

# THE BURGEONING REGION OF FANGSHAN WHERE WINEMAKING IS NOT JUST FOR FUN

Fangshan is on a mission: to create the most regulated wine region in China as well as a green belt around Beijing, offering wine tourism and other recreational activities for city dwellers.

As a wine region, whose name translates in English to Funhill, it currently covers 1,200 hectares and 22 chateaux to date have harvested at least one crop of grapes. The aim is to set up 60 chateaux over the next decade in an area that owed its first wave of prosperity to the marble industry.

Wine growing poses major challenges, due to high humidity, summer rainfall and winter frosts, where vines have to be buried in the winter, making it very labour intensive. This has not prevented a modern wine industry from emerging and rapidly developing.

## Great expectations and ambitious plans at Densiho

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A case in point is Densiho, which owns two chateaux in Fangshan and currently has 100 hectares under vine divided between three vineyards with plans to plant more; the company owns a total 400 hectares of land.

Vineyard planting began in 2011, with over 70% of vineyards planted to Merlot, followed by Cabernet-Sauvignon, Cabernet Franc, Syrah and Chardonnay. Like many other Chinese wineries, Densiho is constantly experimenting and last year introduced Marselan to its vineyards. Unlike many of its counterparts, it specialises in rosé wines, anticipating a future trend for the style in a maturing market. The red wines here are very

light, though it is still early days as the winery only entered the production phase in 2014. Since then, its output has rocketed from an initial 20,000 bottles to approximately 300,000 currently, despite low yields due to the need to allow room between the vines for burying.

As German-trained production manager and winemaker Yanan Hao explained, vines are buried in mid-November or after leaf fall, not necessarily because of the cold itself but due to the dry winds in winter. Producing wines only from its own grapes, Densiho has already secured a reputation for itself and been featured in guides such as Bettane & Desseauve.



## Chateau Bolongbao – mirroring Fangshan’s desire for innovation

Fellow winery Bolongbao has a slightly older history: established in 1999, its 53-hectare vineyard has been certified organic since 2009, which is seen as the way forward for Fangshan. Like Densiho, it continues to trial new vineyard techniques and although it is still using the ubiquitous flood irrigation method twice a year, it is currently testing drip irrigation.

Similar to many other Chinese vineyards, its vines are not planted on rootstock because of the absence of phylloxera in China and lack of water stress. The winery’s current varietal range includes Merlot, Cabernet-Sauvignon and

Cabernet Franc; Petit Manseng has also proved to work well as French-trained winemaker Fei Xue pointed out. He also spoke highly of Marselan, which produced its first wines here in 2012 and shows resistance to disease and good acidity.

Fei Xue is also experimenting with sulphur-free winemaking. The estate’s propensity for experimentation is perhaps due to its French winemaking heritage – it belongs to a Sino-French joint-venture. But it is also a common feature amongst wineries in the Fangshan region where innovation is actively encouraged.



## WINERY VISIT

# Château Lion – French influence near Beijing city center

If it weren't for its location in the suburbs of Beijing, Château Lion could easily pass as a classic French chateau. Perhaps, that is, apart from the football pitch that has replaced the more usual formal gardens but symbolizes China's take on wine. Château Lion's vineyards are similarly French-oriented.

The estate's 50 hectares or so under vine – out of a total 90 hectares of land - are planted to seven varieties including Cabernet-Sauvignon, Cabernet Franc, Merlot, Marselan and Chardonnay.

Due to the local climate, particularly the cold in the winter, its vineyards are also home to Vidal,

better known for its production of ice wine in Canada.

Established in 2010, the winery currently produces 100,000 bottles a year and has been rewarded with gold and silver medals at the Concours Mondial de Bruxelles.

Its stature as a wine producer is underscored by the involvement of viticultural expert Zou Fu Lin, who planted the first vines in the Fangshan district of Beijing in 1991. A museum housing bottles of wine from around the world also seeks to enhance the wine experience for visitors.



# Chateau Niandu – More than just wine

Funhill Les Millesimes vineyard is located east of the village of Nanbaidai Zhang Fang Town and belongs to the Chinese group Sigma whose core business is residential construction and IT.

The estate covers a total area of approximately 87 hectares, including the 20,000 m2 footprint of the chateau itself, the 3,000 m2 cellar and the 60-hectare vineyard.

The vineyard is divided into eastern and western regions by a natural valley. Depending on the geological conditions, the appropriate varieties are planted using two techniques: a planting density of 3,300 vines/ha using 3x1 spacing and

9,000 vines/ha using 1.5x0.75 spacing like in Bordeaux.

Pruning is from single basal shoots. The main wine grape varieties planted here are Marselan, Cabernet Franc and Merlot, and more wine grape varieties suitable for the region will continue to be introduced. The estate harvested its first crop in 2015.

Les Millesimes Vineyard not only grows vines and produces wines, it offers dining, entertainment, culture and leisure facilities as a high-end wine club.



# Chateau Wode – Unique hillside vineyards

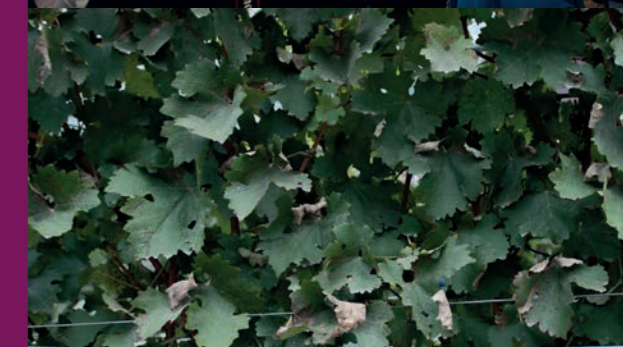
Château Wode is located in the Zhangfang county of Fangshan. Established in 2011, it boasts 130 acres of vineyards planted to Beimei and Beihong, Chinese hybrids obtained in 1954 by cross-breeding Muscat of Hamburg and vitis amurensis, a species native to Asia.

Surrounded by steep hillsides, it is the only vineyard in Fangshan to be planted on an incline with a significant 110 metres difference in elevation.

Here, it produces 100,000 bottles a year, including its semi-sweet Beimei offering which won a Concours Mondial de Bruxelles award for the 2015 vintage.

The wine shows a fresh floral nose of rose, emphasising its semi-sweet character, and a finish tinged with sourness that is attractive in this context.

## WINERY VISIT



Fangshan wineries are not only making strides in quality, they also have a clear vision of how to develop wine tourism.