruse wine family, a cousin of Emmanuel Cruse of Château d'Issan, and her grandmother both co-owned Corbin with other family members, and managed it. As children, she and her sisters skipped school to stay there during harvest.

She decided to become a winemaker at 15. 'I knew as a girl I had to have solid knowledge to be credible,' she says. That meant studying oenology at the University of Bordeaux and a year of viticulture training. Her internship and first job were at Château Branaire-Ducru, where she 'learned everything' from then winemaker



Above: Anabelle Cruse-Bardinet
Right: Château Corbin GCC



Above: Château Corbin was previously managed by Anabelle Cruse-Bardinet's grandmother

Philippe Dhalluin (now at Château Mouton Rothschild), who became her mentor.

One surprising break was six months working with Mother Teresa in India, but the call of wine was stronger. Cruse-Bardinet spent time in California at Sterling Vineyards, and several years with her father at Laujac. But her grandmother wanted Cruse-Bardinet to take over Corbin and eventually its charm seduced her. When she became the winemaker in 1999, she'd already inherited a share from her mother. The family ownership was complex and difficult to resolve, but eventually, she was able to own it completely.

'I think it's easier to combine career ambitions with family life at a small St-Emilion estate, a little jewel, than it would be at a large Médoc property,' she says. Her priority now? To make the wine and estate as perfect as she can, but never to dominate it. **D**