

GROWING BRAND AUSTRALIA IN ASIA

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THE wine world's attention is focused on Hong Kong early each November, as that is when the Hong Kong International Wine and Spirits Fair (HKIWSF) is held in the cavernous Hong Kong Convention and Exhibition Centre.

This event, sponsored by the Hong Kong Trade Development Council (HKTDC), is massive, with 1067 exhibitors from 37 countries showing their products. In its ninth year, the fair was attended tens of thousands of buyers and trade visitors from Asia and some from further afield, including the Middle East. Most of the buyers were from mainland China, however the fair also attracted buyers from Malaysia, Taiwan, Indonesia, Vietnam, Korea, Cambodia, Myanmar and Japan. In 2008 Hong Kong became Asia's regional wine hub after the government removed all the import duty on wine.

This move has meant that Asian buyers can source their wine requirements via Hong Kong without incurring additional duties, while at the same time making Hong Kong the nerve centre for wines in Asia. This has made the fair an outstanding platform for the promotion and trading in wine. It enables participating wineries to extend their business not only into China, but potentially across Asia for significantly less cost than visiting individual countries.

Even being focused on the wine side of the fair, it was impossible not to notice the massive spirits presence, from US whiskey makers, Mexican tequila makers, who also conducted a tasting master class, and the ever present Japanese sake makers, who held two master classes this year. There was even a Russian vodka stand, which drew quite a bit of attention.

More than 80 wine and spirit events, ranging from an introduction to Slovenian wines, a wine industry conference session: "Uncover the Opportunities of the New Cool-Climate Wine Trend" moderated by Debra Meiberg MW, to an Australian boutique wines masterclass, were conducted over the three-day event.

The Grand Tasting of Slovenia was introduced by Slovenian Deputy PM Dejan Zidan. Slovenia is located between Italy, Austria, Hungary and Croatia and is an EU member. The wines were very interesting and tasty despite their tongue-twisting names such as Kupljen Jeruzalem Svetinje - 2013, Renski Rizling and Jeruzalem Ormoz - 2015 Remuni Muscat.

Another interesting master class was the Austrian Red Vertical Tasting, comprising four vintages - 2009,

2011, 2012 and 2013. While most of the world is aware of Austrian white wines, especially gruner veltliner, they are not so aware of Austrian red wines, so this vertical tasting of zeigelt, blaufränkisch and blends, each from the same producer, was interesting and demonstrated the ability of these wines to age gracefully.

This year Australia was well represented with appealing stands from both Winestate and the Royal Agricultural Society of Victoria. Wine Australia did not attend, having opted to exhibit at the Hong Kong Food Fair instead. The Winestate stand had several more wineries than last year and these included: Brygon Reserve Wines, Margaret River; Gralyn Estate, Margaret River; Greenock Estate Wines, Barossa; Handcrafted by Geoff Hardy and Pertaringa, Adelaide Hills/McLaren Vale; Haselgrove Wines, McLaren Vale; Hoggies Wines, Coonawarra; Kings of Kangaroo Ground, Yarra Valley; Koonowia Estate, Clare Valley; Latitude 34 Wine Co, WA; Sharmans Wines, Tamar Valley; Sidewood Wines, Adelaide Hills; Toppers Mountain Wines, New England and Totino Estate, Adelaide Hills.

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I did not get a chance to taste all the Australian wines on show, however those that I managed to try were very good. Of the wines I did taste, stand-outs were: Gralyn Estate - 2014 Margaret River Reserve Chardonnay - beautiful oaky aromas and a lovely creamy mouthful of flavour, a bigger but elegant style of chardonnay. An absolute ripper wine.

Toppers Mountain - 2013 New England Wild Ferment Tannat - light bright colour, complex aromas and lovely elegant flavours with a tight, restrained finish. A brilliant and elegant example of this often rustic French red variety.

Kings of Kangaroo Ground - 2013 Heathcote Shiraz - this is a drop-dead gorgeous Heathcote Shiraz:

big oaky aromas, a great mouthful of silky smooth flavours and a long, lingering finish.

Pertaringa 2014 The Yeoman McLaren Vale Shiraz - Wow, this is a big wine, with masses of deep dark dense colour, beautiful aromas and a big mouthful of complex flavours with a tight, classy finish. An outstanding wine.

While there is no doubt that many of Australia's wineries produce world-class wines, the challenge is to get that message out to the rest of the world's wine drinkers. This is doubly hard for Australia because unlike most other countries which only produce great wines from "classical" European varieties, we are a country of unfettered experimenters who also produce sensational wines from new innovative (alternative) varieties, making our message much more complicated. It is high time that we had a significant lift and a vast improvement in the quality of the marketing of our wines around the world in order to match or exceed the slick promotional ability of our competition, especially the Europeans.

Making great wine is simply not enough in these "instant" days of mass communication. We need to have a strong and concerted presence at international wine events, especially at events in Asia such as the HKIWSF.

Australia doesn't settle for second best in the sporting arena, nor should we in the wine world! So let's get more exhibitors to next year's Hong Kong International Wine and Spirits Fair, and ramp up our wine march into Asia, it really is worth the effort to attend one of the best wine fairs in the world. 🍷

