

Chinese wine drinkers keen on familiar images

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Chinese consumers seem to be won over by plays on cultural symbolism on Bordeaux wine labels.

The wine market in Asia may rest on very simple and obvious footing, according to Jeannie Cho Lee, Asia contributing editor of wine magazine *Decanter*.

Cho Lee attributed the success of a lesser-known estate like Chateau Beychevelle to its label, which she says is "easy-to-remember and familiar: the boat on the label closely resembles Chinese dragon boats."

Beychevelle is considered an up-and-coming red Bordeaux by regional wine merchants and observers in a somewhat uncertain market landscape. Wine producing regions are still not sure which wines will be the next to attract attention in Asia. Cho Lee says that visuals no doubt play a key role.

The Chinese are fiercely attached to symbolism and superstition, and regard the number 8 as an auspicious number, because it sounds like the word "wealth" in Chinese. The Chinese government chose the most auspicious date of all to schedule the opening ceremony of the 2008 Olympic Games in Beijing - August 8, 2008 (8-8-08) at 8:08 p.m. This was also an extremely popular date for weddings.

It's no wonder that Chateau Lafite Rothschild, following a record-shattering Sotheby's auction in October (during which three bottles of the Chateau's 1869 vintage sold for \$232,692 each), chose to feature the Chinese symbol for the number 8 on its 2008 label.

In November, Chateau Mouton Rothschild's choice to feature the work of Chinese artist Xu Lei on the label of its 2008 vintage was announced.

So far, the Chinese are responding - prices for both Lafite and Mouton have surged. According to Bloomberg, most top lots at Sotheby's most recent New York auction went to "phone buyers bidding briskly in Mandarin." Sale prices for cases of Lafite's 2000 vintage hit \$36,300 - yet another record.

