

FLYING AT 30,000 FEET WITH A GLASS OF FINE WINE IN HAND IS ONE OF LIFE'S pleasures. Many considerations are made by the selection panel for airline wine programs which don't always figure in traditional dining scenarios on land. The quality of inflight wines can be indicative of the quality of the inflight experience for guests travelling in business or first class.

Blind tastings of wines are almost uniformly conducted by wine selection panels, ensuring only top quality wines are served. Wine lists have been enhanced with dedicated on board sommeliers, wine training programs for flight staff, wine tasting panels contributing to airline wine cellars and a competitive nature born from the prestigious Cellars In The Sky awards. With improvements in on board dining, wine has increasingly become important to a customer's overall flight experience.

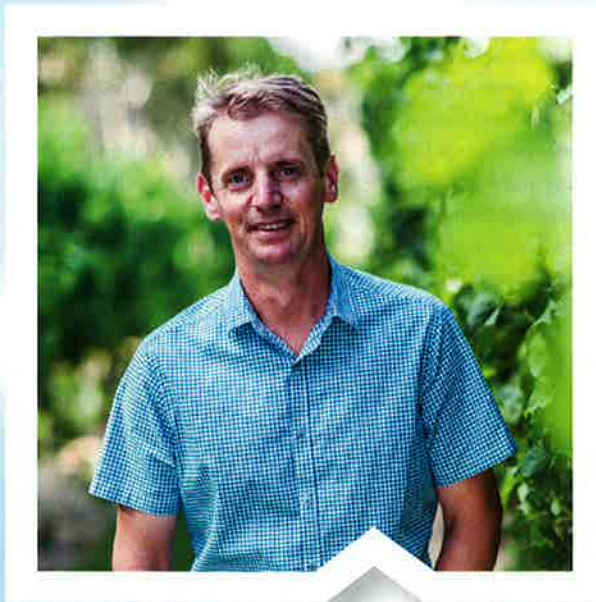
Australian winemaker and wine judge Tom Carson is a member of the panel responsible for the Qantas' wine program and says of the selection process, "we give big points for drinkability factor; acid, tannin and dryness are accentuated in wine in the air, so we look for quality of wine – but also softness, fruitiness, texture and balance." Wines tend to also be selected for their ability to travel well, and to reflect the local producers in flight sectors alongside prestigious labels and increasingly, a diversity of grape varieties and wine styles.

Here, we look at five major airlines, their approach to their list and the prestige wines and champagnes you can expect to enjoy next time you're on board.

QANTAS

It's pretty amazing to consider that one of the largest purchasers of Australian wines in the world is the national airline carrier, Qantas. Regular winners of the Cellars in the Sky awards, Qantas has over 50 different wines from over 150 wine producers and spends A\$15 million dollar a year on Australian wine.

"Other airlines tend to have year-long programs," explains wine panel member Tom Carson, "but with Qantas, the sheer diversity of wine means you rarely get on a plane and have the same wine as last time." The wine lists are an exploration of prestigious and emerging wines and wine styles from Australia, with first class wine lists representing on labels from Australia, from established producers such as Leeuwin Estate, Penfolds, Giaconda, Mount



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TOM CARSON / WINEMAKER AND WINE JUDGE

Mary and Henschke – often bought in tiny quantities. The business class list features wines from newer producers and new regions, but with a foundation of top quality Australian wine.

BRITISH AIRWAYS

British Airways works with prestige wine companies Bibendum (for first class) and Castelnau (for Club World – business class) to create their wine list. Set to more conservative but premier wine producers, the wine buyers have created food and wine pairings available with their five-course Taster Menu in A380 First Class services.

Christopher Cole is British Airways' food and beverage manager, and says, "we always have a mixture of old world and new world wines in both first and Club World. This allows us to reflect the region we're flying to whilst at the same time acknowledging that many of our customers like to see and taste wines from well-known regions in France such as Burgundy and Bordeaux for example." Taittinger and Laurent Perrier are among the champagne selection, while Grand Cru Bordeaux and boutique producers from California, Margaret River and Marlborough are available.

CATHAY PACIFIC

Cathay Pacific conducts its wine panel tastings in Hong Kong, and flies the wines in first to ensure that they are true to their condition and travel well on aeroplanes. The tasters look



Singapore Airlines Wine connoisseur team: OzClarke, above left and Jeannie Cho, right.

for specific characteristics that ensure Cathay Pacific only selects “wines that fly”; Clara Yip, Cathay Pacific’s catering manager, states “the good characteristics for flying wines are a big fruit flavour, mild tannins and a balanced acidity.”

Current selections in first class include one of the world’s greatest champagnes with Krug Grand Cuvee being poured, while red Bordeaux and white Burgundy fill out the selection of typically three premium red wines, two whites, a port and one champagne. Business class features a stand out Marlborough sauvignon blanc from hip producer Spy Valley.

SINGAPORE AIRLINES

Wine critic Oz Clarke (you may have seen him on TV, together with James May of *Top Gear* on their own wine show, Oz and James’s Big Wine Adventure); and a pair of Masters of Wine (MW) in Michael Hill-Smith and Jeannie Cho Lee make up the Singapore Airlines Wine Connoisseurs team responsible for the inflight

wine experiences. It’s pure luxury with Singapore Airlines offering first class clients the opportunity to choose between Dom Perignon and Krug Champagnes, a rare treat exclusive to the airline.

The Singapore Airline’s flagship A380 first class wine list includes producers like Cloudy Bay and Petaluma alongside wines from established, high-end French producers Chateau Cos d’Estournel and Louis Latour.

The business class list is where you’ll find boutique producers getting a run – along with Bollinger Champagne.

EMIRATES

While poring over the wine drinking opportunities in first and business classes across a swathe of airlines, it’s hard not to be taken by how diverse and well-chosen the Emirates offering is. From true, boutique wine producers, to matured Bordeaux, and the parent-



Emirates also offers in-flight sommelier services on selected routes.

child champagne duo of Dom Perignon and Moët & Chandon, there’s a wide selection of classy wine to drink while flying with the Dubai-based carrier.

Current selections show ex-Australia routes carrying Savaterre Chardonnay, a rare-in-Australia producer prized for fine wines, while Australia’s most well-known riesling, Grosset, is also offered – a wonderful pair. European routes take on a decidedly European feel, with representation from significant wine regions. Emirates also offers in-flight sommelier services on selected routes.

LAN

Travellers to and from South America who opt in for LAN’s premium business class, can choose from wines selected by Latin America’s only master sommelier, Hector Vergara. Vergara’s selections tend to the local, with some exotic and interesting choices that span Chile and Argentina’s best wine growing regions.

Without a dedicated first class, per se, the selection has an exploratory feel. The list comprises a mere 30 wines, but all have been chosen for versatility of drinking, while offering an insight into traditional and modern wine producers. Expect to see torrantes and malbec from Argentina, while Chile teeters between grapes like the local favourite carmenere and some more expressive pinot noir that has been garnering attention.

**Wine selections current at time of publication.*