



## Bangkok Post

### **In a glass of their own**

***With its world-class design, a premium Asian brand is taking on the Europeans at their own game***

Traditionally, the crystal stemware space has been dominated by lead variants.



*The new Hong Kong Hip collection from Ocean Glass*

More recently, newer production techniques have given consumers consent to indulge in a greater variety of novel crystal glass. But now lead-free offers a similar refractive index to lead crystal, but with lighter weight and less dispersive power.

There is no need to spend a fortune on wine glasses, provided a few basic principles are followed.

The glass should be thin, while not overly fragile; the rim must not interrupt the flow of wine to the mouth; the bowl should be fat, with the widest part about one-third of the way up (the level up to which you should pour the wine).

Claret (Bordeaux, Cabernet, Merlot) is best suited to stemware with a large tulip or narrowing goblet, as it allows swirling but has a narrow opening to concentrate the aroma. Many wine drinkers use this shape for all red wines.



*The stylish Hong Kong Hip Burgundy glass*

For Burgundy, Pinot and Shiraz, larger glasses allow greater exposure to air for these big, or closed wines. In my view, they add a spectacle to the table when a special wine is served. This shape is often preferred by red wine enthusiasts.

However, I have seen heavily oaked white wines served in these glasses, but this may have been due to the Burgundy pedigree.

Whites like Chablis and Chardonnay tend to be designated to shrunken versions of the tulip because there is less need to aerate white wine and a heightened desire to maintain a lower temperature by minimising contact with surface areas. Most fresh white wines tend to be served in this format, including Picpoul de Pinet.

Many would accept that Riedel is the best known wine-glass manufacturer. The company was founded in 1756 as a manufacturer of perfume bottles. The brand has, through the years, developed different glasses for different varieties and discovered that the correct choice of glass enhances a wine's flavour.

Another well-known brand is Schott Zwiesel, the producers of Tritan crystal glasses, offering brilliance and durability while being dishwasher-safe. Schott Zwiesel has set new industry benchmarks for resistance to breakage and scratches. Other premium brands include Dartington, Spiegelau, Stoelzle, Bohemia and Rona, to name a few.

Now, there are newer players in the market, each claiming technological advances. Most notably, Eisch asserts that wine poured into its Sensis Plus range becomes harmonious and complex with good balance and elegance through a natural process, while preserving the original character and structure.

This is a bold claim, and to be candid I was loaded with cynicism when I conducted a blind test of the Eisch Sensis Plus against the brand's standard range to determine how it affected fairly respectable mid-market French and Australian wines. To hop straight to the conclusion, although I was unable to explain exactly why I preferred one glass over the other, I invariably had a strong preference for the Sensis Plus \_ with no exception.



*The Hong Kong Hip Bordeaux glass*

Another leading brand, Zalto, has ambitiously created glasses with bowls tilted at angles of 24, 48 and 72 degrees, a decision based on the Earth's tilt.

Being in Thailand, we cannot overlook local brand Lucaris, Asia's first crystal stemware brand from Ocean Glass, which now competes with leading European brands. I have experienced Lucaris on a number of occasions, and have recently purchased some. With its world-class design, Lucaris is now playing the Europeans at their own game.

I caught up with Kirati Assakul, chairman of Ocean Glass, in Hong Kong at the launch of their latest Lucaris Hong Kong Hip collection, an event called "The Perfect Encounter".

Kirati explained his philosophy and vision for Lucaris: "Pairing wine with Asian cuisine is not about how to best complement or enhance a particular dish, but rather how to enhance a rich and multi-faceted dining experience. The fact that we are Asian has allowed Lucaris to create this unique brand experience called 'The Perfect Encounter', bringing together Asian food, wines and people in a way that Asians truly enjoy."

According to Kirati, Lucaris is a collaboration between Ocean Glass, Toyo-Sasaki Glass of Japan, and award-winning designer Martin Ballendat of Germany.

In 2009, Ocean Glass invested 1 billion baht in a new factory equipped with advanced furnaces and technology from Japan and Germany, which can produce lead-free and barium-free crystal glass, with high clarity and brilliance.

The following year the company introduced the Lucaris brand of premium crystal wine ware and accessories. About 80% of Lucaris products are now exported to Asian markets such as Hong Kong, China and Singapore where wine consumption is rising. About two million premium crystal wine glasses were sold in Asia last year. Lucaris has about 10% of the Asian market and expects to capture 40% of the market in five years.

The Hong Kong Hip launch took place at the Ritz-Carlton Hong Kong. Among the guests attending were well-known figures in the industry including **Jeannie Cho Lee, the first Asian Master of Wine**; Judy Leissner, CEO of Grace Vineyards, known for introducing China's first Bordeaux wine; and Dan Hetrakul, the first Asian owner of the Bordeaux region's Chateau Meyre. The evening started with a wine glass blind tasting between the Hong Kong Hip and other international brands, followed by a five-course dinner of modern Asian cuisine.

The food was accompanied by wines of the world served in the new Hong Kong Hip Chardonnay, Burgundy, Cabernet, Bordeaux and Champagne glasses. The result was very impressive.

The starter \_ sauteed prawns skewed with Jin Hua ham and vegetables, deep-fried garoupa fillet stuffed with green onion, and steamed scallop dumpling \_ was perfectly paired with the 2009 Grace Vineyard Tasya's Reserve Chardonnay from Shanxi, China.

Next was Tin Lung Heen Peking duck: stir-fried minced duck served with onion in a crispy bowl and double-boiled mushroom with duck. This was a great pair to the fine 2008 Domaine Dujac, Morey-Saint-Denis from Burgundy, France.

Char-grilled barbecued Iberian pork, pan-fired pork rolls with pineapple and honey sauce and crispy eggplant with salt and pepper was superbly served with an excellent Australian 2009 Wynns Coonawarra Estate Cabernet.

The deep red and flavourful 2003 Chateau Meyre, Haut-Medoc Cru Bourgeois, Bordeaux, France was an excellent companion to the meat course of stir-fried

diced wagyu beef with asparagus in black bean sauce, and fried rice with minced wagyu beef and diced vegetables.

The dinner ended stylishly with a delicate Italian wine, 2012 Moscato d'Asti Bricco Quaglia, La Spinetta, superbly paired with the luscious chilled pear with bird's nest.

"I was very impressed with the Hong Kong Hip collection," said **Lee, author of Asian Palate**, a coffee-table book explaining how to pair wine with Asian food. "It's aesthetically beautiful, functional, but also it really enhances a lot of the flavour characteristics in the glass. Part of the beauty of its shape is that it really allows the aromatics to come forth and the delicate lip and balance and the feeling on the hand, all of it I think really promotes a much more pleasurable wine experience."