

NINGXIA WINERY

# WINE WITH A PASSPORT

China's giant Changyu winery is ready to change the global reputation of Chinese wines, making a big splash in Europe with vintages from its Ningxia chateau, **Mike Peters** reports.

**B**arrel No 1 is almost chocolatey, softer than any of the others. Barrel No 2 is more macho, the flavor long and spicy. "Too much, of course," says consulting winemaker Lenz Moser from Austria, who was in the Ningxia Hui autonomous region for a barrel tasting last fall. "But it will age well, getting smoother while adding power."

Fast-forward to last month, when two years of cossetting in six different French oak barrels was complete, and deft blending by in-house winemaker Fan Xi had produced the 2013 Chateau Changyu Moser XV. One of Europe's top distributors has signed on after a barrel tasting, and hopes to make deals with two other Ningxia wineries. Meanwhile, thousands of carefully selected corks arrive from France, and an eager parade of glass bottles sails along a Changyu conveyor belt.

By the time you read this, five different premium wines — 65,000 bottles — will be on their way to the finest restaurant tables in Europe.

## Evolving wines

Changyu was founded in 1892 in Yantai, Shandong province, by a veteran Chinese diplomat named Zhang Bishi. The company's name is formed from his surname Zhang (Chang) and the Chinese character that means prosperity.

Zhang, a vineyard enthusiast from his wide travels, had big ideas for what was a novelty business in China. By 2011, Changyu Pioneer Wine Company was among the 10 largest wine companies in the world, producing more than 90,000 tons of wine that year. Now a stock-listed corporate giant, the company has holdings in France and Spain, with eyes on other acquisitions.

Despite a slump in 2014, China continues to be a fast-growing market for wine, with consumption per capita doubling between 1995 and 2010 to 1.2 liters. That is still 40 times less than consumption in France, where wine drinking is actually declining, so the potential in China is huge.

For most of its short life, the Chinese wine market has grown faster than producers could keep up. Commercial giants like Changyu had little need to produce vintages of superior quality when making wine fast and cheap generated quick sales. Graced with European-style chateaux, Changyu vineyards now sprawl across millions of hectares in the Xinjiang Uygur autonomous region (its biggest operation), Liaoning (where it makes a lauded ice wine) and Shaanxi (with what may be the largest wine cellar in Asia) provinces.

However, China's biggest companies took notice when boutique wineries sprang up in Ningxia and created what has become a Napa Valley wannabe, a wine zone that would feed a thirst for quality instead of quantity. When labels like Jia Bei Lan (made by Helan Qingxue) and Pretty Pony (Kanaan) started scooping up international awards and tributes, the value of that effort became plain.

## Surprising quality

Convincing French people to drink Chinese wine might sound like the punchline of a joke, Moser acknowledges with a smile.

But in the 1960s, California wines were shrugged off as "mouthwash," until a pioneer

named Robert Mondavi changed perceptions by developing Opus One and other vintages with some French collaboration.

"For another benchmark, consider that New Zealand wines started at zero 40 years ago," says Moser. "What you see in Ningxia today is really the product of just 10 seriously dedicated years."

"Ningxia is China's No 1 estate wine region," says Li Xueming, director of the Administration of Development of Grape Industry of Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region, "because we were the first to follow international wine standards."

Li notes that there is a government push to integrate tourism into every level of its wine industry. In an area still dominated by coal, Ningxia's 184 wineries now represent 20 billion yuan in annual revenue from plantings on 610,000 mu (40,666 hectares). China's latest Five-Year Plan calls for growth to 300 wineries generating 50 billion yuan from 1 million mu planted.

In fact, Changyu has already achieved a small international foothold. In the cellar here in Ningxia, there is a barrel signed with the big black scrawl of Jasper Morris of Berry Bros & Rudd, a big buyer in Europe and holder of a royal warrant in Britain's capital. "Berry Bros in London has eight buyers, all masters of wine — the company was the first to take on our chateau in Europe," Moser says happily.

"Changyu is China's oldest biggest and best winemaker, with state-of-the-art equipment," he says of his partnership with the company. "They obviously had great market potential, but lacked international experience in both winemaking and marketing."

"Ninety percent of its business is in China, and that's not going to change fast," Moser observes.

But the winery wants a global reach to enhance its reputation at home, Moser says.

Putting Changyu Moser XV on dining tables in the finest hotels in Europe will open a lot of eyes on both sides of the world.

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## Online

Scan the code to read about the company's World Cabernet Gernischt Day.



**If you go**  
Scan the code to read about the company's World Cabernet Gernischt Day.



Top: Austrian winemaker Lenz Moser. Above: The winery of Chateau Changyu Moser XV in the Ningxia Hui autonomous region. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

## THE AUSTRIAN TOUCH

The chateau and its wines are named after the company's Austrian winemaking consultant Laurenz "Lenz" Moser and his family: the Moser lineage can be traced back 15 generations, but it was Lenz Moser's grandfather, Lenz Moser III, who became an icon in the industry for growing grapes horizontally on wires, producing a more uniform and quality harvest, instead of letting vines race for the sky. The winemaking family has since also helped popularize aging in barrique, 225-liter barrels as opposed to commonly used barrels of 400- to 700-liter capacity.

The relatively smaller barrels allow more of the wine to be in direct contact with the wood.

Lenz Moser has been a consultant and winemaking adviser to Changyu since 2005, has been coming to China "in spurts" for most of that decade, but last fall — on his 28th trip to the country, he camped out in Ningxia for a solid three months.

The Chinese corporation unveiled Chateau Changyu Moser XV in Ningxia in 2013, a more than 500-million-yuan (\$77-million) project that took two years to build. It houses an 800-barrique cellar, a high-tech

bottling line and a museum illustrating the history of the company and of winemaking in China.

"The spirit in China excites me to the max — people in Ningxia are hungry for something, but for all that, friendly," he says over a bowl of noodles last week in a local cafe.

"We're still in the early days of wine in China — the pioneering days. It's the Wild West — that's why it's so exciting. In Europe, the formulas are set. Here I have a chance to think outside the box."

Today Moser is playing proud papa, alongside "my good friend

Mr Fan", as the bottles bearing Moser's family name chug along an assembly line. Besides export orders for major European distributors, made their way to the recent London Wine Week and the Vinexpo 2016 in Hong Kong.

But while savoring the winery's five current export offerings, ranging from the white Italian riesling (150 yuan or \$23) to the top red — 2013 Chateau Changyu Moser XV (750 yuan) — he's already looking ahead.

"2013 was a beautiful year for wines here," he says with a sigh. "But 2015 will be even better."

- MIKE PETERS

## UNLIKELY STAR

# Dorm chef graduates to a hungry world

By ASSOCIATED PRESS in New York

As a student at Columbia University, Jonah Reider wowed foodies and rankled city health officials by opening an exclusive supper club in his dorm.

His culinary chutzpah, and the long waiting list for a seat at one of his unorthodox dinners, earned him write-ups in newspapers and magazines and even an appearance on *The Late Show* with Stephen Colbert.

But after graduating recently, the 22-year-old whiz chef from Newton, Massachusetts, is facing the same reality as a lot of other new college grads.

He's looking for a place to live and a way to make a living.

Four months after leaving his dorm, Reider has been booted from the Columbia-owned apartment where he hosted the latest incarnation of his supper club. His eviction comes amid pressure from the university and city health officials, who said he was operating a restaurant under the radar of food inspectors.

"I don't mind if I live in a squalid little New York apartment," Reider says.

His goal is to earn a living staging "wild, crazy events" for companies including, perhaps, fashion houses and hotels.

A few gigs already have started to materialize.

Just a day before he graduated last month, the economics and sociology major cooked up his "experimental cuisine" for 90 guests who gathered at a Fifth Avenue mansion for an evening of music with Grammy-nominated conductor Andrew Cyr and the Metropolitan Ensemble.

He's also lined up to film an online series, appear at a Chicago cooking conference and prepare a series of meals at a Manhattan art gallery, with visitors helping to choose and



Jonah Reider prepares food during Brownstone, an experimental treasure-hunt of sound, taste, and color, in New York. AP

mix ingredients amid artful ceramics and furniture.

Reider's cooking career started when he and his friends at Newton South High School formed a grilling club. He had no formal training in cooking last September when he started his Columbia dorm supper club, which he called Pith, for the white outer part of an orange or lemon.

With a mere four seats around one table and reservations available only online, Pith had no choice but to start small. But after one news outlet dubbed it "New York's hottest new restaurant", the waiting list quickly grew to thousands of wannabe guests.

The Wall Street Journal reported that the school had started getting heat from the Health Department — something about how, apparently, dorm kitchens can't be used to conduct commercial restaurant activity.

Others haven't hesitated to heap praise. The New York Times named him one of its "30 under 30" creative achievers.

As for what the future holds, Reider says has no regrets about breaking from most of his Ivy League classmates and choosing an unconventional path.

## Eat Beat

### BEIJING/CHONGQING

#### Wagyu nights

Billed as Australia's finest dining, award-winning Wagyu by Mayura Station comes to China for two wine-pairing dinners hosted by Penfolds and Melbourne wine guru Kyla Kirkpatrick, also known as The Champagne Dame.

7-11 pm, June 11; 1,750 yuan per person including gift bags; at the Westin Beijing, 7 Dongsanhuan Beilu, Chaoyang district. 010-5922-8888. tickets at [yoopay.cn/event/ausfinedining](http://yoopay.cn/event/ausfinedining).

June 15; 1,550 yuan per person, at JW Marriott Chongqing, 235 Minsheng Road; 023-6379-9999. tickets at [yoopay.cn/event/ausfinediningCQ](http://yoopay.cn/event/ausfinediningCQ).

### BEIJING

#### Flavors of Indonesia

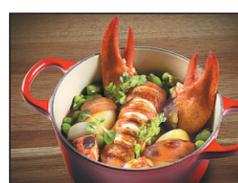


To celebrate the 25th anniversary of the establishment of China-ASEAN relations, ASEAN-China Centre and Beijing Minzu Hotel are hosting the First ASEAN Food Festival — Splendid Indonesia Month through June 24. In addition to a special menu prepared by chefs from Indonesia, each week features different displays of fashion, tourism, music or art. Lunch is 158 yuan net, dinner 188 yuan.

51 Fuxingmennei Street, Xicheng district. 010-6601-4466.

### MACAO

#### Tastes of Asia



Celebrating the expansion of its phase 2 development to a whopping 1.1 million square meters, Galaxy Macao is hosting a month-long Best of Asian Dining event for June. More than 120 restaurants, including several Michelin-award winners in 2015, will allow guests to have a taste of 5,500 types of Asian dishes from 56 cuisines from 19 Chinese provinces and cities plus another 12 countries. The event includes a lobster festival, featuring 37 lobster dishes prepared by both Cantonese chefs from restaurants like Lai Heen and Western chefs. 853-2888-0888.

### SHANGHAI

#### Fine-dining water

After more than three years of preparation, leading Chinese water producer Nongfu Spring is bringing its premium bottled water collection to the tables of fine dining restaurants in Shanghai, including 8 1/2 Otto e Mezzo Bombana, with a Beijing debut planned this month. Sourced from Moya Spring at Changbai Mountain in Jilin province, which is known for its unusually low-sodium light-mineral waters, both the still and sparkling water of the new Nongfu Spring Natural Mineral Water range feature a refreshing and "unaggressive" flavor, ideal for cleansing the palate between dishes.