

WORLD BULK WINE EXHIBITION

BULKING UP

The World Bulk Wine Exhibition in Amsterdam is going from strength to strength. WBM was there.

WORDS DAN TRAUCKI



The world of wine is 'bulking up' as more and more wine is being sold and/or shipped in bulk to be bottled at its destination. This significantly reduces the wine's carbon footprint and creates considerable savings on the final cost of the wine. Shipping in bulk allows for 24,000 litres of wine to be shipped in a 20-foot container, as opposed to 10,584 litres of bottled wine in a 20-foot container along with about 5.5 tonnes of glass. Some of Australia's biggest commercial brands are shipped to Europe in bulk and then bottled over there, for distribution throughout Europe.

The best place to see 'bulking up' in action is in Amsterdam at the start of December each year, when the World Bulk Wine Exhibition (WBWE) is held; 2019 was its eleventh year and it was bigger, brighter and better than ever.

Unfortunately in Australia the word 'bulk' is synonymous with 'cheap and nasty', whereas in the rest of the wine world it simply means wine that is sold by its producer in bulk rather than in bottle. This is especially so in Europe where they have hundreds of wine co-operatives who receive grapes from thousands of small grower/owners, turn it into wine and then sell it *en masse* to supermarket chains to use for their own brands, or they export it to buyers in other countries. These European co-operatives were established a long time ago, so that small acreage grapegrowers could get their wine made. Over time as the volumes grew they began to sell the resultant wine in bulk to interested parties. A typical co-operative can have anywhere from two/three hundred members/owners up to well over a thousand for the really big ones. Until the turn of the century most of these co-operatives made wines that were of lowest common denominator in quality, as they accepted all of the grapes from all of their members with no significant rules or standards. However, in more recent times, in order to survive, they have increasingly had input into the viticultural practices of their members. They have introduced quality standards and wine grading systems so that they have significantly raised the quality of the wines they produce and sell.

Today there is a significant quantity of premium and super-premium wine available for sale on the bulk wine market. Yes, there is

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still a sea of bland, ordinary bulk wine for sale as well, but those are not the sort of wines which come to be showcased at WBWE.

The 2019 exhibition included 450 producers exhibiting wines from 24 countries and it was attended by more than 6,000 wine industry buyers and executives from 60 different nations. It is the only event that brings together buyers and sellers of about 80 percent of the world's bulk wine trade.

Each year they conduct the International Bulk Wine Competition (IBWC), which is open to any wine from around the world that has a volume of over 10,000 litres produced in order to be sold in bulk. The IBWC is judged by an international panel of 25 judges from 18 countries. We judges were divided up into five panels of five, each with a chairman. The scoring is done using iPads - a brilliant system so long as none of the iPads crash. Each judge enters their score on their iPad and the chairman then accepts the results or asks the judges to review them if there is a wide variation in the scores. There were plenty of silver, gold and a few grand gold (equivalent to a trophy) medals handed out. The results were announced just before the official opening of the exhibition. Out of just under 250 entries, the judges awarded four grand gold medals, 43 gold medals and a number of silver medals.

The grand gold medals were awarded to:

- Dee Vine Estate Chardonnay 2019 - (Australia). This is the second year in a row that an Australian winery has won the only double gold for Chardonnay.
- Bodegas Vinival - Moscatel de Alejandria 2018 (Spain).

- Grupo Penaflo - Malbec Premium 2018 (Argentina).
- Les Vignerons de Montfrin - Cote du Rhone Grenache Syrah 2019 - near Avignon, France.

Apart from the wine competition, and the bulk wine trading, the WBWE also conducts a number of excellent seminars and workshops over the two days of the event, covering topic such as climate change, the environment and potential business opportunities, all of which are crucial to the survival and growth of the bulk wine trade. Some of the seminars included:

- African wines: a business project - an overview and new perspective on wine in Africa.
- Chinese wine and Chinese wine regions - with a tasting of four Chinese wines including a Marselan, the variety that is touted to possibly become China's mainstay, like Shiraz is here. Marselan is a cross between Cabernet Sauvignon and Grenache.
- Tannat and other grape varieties - Uruguay, an exporting country. This was an insight into the wine industry in Uruguay and why they are so active in the export arena.
- Wine trends in Italy - covered six current trends but was mainly focused on the raging success of Prosecco.
- Moldovan wines blending - a solution to get awareness on global markets. This included how they are producing wine blends of classic varieties and native varieties. There was a tasting of five very presentable wines, especially the Carpe Diem Bad Boys 2017, a



- smashing blend of Feteasca Negra and Saperavi (three gold medals). Big and powerful yet slick and sophisticated.
- The world is canning – an interesting look at the US can history since 1996 plus current perspective on wines in cans, including a tasting of several canned wines.
- Argentina beyond Malbec – an interesting presentation and tasting of some of the new blends being produced using Malbec.

One of the great features of the WBWE is 'The Silent Room' – a vast open area where wines are lined up by variety/blend on long trestle tables for you to taste in peace and quiet, without the presence of any salespeople or marketers. You can taste almost all of the wines that are at the exhibition and compare the same variety not only from different producers, but also from all the different nations participating.

Wading past a sea of Sauvignon Blanc, Pinot Grigio, Chardonnay, Cabernet Sauvignon and Merlot from around the world, one encounters some really interesting wines. There were five samples of Ancellota (native Italian red) which were all bright purple, had lovely herbal aromas with uber tasty palates and a tight grippy finish. Very appealing wines.

The varieties that really stood out in this line-up were mainly the emerging varieties, as there were a smaller number of samples and they seemed to have had more TLC put into them.

In the whites the stand-out was Verdejo from Rueda in Spain, with all four samples being excellent wines. Likewise with the very rare Gross Manseng from France, which had a great crunchy green apple flavour. The various Chenin Blanc from South Africa were darn good, as were the couple of Pecorino from Italy.

In the reds there was a far greater number

of interesting wines on show. These included some lovely juicy/jubbly Grenache from Languedoc, delightful Granacha Tintorera from Spain, interesting Feteasca Nera from Macedonia and Moldova, the rare Bobal from Spain and many of the wines in the plethora of Argentine Malbec. There was certainly no dearth of quality wines with which one could create a blend to suit any palate anywhere around the world.

The big focus was on the east of Europe with Moldova having a massive stand. North Macedonia also had a large stand, with Romania, Czech Republic, Georgia, Slovakia and Bulgaria also having stands. Most of their wines were made from the usual classic or mainstream varieties like Chardonnay, Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot and Shiraz. They were good commercial wines but nothing to get too excited about – that is, same old same old – and would need to be sold more on price than sheer quality. However, at both the Macedonian and Moldova stands I tasted some excellent wines made from the region's native varieties. In the whites, Feteasca Alba and Feteasca Ragala while in the reds it was Feteasca Negra, Vranec and Kadarka. There is also a growing trend of blending native varieties with classical varieties to create a point of difference; so far it seems to be working.

Australia was represented by 10 traders: Kingston Estate Wines from the Riverland, Austwine (Adelaide-based wine brokers), Braid Group (Flexitankers) CW Wine Coonawarra, Dee Vine Estate Griffith, LCW from the Limestone Coast, Winegrapes Australia, Winefinder Australia from the Barossa, Qualia from Sunraysia and the South Australia Wine Group also from the Riverland. Well, actually 11, as Ciatti Wines Australia was there as part of their big global stand.

All the Aussies had very good quality wines, with the standouts for me being, in no particular order:

- Dee Vine Estate 2019 Chardonnay – grand gold winner, an utterly smashing Chardy.
- Kingston Estate Clare 2019 Shiraz – a delectable wine from their newly acquired vineyard.
- Winegrapes Australia McLaren Vale 2019 A Grade Shiraz – a pretty nifty wine.
- Auswine SEA 2019 Cabernet Sauvignon – amazing quality for an SEA Cab.
- SA Winegroup Barossa 2018 Shiraz – drop-dead gorgeously drinkable.
- CW Wines Coonawarra 2019 Cabernet Sauvignon – classic Coonawarra Cab.
- Dee Vine Estate Riverina 2017 Durif – a truly delicious Riverina Durif. I'll drink that any time!

For the first time I saw a New Zealand stand, where Giesen wines were offering a tasting of Sauvignon Blanc and Pinot Noir.

The WBWE is attended by most of the wine industry's leading bulk wine sellers, shippers and buyers from around the globe. It has become so successful that as the world's bulk wine focus goes shifting from Europe to Asia (especially to China), WBWE in May last year conducted its first Asian exhibition (WBWEA) in the city of Yantai in China. It was the first ever bulk wine exhibition to be held in Asia and it was almost as spectacular as the sensational WBWE in Amsterdam is each year.

Stop Press: Kingsland Drinks in the UK has formed a partnership with Soul Tree Wines in India and will be importing bulk wine from India to be bottled in the UK and sold through Indian restaurants. The initial offer will be of one white wine and one red wine, with a view to expand the range over time. ♦

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