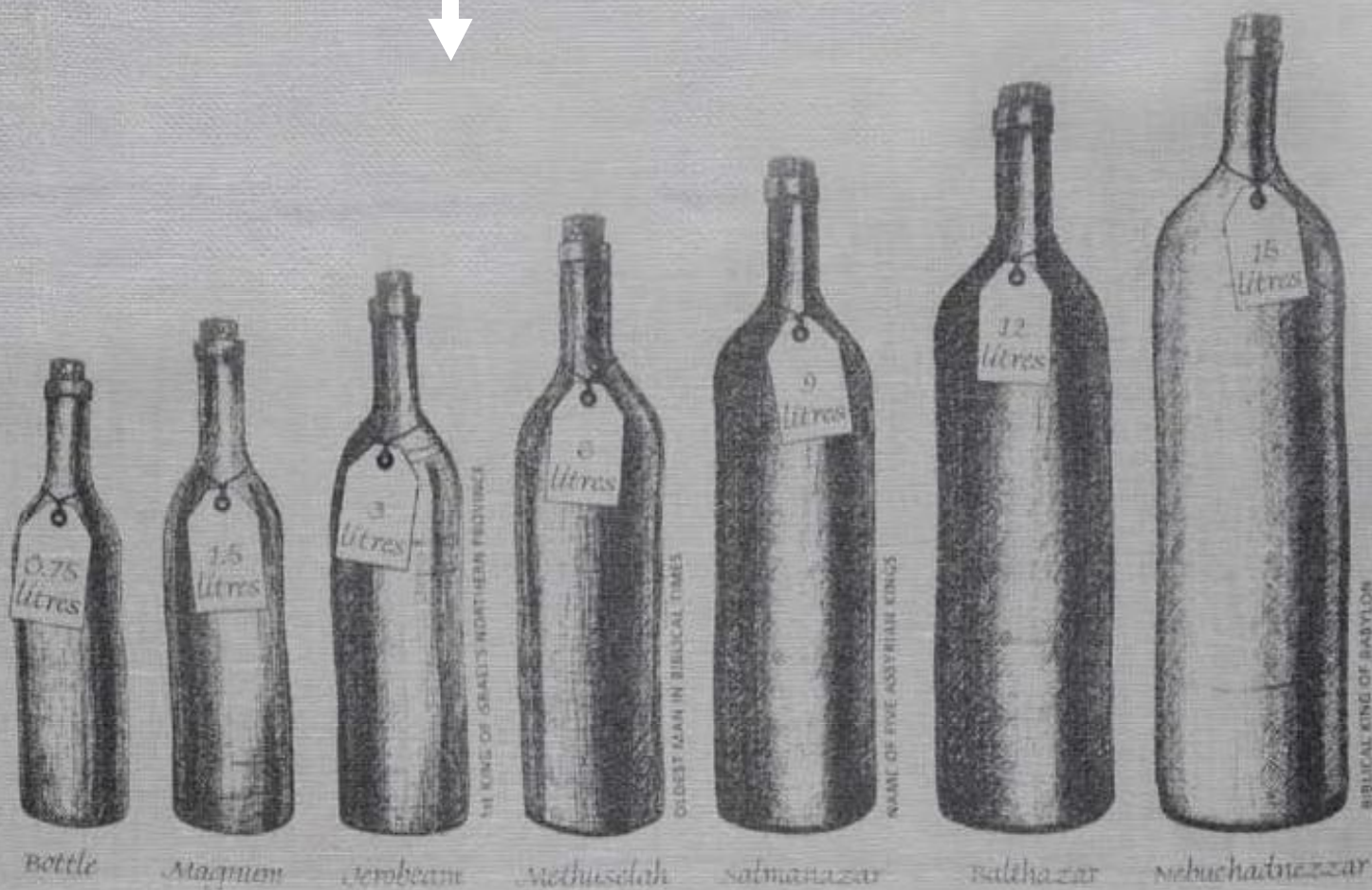


# FROM DOWN TO UNDER TO UP ABOVE



DESPITE THE INCREASING AWARENESS OF AN EVOLVED AND 'NEW' AUSTRALIAN WINE LANDSCAPE, HOW IS THE ASIAN MARKET RECEIVING IT, AND WHAT IS NEEDED FOR MARKETS TO GET ACQUAINTED WITH THIS NEW IMAGE? LIM HWEE PENG, CSW, FWS, AN ACCREDITED AUSTRALIAN WINE EDUCATOR AS WELL AS A SCHOLARSHIP RECIPIENT OF THE INAUGURAL AUSTRALIA LANDMARK TUTORIALS, SHARES HIS VIEW.

The Australia Network announced, on 13 April 2012, their intention to expand their broadcast in Asia Pacific region, and play a growing role as a diplomatic tool. Already broadcast via satellite to 44 countries including Indonesia, Malaysia, India, China and Singapore, such development will put The Australia Network on par with other established broadcast services in Asia continent, such as Britain's BBC World Service and Germany's Deutsche Welle. Such outreach will also lead to a deeper engagement with the region, presenting various positive images of Down Under, including a culturally-diverse identity. I found this news, although directly unrelated to our topic of discussion, offers similarity to the position and direction that Wine Australia and the wider Australian wine industry are managing i.e. spreading the words on what is "the new Australian wine" internationally, especially in the Asia Pacific region. "Sunshine in a glass" – that one-liner represents, succinctly, a past era in the evolvement of Australian wines that started brilliantly from the 1980s, and found itself needing to re-invent itself by mid to late-1990s. A 'new' Australian wine industry has since emerged from years of self-reflection, intense market engagement exercises, and cross-learning with the classic as well as established New World wine countries. With so much occurring and most of the evolvement already taken place, it is thus vital that this new image of Australia wine land, and its progressive wine style, must reach out effectively to the international markets in ensuring the sustenance of Canberra's future wine growth. Yet, challenges are aplenty in engaging the international market on this new identity, especially in the diverse and complex Asia continent.

### The Past & Present

In some of the wine tasting panels that I sat on, I have come across unwarranted remarks on Australian wines – "known only for Shiraz", "fruit bowl in a bottle" were some of those misguided comments. One of the main reasons for such interpretation was the inability to fathom, or a state of ignorance to the history and growth of Australian wines. In order to appreciate the present growth and status of Australian wines (as well as its wine style), it is vital to revisit its past. In less than half a century, Australia has transformed its wine landscape from one of a fortified nature, to a wine land that produces handcrafted wines, which could reflect regional nuances in its expression; as well as producing regional wines that could stand proudly next to bottles from other classic wine producers. Up till the 1960's,

approximately 80 percent of Australian-made wines were fortified wines. Under the influence of post-World War II migrants from Europe, who also brought along their culture of enjoying food with Still Wines (i.e. fermented white and red grape varietal-based wines), consumption trends swung gradually away from fortified bottles. By mid-1970s, demand for Still Wines increase sharply, and that trend continued on through the decade of 1980. Not only was domestic demand established during that period, Australian wines also began to export their bottles internationally. Export demand swell exponentially, and by 1990s, Australia became a net exporter of wine; with domestic market occupying approximately or near 40 percent of its total production, while the other 60 plus percent were exported. Today, Australia with just four percent of total world wine production is the fourth largest exporter by volume behind four traditional wine-producing giants of Italy, France and Spain.

### Uniqueness Of Australia Wine & Its Industry

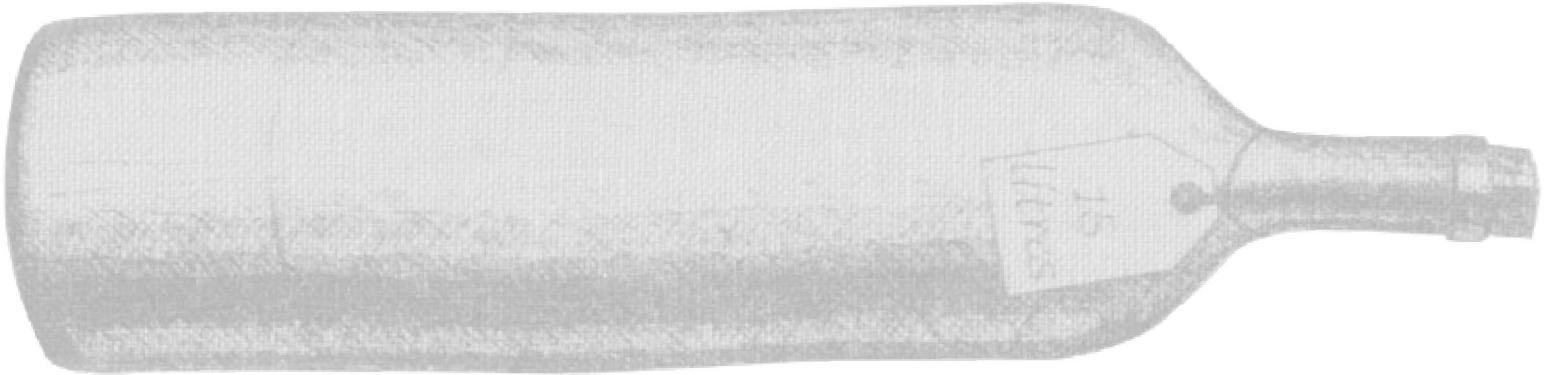
The existence of many world renowned research and educational facilities, such as the National Wine Centre (Adelaide) and the National Wine and Grape Centre, were some of the 'secrets' for Australia's speedy ride (in less than four decades) to the pinnacle as a top wine producing nation in both quantity and quality. That advantage led to Australia's current and next generation of winemakers and viticulturists possessing some of the soundest technical skills necessary to allow unbridled expression of their creative spirit in a competitive landscape. Also, Australia is such a large country that almost every climate and soil type can be found in the five major wine-producing states, namely Western Australia, South Australia, Victoria, New South Wales and Tasmania. Such diversity contributes to the production of almost all wine types that consumers are fond of; from red to white wines, sweet wines to sparkling wines, and fortified wines. The diverse micro and macro climatic conditions allow unique wine styles to be crafted from both known varietals, as well as new varietals planted to suitable soil and weather. Australia also has some of the oldest vine plants in the world. When many of Europe's established vineyards were destroyed by phylloxera in the late-1800s, the handful of survivors were those vines brought to Australia. Another agent of change in a new Australia wine land is the adoption and practices of environment-friendly and quality-conscious vinification methods, such as organic farming and biodynamic viticulture, were embraced in the wineland.

## Spreading “New Australia Wine Rocks!” To International Markets

So what is the 'new' Australia wineland like? For one, the image of Australian vigneron producing only a single wine style (rich, jammy fruit) through a single varietal (Shiraz) has become a thing of the past; although, some producers continue to offer those wines for a segment of consumers. These days, each region is focusing on handcrafting a wine that reflects its regional climatic condition aided by its unique soil composition. Wines are also made in the stylistic direction rather than purely an expression of its varietal. Increasingly, grapes that thrive well in the unique regional climate (at micro, meso and macro levels) are used in crafting the 'new' Australia wines. Example, a Shiraz-based wine in Barossa

“Therefore, the 'New Australia' is not a product of revolution; rather, it is an evolution one.”

Lim Hwee Peng, CSW, FWS



Valley vis-à-vis one that is made in Adelaide Hills and Hunter Valley, would offer different flavour spectrum and nuances. Similarly for Chardonnay made in Margaret River, Mornington Peninsula and Tasmania, this neutral-varietal would express itself differently, too. Therefore, the 'new' Australia is not a product of revolution; rather, it is an evolution one. How then do we get that complex chunk of information and images to the international markets? Without presenting the entire Wine Australia strategy and activities, I have highlighted two initiatives that are making waves in the wine world. In reaching out to both consumers and trade professionals, Wine Australia has sought out suitable and appropriate candidates from various key markets, then proceed to certify gatekeepers and qualified professionals as wine educators delivering wine courses to create awareness on the emergence of a 'new' Australia. This subtle, but effective approach can be painstakingly slow in delivering a convincing outcome. However, it is an approach that requires patience as it

does deliver result in the long run. Additionally, Wine Australia has also organised visits, workshops, mass-tasting session as well as participation in international wine exhibition to satisfy the immediate to medium-term needs. In engaging the fine wine and super-premium segment of the international market, a groundbreaking initiative, emulating the late Lens Evans Tutorial, was mooted. Internationally renowned and established wine professionals, ranging from wine journalist, sommeliers, educators, consultants, food and beverage and hotel professionals were awarded the Australia Landmark Tutorial Scholarship. Those scholars then experienced a week of intense immersion course on the past, present and future of Australian wines through tutorial, masterclasses and winery visits in key wine-producing regions. Such tutorial titled "Landmark Tutorials" was also conducted on an ad-hoc basis in selected international markets to maximise the outreach.

## Challenges Of Updating 'New' Australia In Asia

Much of the initiatives, in engaging international markets, were corporate-like, or at best, tried and tested methods were adopted. In my encounters with several visits to Down Under, I discovered that some of the best engagement tools were already in existence domestically, but was untapped. Whether it is engaging the upper echelon of the wine world, trade professionals or consumers, various existing initiatives in the different Australian states should be looked into for potential application in international market. These are some of the obvious choices:

### *Gave Us A Show!*

There are several wine shows organised in each state and sub-regions annually, this platform is an excellent stage to showcase Australian wines quickly and memorably to the professionals. There are also small-scale wine shows that could form part of the wine experience for both professionals and consumers. Besides inviting participants to visit Down Under for those wine competitions, the wine shows can also be considered to be brought to the various markets to create awareness, and create potential commercial opportunities.

### *Show Us Your Platform!*

Established trade and consumer wine publications such as *Gourmet Travellers Wine* and *Wine Staté* can also be considered as a means or tool to be employed for a desired outcome. As part of the outreach efforts, those publishing titles can consider either work with the selected markets on representation, or to include representatives in their pages and columns. The suggested linkage would add breadth to its contents, and also create a direct and constant engagement with the regional market. Even wine books published by individuals, such as James Halliday MW, Jeremy Oliver and Nick Stock (just to name a few) could include some Asian wine professionals for their views or comments on the wines selected. An Asian linkage on those platforms lends much width and relevance to both the publication and the targeted markets.

### *Show Us The People!*

Outside of Australia, a handful of eminent wine figures were noted. Yet besides Halliday and Oliver, very little is known about the young guns such as Stock, Matthew Jukes, Campbell Mattinson, Philip Rich, and Tyson Stelzer (I am certain those few names are just the tip of the iceberg). Those folks will be able to engage and attract a new pool of

Australia wine imbibers, a move that will favourably impact on the next lap of growth for Australian wines. There are also a group of young and established Australian sommeliers, which should be brought out to Asia and allow a deeper and direct engagement with the markets.

### *Show Us The Wine!*

When I put on my hat as the representative of Australia as an accredited wine educator as well as a scholar of the much acclaimed "Landmark Tutorials", the oft-heard comments were 'Yes, we do hear of the great wines in Australia, but we do not see nor experience enough of them here in Asia?!' Be it due to rarity reasons or minute quantity, it is paramount that the market gets to experience those beautiful and classy wines. Show the market some of the gems from Victoria, Barossa, McLaren Vale, Tasmania, showcased them to the international market, which deserve a glimpse of those Australian wine jewels.

### *Show Us A Good Time!*

The Australians is thoroughly familiar with activities organised in wine regions or wine entities, as those lifestyle activities were hosted almost all year round. Some of those activities include concerts in vineyards or wineries (Leeuwin Estate comes to mind), food and wine fairs (such as Melbourne Food & Wine Festival), awards programmes (such as Gourmet Traveller Wine Best Wine List programme), even unique activities such as Wine & Music organised by *Gourmet Traveller Wine* will keep both direct and indirect stakeholders in the wine world deeply enthralled.

## In Conclusion...

'Telling' might achieve certain outreach when it is seen as a commercial product, however, wine is also part of a cultural experience, hence, the best way to promote it is through 'show and tell'...and don't keep the best to yourself, share with us! LHP, CSW, FWS

About the columnist: Mr Lim Hwee Peng, CSW, FWS  
A Singaporean wine lover and a perpetual student of wine, Lim stresses on continuous wine learning as a sustainable means in increasing professionalism and career growth; leading by example, Hwee Peng, a Certified Specialist in Wines, has been diligently acquiring international certifications through programs in Bordeaux, Burgundy, Napa Valley, Spain, Australia, and recently graduating from the French Wine Scholar program. The learning did not stop in the classroom; he also picked up valuable lessons in international wine judging. These days, besides coaching the program participants in the Certified Specialist in Wines (CSW) and Certificate in Wine Studies (CWS) programs, he writes for *Cuisine & Wine Asia*, a trade publication, and muses about his wine journey in his wine blog [www.drinkgoodwines.com](http://www.drinkgoodwines.com)

