

PEOPLE

How Lenz Moser wants to put quality Chinese wine on your wine list

Here's a starter for 10 for you. Have you ever tasted a bottle of Chinese wine? If yes, was it any good and if so worth a place on your wine list? If the answer's no then you are not alone because for all of the talk of Chinese wine we see very little of it here. Austrian winemaker, Lenz Moser, hopes to change all that with his own quality Chinese wine range gunning for a place on your wine list.

By **Richard Siddle**
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Lenz Moser's six-strong Chinese range hopes to establish Chinese wine in both the mainstream off-trade, but also in casual and fine dining restaurants through Bibendum, Walker & Wodehouse and Berry Bros & Rudd.



Lenz Moser: China is simply too “big to fail” when it comes to making quality wine

It's hard to go a week without some article or major new wine report declaring just how important China and Chinese wine is going to be in the future.

It all might make for fascinating reading, but it also feels like a parallel universe. We all know where China is, you can hardly miss it on a world map, but how many of us have actually been there?

For all its importance to the world's future, China remains very much at arm's length, particularly so for those looking to source and buy quality wine from around the world.

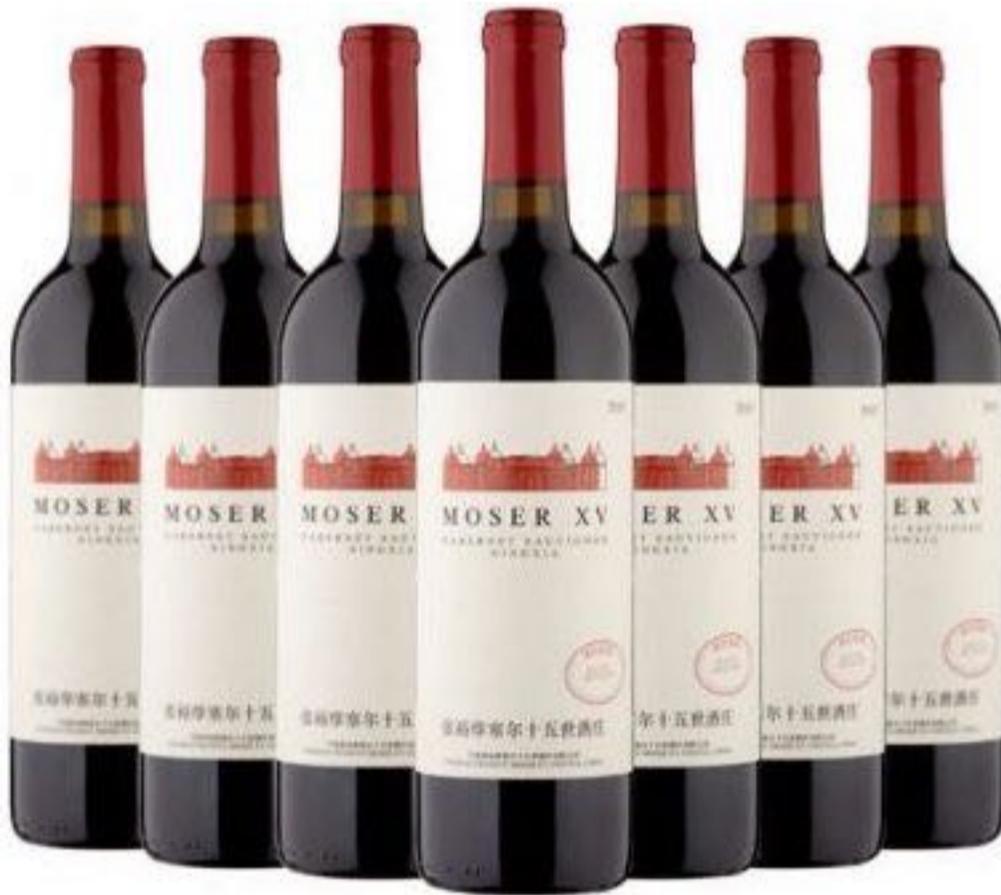
We might need to know what China is up to, but as a serious country to start importing wine from? That still seems some years away.

But are we being too quick to dismiss China as a quality wine producing country just because it is not walking away from our international wine competitions with a horde of gold medals?

Acclaimed Austrian winemaker, Lenz Moser who has built up a world wide reputation for the wines from his Lauren Z winery, certainly thinks we are. He, like so many big names in wine, have been quietly working away, exploring and trailing the possibilities of making great wine in China for many years.

Trust building

In fact Moser first started taking China seriously some 13 years ago. Time he has spent slowly building the trust of the Chinese wine industry that he is there for the right reasons, to help it make better wine, rather than just find a home for his European-produced wine.



Breaking new ground with the Moser XV range

In fact Moser’s motivation for being in China has not been about selling his exported wines there, but in creating his own quality Chinese wine range and brand that can help put China on the world stage

The result is his own Moser range that we can now see gaining listings in UK supermarkets, specialist stores and the premium on-trade.

Moser’s Chinese range came about thanks to a long standing relationship that Moser has built up with Changyu, arguably’s China’s biggest wine producer – producing some 150m bottles a year.

A bond so close that they even named the chateau and winery that he helped them develop in the now key winemaking district of Ningxia after him. Château Changyu-Moser XV.

Now that’s a partnership for you.

“A lot of winemakers will go to China with their own recipe to make wines. That’s not the right approach. You have to be there and work properly in the vineyards to know where you can make good quality wine,” explains Moser.

“If I was to put my name to these wines then I had to be in control of the quality and the whole project,” he adds.

Which means he has been spending over three months of the year in China, and takes Chinese lessons every day just to help get a bit closer to the country and the culture that he clearly so much respects.

“I want to get under their skin a bit more, and understand them better,” he says.

From a wine point of view the result is a six-strong range that, like everything else in China, has serious ambitions to become a global brand in its own right with wines aimed at all the main commercial price points through to fine wines in the on-trade.



If you're going to have a Chateau named after you, then make it a goody..

Quality is there

This is no PR exercise or retirement project for Moser. Far from it. It was by spending so much time in China exploring its different soils and terroirs that Moser became convinced that there was such exciting potential for winemaking in certain parts of the country.

In fact he sees his career reaching even greater heights thanks to the possibilities in China, even with his reputation as one of the world's leading winemakers.

“It is a wonderful opportunity for me at the right time in my career,” he says.

“I said to Chanyu about going to Ningxia when no-one was talking about it. But I could tell it had a great micro-climate for making quality wine.”

The excitement and passion that Moser has for his new Chinese wine range is infectious. An excitement he says is shared by Andrew Shaw and the team at Conviviality tasked with introducing it and selling to the UK restaurants through Bibendum and independent merchants with Walker & Wodehouse. Some of the range is also going through Berry Bros & Rudd.

He says he is grateful to Shaw and his team that they have been willing to “take a risk” with these wines. But they too want to build something new and exciting with them.



China Tang at the Dorchester hotel was one of the first to take on Moser's Chinese range

Oblix in the Shard and China Tang were two of the first restaurants to get behind it last autumn.

“The UK has been somewhat of a test market for us. We then launched it to the rest of Europe at ProWein.”

The wines certainly match his enthusiasm. As there is no real established Chinese wine style it is hard to define them as necessarily Chinese. But they certainly more than stand up as quality international wines that offer a different take on the varieties being used.

And they are selling. The range is predominantly red Cabernet Sauvignon focused but there are also 120,000 bottles of a white Cabernet “blanc de noirs” of which 60,000 bottles are already accounted for.

The look and design of wines in China is very important so Moser was keen to ensure it included a “stamp” of quality and says the label is very much inspired by his favourite wines from the Loire.

The range covers three main price points, around £10 for the Moser XV wines, £25 for the Family wines and then up to around £60 for the flagship Château Changyu Moser XV, a blend of 90% Cabernet Sauvignon and 10% Merlot.

These are also wines made to age and with the first vintage coming out in 2015 Moser is confident the best is yet to come as the vines mature. “It develops in the bottle really nicely,” he adds.

A matter of time

Moser believes it is only a matter of time before China is recognised as both a mass producer of wine, but also a country with world leading vineyards and great potential.

“It’s simply too big to fail,” he claims. “They are currently asking people like me to help them, but it’s just a matter of experience and knowledge.”

It is, of course, still very early days in China’s modern wine history and many of its wine regions will take many years before fulfilling their real potential.

But for Moser there are already sites and regions that can give the rest of the world more than a run for its money. “You can also make anything in China,” pointing to the white Cabernet that he has in his own range.

China also has a ready made market for good quality, home grown fine wines with some 1,500 five star hotels, says Moser.



Global appeal

But it is internationally where he really wants these wines to shine and has been really encouraged and enthused by the response he has had including at last month’s London Wine Fair.

“If there is one thing I have learnt about the UK market is that you have to over deliver here. It is the most competitive market in the world and still very much in the top 5.”

Which is why he admits he was more nervous than normal bringing his Chinese wines to the UK market.

“You only have one chance to surprise people. But this is very much just the beginning for us. I feel almost like I am starting my career again.”

Which can only be good news for the rest of the wine industry.