

IN FINE SPIRITS

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New wines to discover |

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In Fine Spirits

A round-up of new tipples around town



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After a two-year break from large-scale events, the wine and spirits industry is wasting no time in getting back to the pre-pandemic days of exhibitions and festivals.

In September, wine and spirits trade fair ProWine Singapore returned for its third staging.

Among the 230 international exhibitors plying their wares at the Singapore Expo were home-grown wine retailer Bottles & Bottles and Spanish canned wines specialist Glass Canned Wines.

Up next is the Wine Pinnacle Awards at Resorts World Sentosa, to be held from Oct 28 to Nov 1. The programme includes a two-day Wine Industry Symposium and Wine & Dine experiences, all of which are open to the public as well as industry players (register at str.sg/wVsW).

The return of these events indicates an interest in Singapore as a potential wine hub, says Mr Gernot Ringling, managing director of ProWine organiser Messe Duesseldorf Asia. It also helps that wine appreciation in Singapore has grown more sophisticated, he adds.

"Singapore consumers and the regional market are hungry for new experiences. There are many successful wine shops and wine bars popping up – people are starting to know how to appreciate wine and are eager to broaden their knowledge about the industry," he says.

The Straits Times looks at the wine trends set to gain traction here in the coming months.

ORGANIC AND NATURAL

Organic and natural wines – made from grapes grown without using chemicals such as herbicides or pesticides – are not new, but will continue to attract interest, says Mr Koh Chin Liang, managing director of Bottles & Bottles.

"Retail and trade customers who like the brands we carry often ask, 'Does this label have an organic selection?' They may not have switched completely to wanting only organic or natural wines, but the general movement towards sustainability and environmental stewardship across all consumer products seems to be influencing some wine drinkers," he says.

PREMIUM VARIETIES

A shortage of grapes in some traditional wine regions – white grapes in France's central Burgundy region, for instance – has pushed up prices, but that has not stopped connoisseurs from seeking out premium wines, says Mr Koh, who notes an increase in queries about "rare and limited commodities".

Mr Ringling observes that the fixed customs duty in Singapore may mean paying more for premium wine, but it is worth it for better quality. "People are beginning to realise that it's more value for money to buy a better bottle of wine. And wine enthusiasts in Asia are



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MR KOH CHIN LIANG, MANAGING DIRECTOR OF BOTTLES & BOTTLES

Wine and spirits trade fair ProWine Singapore (left) returned last month with varieties from lesser-known regions, such as Frederiksdal's cherry wine from Denmark (above), on show. PHOTOS: PROWINE SINGAPORE

also willing to spend more on limited editions and creative brand collaborations."

Ms Jeannie Cho Lee, a qualified Master of Wine and chairman of the Wine Pinnacle Awards 2022 Technical Committee, says online markets and auctions have helped fine wines to thrive during the pandemic. "Many wine auction houses have reported growth during the past few years," she says.

FROM CALIFORNIA TO SLOVENIA

With Singapore's rising status as a wine hub, climate change impacting wine crops and supply chain disruptions across all industries,

wines from lesser-known regions have had a chance to fill in the gaps.

"Consumers can expect more lesser-known family brands popping up on shelves, along with an increase in wines from places such as Santa Barbara in California, Switzerland and Slovenia," says Mr Ringling.

This is in contrast to the more classical sources of wine, such as France's Burgundy, Bordeaux and Champagne regions.

LIGHTER, HEALTHIER AND MORE COLOURFUL

Some may see wine as an indulgence, but the move to healthy liv-

ing is changing consumers' tastes.

Ms Cho Lee says: "We are eating more vegetables and cutting down on 'heavier' foods such as red meat, and our preference for wine is also evolving to accompany these lighter meals."

Lighter grape varieties – pinot noir, cool climate grenache or cabernet franc, for example – are thus becoming more popular than heavier red wines such as cabernet sauvignon.

The shift towards lighter wines is also due to advances in wine-making techniques, says Mr Kenichi Ohashi, qualified Master of Wine and technical committee member for the Wine Pinnacle Awards 2022.

This allows for more "colourful" styles such as orange wine from Georgia and Vin jaune yellow wine from Jura in eastern France.

He highlights other wines to look out for: rose-like wines made from grey grape varieties, such as pinot gris and Japanese koshu, which are usually made into white wine; and easy-drinking sparkling wine such as pet-nats, which have a hazy appearance due to the use of ancestral fermentation methods.

FOCUS ON EXPERIENCES

The pandemic drove home the importance of physical experiences and connection.

And wine, more than other types of alcohol, is as much a lifestyle as it is a product.

"Customers still appreciate the physical connectivity, conversations and good company that wine brings together," says Mr Koh. "In the coming year and as the new norm, we can expect more engagement activities, private tastings and food-pairing events."

However, virtual events – such as online wine-tasting sessions – will not go away any time soon because some wineries have found success in selling directly to customers, says Ms Cho.

"Those wineries will continue to focus on this segment because it means higher margins for producers, and more direct relationships with the end-customer who is drinking the wine."

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