Italian wine: a symbol of Made in Italy lifestyle in China

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Through his passion and dedication he has been supporting for years the export and communication of Italian wines in Hong Kong and China markets. For his great patronage to the Italian wine sector in Hong Kong markets, in fact, he recently received the honor of Knight of the Star of Italy.

He illustrated to us the different facets of the colorful Chinese market, where Made in Italy wine has what it takes to represent the art of Italian lifestyle. However, a long-term

strategy is needed, based on luxury marketing, aimed at cohesion between the two cultures and at generating desires and emotions.

We have seen that you have a terrific experience in the wine industry. Can you tell us more about your experience and your passion for the world of wine?

My experience with the wine industry grew out of my passion for wine, in particular with italian wines. This passion comes from my deep belief that wine is for pleasure and that pleasure builds bridges: to places, to time past, but most importantly to people. I learned a lot from italians in that regard (my wife is italian): wine for me is a wonderful media for conviviality and for sharing.

From this passion, I decided to focus my efforts on wine communication and the organisation of wine events. Along the way, I acquired various wine qualifications. especially dear to me, since 2009, i have been a Certified Educator of the WSET. This motivated me to study for the Master of Wine exam and through this process, I travelled all over the world to explore a great many wine regions and to meet the people behind the labels and learn their perspectives. Throughout these travels and with my exposure to China (as an entrepreneur in the export sector), I started to develop strong ideas on the importance of storytelling in wine marketing but not as the telling of stories but rather as the generating of emotions through stories.

As VIA Ambassador, what are the educational activities aimed at promoting Italian wine and what contribution can the figure of MW make to encourage the recovery of the sector?

The figure of an MW and also those who are currently preparing for this difficult exam have something very important to contribute to the Italian wine industry. They can bring a

global perspective to the table which can help steer the Italian wine industry towards a modern trajectory. In the MW program, there is a very strong focus on using “examples” to support arguments when writing essays in its five theory exams. These examples are “real-life” case studies that enable the MW Candidate to demonstrate that theoretical concepts must be carefully considered against actual realities on the ground. The program pushes MW Candidates to think deeply about the issues and to broaden their views to approach the market with a global and multifaceted dimension, not only with a regional-specific point of view.

This approach can be very useful for the Italian wine industry as it can help to tackle the problems from a fresh angle. The key for the recovery of the sector is not to copy what others are doing but rather to find inspiration from them to create new solutions while still respecting and valorizing the traditions, authenticity and unicity of Italian wines. Many producers in Italy think their competitor is their immediate neighbor when in fact their competitors are actually 10,000 kilometers away. To understand these wine realities far away and to understand how Italian wines sit next to these realities will be key to be effective in the coming years, especially in the sophisticated and complex markets of Asia in general and China in particular.

With regard to China, what is the actual context/situation of the post Covid-19 wine market and what interesting new trends have emerged?

I believe that to be successful in China, we must understand its relationship with luxury. I read recently that Bain & Company predicts that Chinese consumers will account for nearly ½ of the world’s luxury consumption by 2025. just this morning, the Agenzia ICE announced that in Q1 of this year fashion exports from Italy to China increased by 175%! The reason for these trends is that Chinese consumers feel

inspired by Italian luxury and such products give them a strong sense that they can enrich the quality of their lifestyle.

For several years, I have advocated a different approach to this fascinating market: in China, wine is not a need (a commodity), it is a want (a desire). Therefore the luxury marketing model is the right, and perhaps the only, approach for success. The essence of luxury is to offer extreme value. In this context, value is not the relationship between price and quality. In luxury marketing, value is the degree to which a wine can generate a deep emotion. Just as italian fashion inspires chinese consumers in feeling good about themselves, italian wines must convince consumers that they can inspire the same.

Many believe that Chinese consumers need education to appreciate the wines of Italy. I strongly disagree! Chinese consumers do not want education, they want inspiration. Therefore, for Italian wines to succeed in China, we must sell less wine and sell more. In other words, let's extract from our wines, its regions, and traditions its true essence and let's learn to tell stories that generate emotions, not stories that describe a product. It is not product features that sell in China, it is the lifestyle it represents. The Italian art of living is perhaps the most sought after in the world and Italian wine is without a doubt one of the greatest symbol of this art of living.

Is the 'diversity' in Italian wine production perceived by Chinese customers? Or should wineries improve their communication strategy?

We should not be afraid of diversity, in fact, I believe that we should embrace it. This diversity represents a rich tradition and a history full of fascinating elements that can capture the imagination of consumers and generate strong and

most importantly authentic emotions. It is this diversity that differentiate Italian wines from the rest. However, as I hinted above, we should communicate in the context of what this diversity represents (a lifestyle) and how that diversity is a symbol of sophistication and culture, which it is. it must be an element of inspiration and not an easy excuse for education.

China and Italy are actually quite similar in this way: both countries have a rich and tumultuous history that spans millennials, both have an incredibly diverse and proud cuisine, a strong regional identification including a long list of dialects still spoken today in various corners of its territory. Both crave the emotion that deep traditions inspire. we must approach China as a collection of diverse cultures and people, not as a monolithic and standardised country. the diversity of Italian wines can only mean that it will eventually meet its match in what is in fact an incredibly diverse country that is China.

Can you tell us more about the positioning of Italian products in the Chinese wine market? What prospects for the future and what strategy do you recommend to Italian wineries in order to reach Chinese consumers more effectively?

China, because of its huge size and complexity, requires not only a lot of patience and time, but also a lot of financial and human resources. A winery must have a perspective of at least 5-6 years before it can hope to recover its investments by showing a strong commitment to the country.

In case a winery is not ready to commit so much in the short term, it can already start this work here from Italy by means of the web, by creating a website in Chinese language or by preparing an offer targeted to Chinese tourists. In this regard, I expect that once travel to Europe resumes, many young Chinese couples will begin to travel alone and without a

group. These tourists will look for experiences and a way to connect with local cultures, valuing companies that will try to understand their culture and their special needs. Wine is a perfect medium for this.

Another strategy that can help to pave the way for the success of a small and medium winery is the commitment of big wineries in the Chinese market. These large producers, with their resources, have the ability to not only build their position in the market but also capture the imagination of consumers about the entire appellation.

This will generate more requests for the wines of the appellation and, in turn, will trigger competitive activities among Chinese importers to look for new producers. In other words, the success of big producers will set in motion a virtuous cycle for the whole appellation.

There are no shortcuts to China’s markets. A producer must be committed with a long-term vision and demonstrate sensitivity to the colorful Chinese market, striving to understand its cultural characteristics.