

(preview)

## Following the scent: From PE instructor to international Champagne guru

**Richard Juhlin**

*A Scent of Champagne  
(8,000 Champagnes  
Tasted and Rated)*

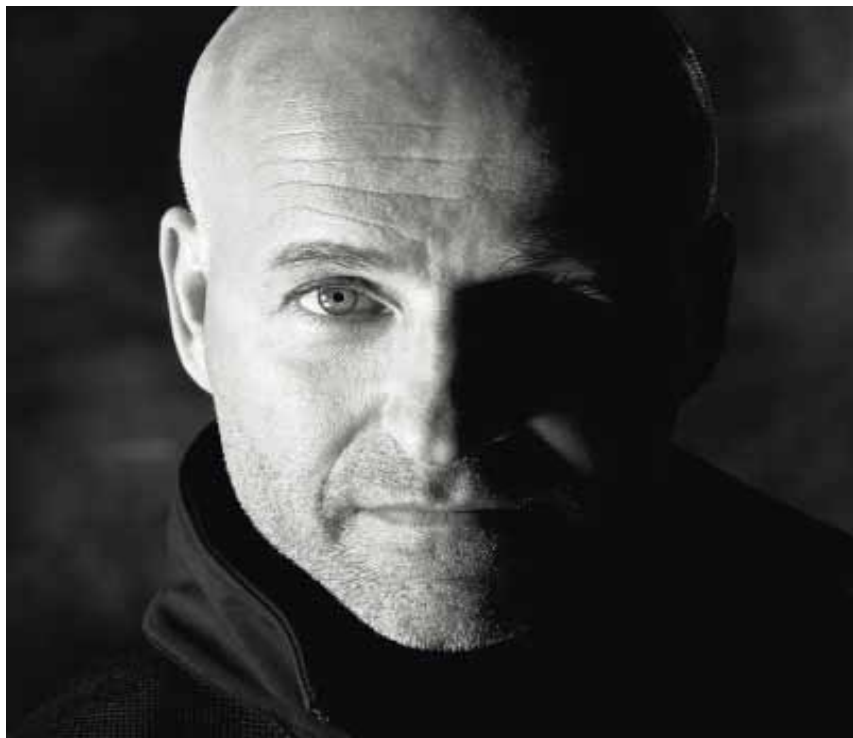
Skyhorse Publishing \$75 / £46.31

REVIEWED BY

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Scent is the clue to Richard Juhlin's (pictured) new book. There may be twice the number of venerable vintages tasted in this opus, but its core attraction for his devotees is Richard's personal story of his rise from Swedish PE instructor to international Champagne guru, equipped with an acute sense of smell, the main armament of the fine taster that he certainly is. The nicest surprise is that in the drive to express his passion on a human scale, he has written a delightful prolog about a recent holiday in Corsica with his children and Norwegian fiancée, Ragni. "So incredibly beautiful and rich in scent," he writes, "is the flowing sweet perfume of lily plants, cyclamen, bougainvillea, and yellow roses." Then he finds fresh tones in the Mediterranean air, of citrus flavor, lemon, and acacia; so he's on home ground as Ragni suggests a little blind tasting of a vintage blanc de blancs. It's a sensational bottle savored under the olive tree. Richard correctly identifies this nectar as Comtes de Champagne—yet misses the vintage, which he thinks is 1999 but is in fact the far greater 1995. Full marks for honesty but this is also a cautionary tale of how memory can play tricks with even the finest taster.

Modesty is always a sound principle—which is something that Richard occasionally forgets in a hymn of praise to his own God-given talent.



In a temporary loss of his sense of the ridiculous, the author goes on at inordinate length about the problem his sharp nose causes him in the social intercourse of daily life, a narrative that verges on the comic. "Every time I sit in a café or restaurant," he sighs, "I am careful to position myself far from the toilet [...] I cannot manage distracting scents even when I eat the simplest meal [...] and before I choose a table I'll check the smells from the people and the surrounding tables. Overall, most often I choose to be far away from others." Fortunately, if this gives the impression of a recluse, it's far from the truth. In the 20 years I've known Richard Juhlin he has always struck me as the most charming and gregarious of men. I delight in bumping into him at the corner table in Le Sept, the bistro of Patrick Michelin's great Les Berceaux in Epernay. Often have we compared notes over a bottle of something spectacular—I well remember a

particularly great Cuvée William Deutz 1988 in his company.

The main content, the stuffing, of the book is well organized under catchy chapter headings. "From Gymnasium to Palace, My Journey"; "Beverage, and a Region (champagne & Champagne)"; "Enjoy Champagne"; "Top Lists of the Great," etc, all written in a friendly approachable style. Curiously, though, in describing the special Belemnite chalk soil that makes the taste of classic Champagne unique, the author adopts a conservative, roseate approach to this old wisdom. For sure, it is this Belemnite that makes the grand cru Chardonnays of Chouilly, Cramant, Avize, and Le Mesnil so mineral and long-lived, with a charge that is almost electric. But the 33,000-plus hectares (81,500 acres) of Champagne are about much more than chalk alone: On the Montagne de Reims the interaction of chalk and sand makes this prestigious district ideal for great Pinot Noirs, also long-lived Meuniers—contrary to