

## VinExpo Asia Pacific raises the bar once more

By Sherwin Lao | Jun. 03, 2014 at 06:00pm

In the ever competing world of best wine & spirits fairs and best turnouts—all empirically backed with numbers and data, the recently concluded bi-annual VinExpo Asia Pacific, held for the sixth time in Hong Kong, once more proved its successful hold of the region in this highly commercialized inebriation business. Just last week, from May 27 to 29, I was one of the record breaking 16,800+ verified industry visitors to the Hong Kong Convention and Exhibition Centre for the 8th VinExpo Asia Pacific (six of the eight times were done in Hong Kong, including this most recent one). This number is 6.4 percent higher than last 2012 based on the organizer's closing hour record.

### *VinExpo celebrates its 15th year in Asia*

VinExpo started in 1981 in Bordeaux—still by far considered the world's preeminent wine-growing region. The concept from the onset was to create a wine & spirits fair in an international stage for the industry professionals, a purely trade show that connects producers who would be the exhibitors, to buyers and media people, who would be the

visitors. While VinExpo is certainly not the oldest wine & spirits fair, given that VinItaly started as early as 1967 and The London Wine Fair started in 1980, the VinExpo strength in Asia, which began with the first staging of VinExpo Asia Pacific in Hong Kong in 1998 was a pioneer of sorts in this still vastly potential region.



I attended five of the eight VinExpo Asia Pacific events so far: four in Hong Kong including this recent one, and one in Tokyo, Japan in 2002. The return to Hong Kong in 2006 (after Tokyo in 2000 and 2002, and skipping 2004), and the removal of wine duties in this former British colony in 2008—all made for Hong Kong being the ideal hub for VinExpo Asia-Pacific. Not to mention, the always tantalizing prospect of Hong Kong being the window to the huge mainland China market.

### *Best meeting place*



Officially, there were 1,300 exhibitors from 34 countries in the recently concluded VinExpo Asia-Pacific, but I am sure an extra 10 percent can easily be added to the list of exhibitors if we were to include wine & spirits company

representatives who also visited the fair, but did not have a stand for their products. VinExpo Asia-Pacific is after all the biggest gathering of the Asian wine & spirits importers, and representatives get to “hit several birds with one stone” in these three-day affair. I noticed throughout my stay at the venue, all the tables and seats were fully occupied in every café, lounge and even the function rooms of nearby hotels Hyatt and Renaissance. Based on VinExpo Asia Pacific media release, while bulk of visitors were from Hong Kong and mainland China, there was a huge improvement from those coming from Southeast Asia, including from Singapore, Malaysia and even military-coup taken over Thailand. This year, the organizers also added 50 percent more exhibition space, extending to two large halls, covering the 1st and the 3rd floors. This might be the reason why it seemed that the crowd at first might appear a bit sparse, but then if you go to the French floor (the entire 3rd), you would see roughly similar crowd, so logically with the space doubled, and the visitors up 6.4 percent, the crowd would be better spread out. This VinExpo was however still a bit too French-centric, as 42 percent of exhibitors were from France or were featuring French products.

### *Great programme lLineup*

I believed this year’s programme lineup, which included expertly conducted master class tasting, forums on the Chinese market, food & wine pairings, and a sommelier guide to blind tasting were very loaded on all wine fronts.

Fees were charged for certain seminars including those conducted by Master of Wine Jeannie Cho Lee (first Asian MW) and 2013 Best Sommelier of the World Paolo Basso. In these seminars, an official VinExpo Asia-Pacific Academy certificate would be given to each participant. I was very fortunate to attend one of the sit-down seminars, and this was the “Chance to Taste Classified Growth’s 2010 Vintage” by the Cru Classes de Graves. More on this surreal experience next week here in this column.



Despite the sweltering heat of 32-33 C° (as if I never left Manila) and mass traffic of human bodies going in and out of the Hong Kong Convention and Exhibition Centre (even enduring long taxi queues), once I was in the fair, being able to see old industry friends, meeting new ones, plus tasting several lovely wines, make the VinExpo Asia-Pacific 2014 a productive event worth every cent spent on this trip. Lastly, I saw a huge indoor signage on VinExpo Nippon Tokyo for this coming November 1 and 2—a second one in the region this 2014. It would be interesting to see if this fair will make an impact on the Asian industry squarely targeted at East Asia, primarily the rich economies of Japan, Korea and again mainland China. We could never be too “vinexpoed” out... or could we?