

HONG KONG: WINE GROWTH TRIGGERS NEW EDUCATION DEMANDS

CONFERENCES

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One of the few tax-free wine markets in the world, Hong Kong has emerged as a hub for global trade in wine, but also as a significant market in its own right. **Dr Murray Mackenzie**, a professor at the School of Hotel & Tourism Management at the Hong Kong Polytechnic University, explained the links between greater penetration of wine and the need for more advanced education solutions.

The rapid growth in Chinese wine consumption – from just 0.25 litres per capita per year in 2002 to an estimated 1.9/2 litres in 2015 – has prompted greater need for education, amongst consumers and the trade. The same is true of Hong Kong where total wines sales by volume rose by 5% in 2015 to 15 million litres and are expected to grow by a further 4%. The 6% increase in Champagne sales in 2015 and 3% average unit price growth are all signs of healthy market development, with Moët Hennessy Diageo Hong Kong leading total volume sales of wine in 2015.

The increased popularity of wine has led to the emergence of dedicated events such as the Wine & Dine Fest and a greater desire by consumers to understand the product, sparking the need for more qualified staff.

There are currently 54,518 full-time employees with major duties related to wine in Hong Kong, over half in a managerial or supervisory capacity. But there are also significant vacancies for trained staff, with needs estimated at 8.4%, more than 20% of which are in western restaurants.

In response to this, Hong Kong has broadened its range of training opportunities, now offering 193 different wine-related courses conducted by 98 training providers; over 32,800 places are available.

Courses do not simply focus on basic sommelier-type education but at the top-end can even include hands-on winemaking, as with the MSc

in wine management. Predictably, WSET has a significant presence in Hong Kong and China, though teaching is also provided by universities, colleges and other organisations. However, whilst the industry is fully aware of the need to train staff, only 27% of establishments were doing so in 2015.

Millenials cause shift in education requirements

Looking forward, involvement by younger consumers in wine drinking is leading to a shift in education requirements, with many enthusiasts seeking courses.

Millenials are enjoying the entire wine experience and not just tasting. They appreciate the quality of the welcome and interaction with staff, are averse to intimidating environments, have a thirst for knowledge and are looking for more flexible wine experiences. Value for money is their holy grail, often pushing them towards the New World countries.

Dr Murray Mackenzie believes that food and wine pairing is pivotal to growth in red and white wine and that wine cellars and specialists will be crucial in introducing new products and varieties, already evidenced by a surge in independent specialists.

All of these emerging trends make professionalism, knowledge and improved sales service key for future growth.