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From vineyards to distilleries: The Watsons introduce “Renais” – A graft of heritage and innovation

A family's journey from vineyards to distilleries

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In the heart of the French wine regions, an enchanting story is unfolding, weaving the bonds of family with the craft of winemaking and distillation. This summer, Emma Watson, the acclaimed English actress celebrated for roles in movies such as "Harry Potter" and "Little Women", alongside her brother Alex, have brought to the forefront a novel gin brand christened "Renais". Remarkably, its essence is deeply rooted in the grapevines of the Watson family's Burgundian vineyard - a property many were previously unaware of.

A Hidden Treasure in Burgundy

Emma, globally recognized for her acting prowess and activism, spent many a summer nurturing the Pinot Noir and Chardonnay vines at the family vineyard in Burgundy. Chris Watson, the patriarch of the Watson clan, founded Domaine Watson in Chablis and is undeniably passionate about his Burgundian ties. "She was undoubtedly a Burgundy soul who unfortunately was born in England," he jestingly remarks about his daughter.

Chris's journey began when he relocated to Paris in the 1980s to practice law. There, the budding lawyer cultivated deep friendships with inheritors of quaint vineyards, gradually becoming enamoured with winemaking. Encouraged by these viticulturist companions who recognized a kindred spirit in him, Chris took their advice to heart. By 1991, he had acquired land in Chablis, which was rumoured to have been top-tier in the 19th century. He recalls, "It took us eight years to secure all the permissions and approvals to plant the vines." Today, Domaine Watson boasts exquisite offerings, including the Domaine Watson Irancy 2019 and Chablis 2022.



Renais: A Revival of Traditions

Drawing inspiration from the dedication and effort poured into Domaine Watson's vineyards, Emma and Alex envisioned Renais. Currently available exclusively in the UK and Europe, this gin speaks of a unique history and flavour. The moniker "Renais" derives from the French word "renaissance", symbolizing rebirth. As the siblings elucidated in a joint statement, it's "a nod to the strong family bond and how the family vineyard has significantly influenced both the taste and identity of the Renais brand."

A distinguishing feature of Renais gin is the integration of Domaine Watson grapes, distilled as marc to form its base spirit. These grapes are coupled with grand cru pressed grapes sourced from Domaine des Malandes. Further enhancing its palate, botanical and mineral notes of juniper, coriander, citrus, honey, and notably, a distillate of Kimmeridgian limestone - a defining characteristic of Burgundy soil, are infused. Alex highlights, "Grand cru grapes are the region's most treasured natural ingredient, and we're privileged to have access to them. The limestone gives Chablis wines their distinctive mineral taste and lends a splendid body and structure to the gin. Renais is our family's love letter to Chablis."



Emma views Renais not just as a gin, but a familial project invoking cherished memories. "I am particularly proud to repurpose grapes from vineyards, including my father's, to minimize waste and craft something groundbreaking," she shares.

While Chris remains engrossed with his Pinot Noir and Chardonnay vines, Alex and Emma are experimenting with exclusive Renais-based cocktails. Among them is "The Emma", a blend of Renais, Chablis, elderflower syrup, lemon juice, and soda, garnished with a hint of Suze liqueur and served over ice.