

GET CREATIVE, SAYS LIBERTY WINES

Wine sales in premium restaurants, hotels, gastropubs and wine bars are thriving, bucking the overall market trend, according to the latest Liberty Wines Premium On-trade Wine Report.

New figures, developed in partnership with CGA Strategy, show that this is largely down to the growth of white wine. In 2015, Sauvignon Blanc and Pinot Grigio together accounted for over a third of the overall sales in the premium on-trade.

Meanwhile, sparkling wine sales continued to grow and outperform the category, with sales up 32.9% by volume and 58.3% by value. Champagne dominates the premium market, with double the volume of prosecco, and at four times the value.

'We believe this is due to more consumers choosing premium venues when dining out, coupled with people spending more on wine when they do,' said Liberty Wines MD David Gleave MW.

'People are drinking less but better, [but] wine is also facing increased competition from craft beers and artisan spirits. We need to work harder to engage consumers, by guiding



consumers to "drink outside the box";' said Gleave.

'We are faced with a significantly weakened pound, which will have an impact on wine prices. It is therefore crucial for us to embrace changes, including the rise in casual dining,' he added.

The research also revealed that Pinot Noir has become the second most successful red variety after Merlot – with a 13% market share.

Chinese wine project 'game changing' says Moser



Lenz Moser has described his sub-£10 Chateau Changyu Moser XV 2015 wine as a 'game changer' for the Chinese wine industry.

'It was tough to make [the management] do it,' said Moser. 'The industry there tends to think the money is at the top end. But sub-£10 is going to make a huge difference.'

Chateau Changyu Moser makes 350,000 bottles of its basic Cabernet Sauvignon, available from Bibendum for £9.54 ex-VAT.

'Wines like this don't exist in China,' commented Moser, 'but others are going to follow our lead.'

At present, all three wines in the range are 100% Cabernet Sauvignon, but Moser sees big potential for blending the French variety Marselan into his basic wine.

'Currently there are just 10 hectares of the grape in Ningxia,' he said, 'but everyone is really excited by it. It can add a lovely softness to the structure of Cabernet, and it would help set the region's wines apart. I think we'll see more of it.'

Cru Bourgeois set for further reform

The Cru Bourgeois du Médoc classification is set to change significantly by 2020. Classification will now be valid for five years, and will extend to include Cru Bourgeois Supérieur and Cru Bourgeois Exceptionnel.

The changes are aimed at encouraging more premium Médoc wines to join the classification. 'We need to have some stars – they'll become the top of the pyramid,' said Armelle Cruse, vice president of the Alliance des Crus Bourgeois.



Ritz scoops Copa Jerez UK

The Ritz fought off strong competition from around the UK to win the seventh edition of the Copa Jerez UK competition. The chef/somm team will now go on to the international finals in Jerez next spring. Second was the Nut Tree Inn, Oxfordshire.



CHILEAN DROUGHT THREAT

Five years of drought have made life difficult for some of Chile's most famous wine regions – and could even put the continued feasibility of some DOs at risk.

Several years of drought have not affected long-established regions such as Maipo and Colchagua, but there are water shortages in Leyda and Casablanca.

'Growers [in Leyda] away from the river are pulling out their vines and putting in walnut trees because of the water scarcity,' said Peter Greet of Luis Felipe Edwards.

Worst affected, however, are the near-desert appellations of Elqui and, particularly, Limarí.

'Limarí is under threat, for sure,' said Grant Phelps, former winemaker at Casas del Bosque. 'The water shortage is definitely going to change the look of Chile's vineyard map.'