



wine

BUSINESS

— *asia* —

Old World Vs New World

The battle comes to Asia

Grape Expectations

What's new in global varietals

Sommeliers of Asia

Chng Poh Tiong gives incite into Asia's first regional
Sommeliers Association

PLUS...

Exclusive interviews:

David Henderson - Montrose China

Bob Campbell - New Zealand

Martin Jones - Starwood

Asia's wine business publication

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Grape Expectations

What's New in Global Varietals



Well, I guess that depends on who you are and where you're at. If you are just graduating from Coke or Pepsi, maybe it's Rose D'Anjou Heaven or if you're trading-up from Rose, hey, it's a whole new world out there and Pinot Grigio or Chardonnay may just be that next step.

But for those of us who have the benefit of our Rose D'Anjou Doctorates or 3-D glasses (Anybody remember them? Those bulky, cardboard glasses with the green & red plastic lenses we used to get in the cinemas and by wearing them everything came alive), there have never been so many delicious choices worldwide, though in some places the names vary just a bit (i.e. Syrah & Shiraz or Sauvignon Blanc & Fume Blanc to name but a couple of variations).

For many of us it was actually pretty basic once we turned first base (Rose D'Anjou Lane) and we were heading for second; it was Chardonnay on the white side and Cabernet Sauvignon on the red side. Then the vintners figured out that not everybody wanted red wine with lots of wood, especially with the ladies in mind, and before you knew it everyone was talking about Merlot, because it was softer and a lot easier to drink without food, as one intellectualized on the true nature of the universe and or / the meaning of life (when you finish a bottle on your own and you weigh less than 185 pounds, of course, the answers become crystal clear).

Today it's a whole new world no matter where you wake-up (of course for the frequent travelers among us, we normally have to collect our thoughts upon awakening to determine our precise global positioning). On the California mainstream side it's been Pinot Noir, Zinfandel,

Sauvignon Blanc and then any number of other favorites (I really liked the Mirassou Petite Syrah during the 80's), but of course lots of "Reserve" everything. Watch California Syrah, Pinot Grigio replacing Chenin Blanc everywhere and a growing number of Bordeaux blends called "Meritage". Of course the movie, "Sideways" really did spark a great deal of interest in Pinot Noir, mostly California, but also Oregon Pinot Noir and in a kind of general way encouraged many people to be more adventuresome about trying new wines with which they are unfamiliar, which has no doubt boosted other varietal sales more than a tad.

France has always been ready to put some sparkle in our eyes with a million different versions of everything Champagne and sparkling, lots of Bordeaux and Burgundy for those willing to spend more and dessert wines with names like "Y'quem" that are not easily pronounced, but unforgettable on the palate.

The great volume of wine from France has long been from the Mediterranean (Languedoc-Roussillon) area, yet in recent years many of the big cooperatives have been forced to either dump massive quantities of the prior year's production or bulk-off these same quantities for conversion to ethyl alcohol to make room in their enormous, stainless steel "tank farms" for the product of the next harvest.



What is considered “**edge**” from **France** is all about the exciting revolution taking place in the Loire Valley and Cotes du Rhone as well as some specialty producers in the Languedoc-Rouessillon and the southwest of France focusing on various blends and true varietals such as Grenache, Cinsault, Petit Manseng, Syrah, Cabernet Franc, Mourvedre and Muscadet.

It used to be that Asian wine consumers would rarely consider buying a varietal with which they were unfamiliar and that they could not easily pronounce, but no more: Today it’s all about bold experimentation just for the joy of it!

Alsace is enjoying a mini-Renaissance thanks to a new generation of family wine makers taking the characteristically crisp, clean, fruit-acid balance in their Pinot Blancs and Rieslings to new levels.

Spain has sent us their Cavas (the best values in sparkling wine) plus reserve red wines priced similar to Californian table wines. There are also some super value wines like Garnacha Rosado, ripe Tempanillo blends (cabernet, merlot and Tempranillo) now available, not to mention a host of wines from Penedes near Barcelona. Keep an eye out for wines from up and coming regions such as Ribero del Duero, Somontano and Costers del Segres.

Italy has shown us why Tuscany, Veneto et al. are destinations for friendly wines and great food with their endless number of producers; there is always an Italian wine that is just “right” for every occasion.

Probably the hottest trend in Italian wines is known as the Super Tuscans, which became popularized in the 1980s in reference to wines devoid of official appellations yet often surpassing the classic reds of Tuscany in prestige and price.





The original “Super Tuscan” was Sassicaia, created by Marchese Mario Incisa della Rocchetta at his San Guido estate at Bolgheri.

And just when you thought you had seen everything from Italy, Folonari has taken a page from Australia’s play book with the introduction of Folonari 2004 Shiraz Sicilia”.

Portugal has taught us that Port is a marvelous libation with endless variations in addition to being a perennial holiday favorite; Germany has blown-dried their Rieslings to go better with food and to prove that while their high-end luxury wines are still an incredible way to consume mega carbs, they got the message that the key to more wine sales is to make wines that go very well with food. Dry Riesling or bust!

Chile has given us great values in Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot and Chardonnay, plus “Reservas” and “Gran Reservas” all the way. The hottest varietals from Chile are Carmenere (what was mostly sold in prior years as Merlot or blended with Merlot), Bordeaux Blends (with Carmenere) and Syrah or Shiraz.

Argentina is known for its Malbec and that’s not changing, but look for other varietals to take hold beyond it, such as Torrontes, Semillon, Bonarda, Chardonnay, Tannat, Tempranillo, Syrah and Johannisberg Riesling.

The latest launch from Argentina is “Quara”, a line of bold, expressive, estate grown & bottled varietals from the Cafayate Valley (Malbec, Torrontes, Tannat, Merlot, Cabernet Sauvignon and Chardonnay).

South Africa is producing great Chenin Blanc, Chardonnay, Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, Pinotage, Bordeaux Blends (with Pinotage), Shiraz and numerous indigenous varietals unique to South Africa that are only now being exported in limited quantities; watch for them all to do well, because of the substantial value they represent, which is increasing every year now with new investment by the producers in the latest, hi-tech viticulture equipment.

KWV’s Cathedral Cellars Chardonnay, Merlot and Cabernet Sauvignon win gold medals around the world, while their Roodeberg Bordeaux-style blend is one of the best values in top quality red wine from South Africa. The Boschendal Sauvignon

Blanc is tremendous. But the latest and very best news is the naming of the Anglo American Corporation (De Beers) trophy winery, Vergelegen by the Wine Enthusiast Magazine as the “2005 New World Winery of the Year”. Viva, viva, viva, South Africa!

New Zealand has given us Sauvignon Blanc and Pinot Noir and now more and even better of the same, plus Chardonnay, Bordeaux Blends and Riesling.

Australia, Australia, Australia. They have really diagnosed the Asian palate and they continue to flood the Asian market with millions of cases of super values at nearly every price point: So, watch for their Shiraz to continue as one of the top imported red varietals and Chardonnay to be the top Australian white varietal to Asia Pacific! Aussie Cabernet-Merlot, Cabernet-Shiraz and Semillon-Chardonnay blends will find more and more satisfied consumers at a variety of very competitive price points as their value proposition becomes more widely appreciated relative to other wines.

Among the best selling Australian wines is Yellow Tail (A new kid on the block in Asia, but the leader by far in America) and Little Penguin, Jackaroo Big Red, Jindalee Shiraz and lots of others with fun names that show why Australia leads the world in terms of the global de-mystification of wine. The very reasons for Yellow Tail’s tremendous success are the same reasons France has very little to celebrate outside of Champagne. The New World - Southern Hemisphere wines are full of fruit (or “fruit forward” as they say), easy to drink, pair well with food, the labels are easy to understand and pronounce and now many sport amusing names and caricatures. The value perception of Australian wines is very strong with the wine consuming public: Very strong, indeed.

So, what’s new in global varietals you ask? Its lots of better wine values from everywhere imaginable at virtually every price point. But if you were to generalize in just one direction, it’s clearly a new day and it’s very definitely a “New World”.