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The Future in Wine

By Cathy Yan



Jeannie Cho Lee first moved to Hong Kong 17 years ago as a journalist, armed with a master's degree in public policy from Harvard. Now she's a master of wine.

Ms. Lee received the [master of wine accreditation](#), a self-study program that takes at least three years to complete, in 2008, becoming the first Asian to hold the title and only one of 280 masters of wine in the world. A frequent contributor to industry publications such as Wine Spectator, World of Fine Wine and Decanter, Ms. Lee, 41, published a book on Asian food and wine pairings in November 2009, titled "Asian Palate."

Ms. Lee is well-positioned. Asia's recent appetite for fine wine brought record auction sales in October: Three bottles of 1869 vintage Chateau

Lafite-Rothschild [sold for 1.8 million Hong Kong dollars each](#) (US\$232,692) – the highest amount sold for wine at auction world-wide.

"Hong Kong is really establishing itself as the premier wine center in Asia," Ms. Lee says.

She says she has a broad perspective of the Asian food-and-wine market, with Hong Kong being her viewpoint. Here are five trends she is watching out for.

The Next Lafite: "Right now there's a huge Lafite phenomenon in China. I think there will be another iconic wine brand from France that the Chinese will embrace. Some up-and-coming wine producers to look out for are Chateau Haut Brion, Domaine de la Romanee-Conti and Chateau Mouton Rothschild. Winemakers, for their part, are looking to Asia as a security buffer for future economic downturns. The 2008 financial crisis didn't really affect Asia, so the price of wine was somewhat cushioned. China in particular holds enough promise that wine will always enjoy high pricing."

Women in Wine: “Women will play a greater role in both the wine trade and on the consumer side. More women are buying wine, and within the trade, there are more female sommeliers, wine CEOs and executives emerging in Asia. Look at markets such as Japan, where women are one of the most significant buyers in the Japanese market. As the wine market matures in Hong Kong and China, this will happen there, too.”

Wine Pairings with Asian Food: “A couple of years ago, hardly anyone was making an effort to introduce wine with local Asian food. Suddenly, everybody’s doing it. I think this hails a whole decade of experimentation. You’ll see a lot of Chinese restaurants with more serious wine lists. You’ll see wine groups appear. More Asian restaurants and hotels are taking wine more seriously.”

Asian Wine Critics: “Wine experts from Asia will be playing a greater role. You’ll see strong voices from key cities in Asia who will represent the palates of their areas. Wine producers will start to take note of what is the Asian palate, which is not a concrete definition but more an amalgamation of various opinions. So there will be an opinion leader that specializes in Bordeaux, Napa, Burgundy, you name it.”

Fusion Ingredients: “With travel, chefs have greater exposure to all sorts of ingredients. There is already usage of common Western ingredients in Asian cooking. For example, in Hong Kong, foie gras and truffles have infiltrated everything from dim sum to braised beef. I don’t think it works in all those contexts but it is a period of experimentation. In the West, many three-star Michelin restaurants use Japanese ingredients such as yuzu and uni. In the next couple of years, I think you’ll see more Chinese ingredients such as sea cucumber and abalone in Western cooking. This crossover of ingredients will happen at a more accelerated speed, too.”