

# KATHERINE COLE

## 'I have had it with stemware – enough already'



**A**s I move my belongings out of boxes and into the cabinets of my recently remodelled kitchen, I'm discovering that I have, over the years, been bamboozled into buying wine glasses in *eight* different shapes.

This is absurd. A reasonable person should only own one style of wine glass. I don't need a towering Pinot Noir, a cavernous Cabernet Sauvignon, a bulbous Chardonnay and an abstemious Riesling glass. And yet, here they all are, vying for shelf space.

And now, there are new 'must-have' shapes on the market. One is modelled after a jet engine (by Melbourne-based Denver & Liely, released last November, £106). Another, the Cocoon (Stölzle Lausitz, £65-£70), has curves like the Venus of Willendorf. Given its vaguely natal name, I wonder if it was designed to appeal to women, who are, after all, three times more likely to drink wine than men, according to Gallup's US market report for 2023.

But I will not be buying the 'Cocoon'. Because I have had it with stemware. Enough already.

When women my age talk about abstaining from wine because we don't like the way it makes us feel, we aren't merely referring to morning brain fog and menopausal weight gain. We also resent the emotional baggage the wine industry has piled upon us. It's interfering with our well-being.

Consider this headline, which appeared in my news feed recently: '*The wine glass shape mistake you don't realise you're making*'. It scolded me, thoroughly, for 'drinking wine out of the wrong glassware'. I read it and felt stemware shame.

There has been hand-wringing in the business about declining demand for wine, particularly among consumers in their 20s and 30s. But could 'grey divorce' also be a factor? The US consumers who spend the most on wine are aged 50-70 (says Silicon Valley Bank Wine Division's 2024 industry report) – the very age cohort that's now divorcing faster than any other, according to Bowling Green State University, the preeminent US academic institution studying marriage.

### 'A REASONABLE PERSON SHOULD ONLY OWN ONE STYLE OF WINE GLASS'

Women of my age are the last generation raised to learn the art of gracious entertaining. We know a salad fork from a seafood fork. But as we become unmarried in record numbers, we're moving, downsizing, remodelling and reinventing. We're selling off our wedding china and looking deep into our souls. We see that objects we once slavishly collected have been making us feel empty and inadequate all this time.

A wine purchase is an emotional decision. We buy Champagne because we want to laugh, celebrate, indulge, enjoy. Wine stemware, with its confusing shapes – defying dishwashers yet shattering at the mere thought of hand washing – provokes different emotions: frustration and fear.

Michael Moosbrugger, CEO and director of winemaking at Schloss Gobelsburg in Austria's Kamptal region, has studied early 19th-century winemaking and wine appreciation since 2001. He points out that today's panoply of glass shapes derives from a contemporary focus on isolating olfactory perceptions, while our predecessors valued other aspects of the sensory experience.

'The glassware of the period was beautifully crafted, but without the allowance to smell anything from the aroma of a wine,' says Moosbrugger.

But is this such a bad thing? The glasses of times past were simply beautiful. Consumers could make a purchasing decision based not on a feeling of inadequacy, but because a set of stemware *felt right*.

As I reassemble my kitchen, one set of glasses makes me smile. These are cut crystal and tulip-shaped, their rims curving gracefully outward, their stems chunky. Sommeliers might be appalled to know I drink wine out of these – the olfactory experience is lacking! – but they belonged to my grandmother and her mother before her. They don't accuse me of not being enough; they simply make me happy. 

**Katherine Cole is the author of five books on wine, as well as host and executive producer of James Beard Award-winning podcast *The Four Top***

### IN MY GLASS THIS MONTH

**If the final judgment comes anytime soon, let me die with this spicy, elegant Beaujolais cru in my hand: *Jules Desjournes, Le Jugement Dernier, Chénas 2016* (US\$62.40 Saratoga Wine Exchange). I enjoyed it during a recent multigenerational family meal at Vantre, in Paris' 11th arrondissement. Everyone agreed it was beguiling. I do not, for the record, remember the shape of the wine glasses.**



PHOTOGRAPH SHE SAW THINGS