

Wine critic breaks the mold

Tuesday, November 16, 2010

When Hong Kong-based wine critic Jeannie Cho Lee presents the special for the night to her guests, she may say it has the aromas of hay, wet earth, honey, mushroom, garlic and spices.

But she won't be describing a wine.

Lee will be sniffing a 900-gram giant white truffle, which she won for 105,000 euros (HK\$1.11 million) at an auction in Castello di Grinzane in a region of Italy famous for the pungent delicacy.

Lee, a South Korean, said she and friends made the bid through a satellite link-up and that they will hold a feast after it arrives today.

The price per gram for their truffle came out less than 117 euros - lower than the rate of 133 euros paid at the same auction last year. That buyer, not surprisingly, is also from Hong Kong.

The city has won more than a fair share of truffle auctions in the past few years.

Among the winners are property tycoons like Hopewell Holdings chief Gordon Wu Ying-sheung and wife Ivy Wu Kwok Sau-ping and R&F Properties chairman Li Sze-lim.

Lee is just not trying to be lavish.

"It is all for charity," she said.

Indeed, most of the proceeds from the auction - which brought in a total of 307,000 euros - will go to Italian charities, as well as Mother's Choice in Hong Kong, which cares for pregnant girls and organizes adoptions.