



TASTE OF LODI: Some of the Lodi wines poured in China included these four medaled bottles from Barsetti Vineyards. The Chinese liked what they tasted in the California wines.

GROWING WINE MARKET: Hong Kong hosted its first international wine fair in August.

Lodi wines find success in China

COMMENTARY

By **JANIS BARSETTI GRAY**

EIGHT Lodi wineries took their wines to the first annual Hong Kong International Wine Fair in August. We had no idea just how enormous the Chinese market was, nor did we realize the business potential.

The eight Lodi wine "pioneers" were: Abundance Vineyards, Barsetti Vineyards, Benson Ferry, Irish Vineyards (Calaveras County), Miramont Estate, Van Ruiten Family Winery, Watts Winery and Weibel Vineyards. This project was the brainchild of Lodi grape grower and international wine broker Frank Gayaldo.

Costa Rica, China expos

In May 2006, Gayaldo helped three Lodi boutique wineries — Macchia, Pasos and Watts — to be served at Costa Rican

Key Points

- Lodi wineries attend Costa Rican and Chinese wine expos.
- Asian wine market expects growth of 10% to 20% per annum over next five years.
- Lodi wine was "People's Choice" at Expo Vinos Costa Rica in 2007.

President Oscar Arias' inauguration. In October 2007, a dozen Lodi boutique wineries went to Costa Rica for the nation's first Expo Vinos. The accolades poured in and Lodi won the Peoples Choice award, voted show's best wines.

My husband Richard and I attended both the first Expo Vinos Costa Rica and the first Hong Kong International Wine Fair. Both were exciting, but they were quite different. Hong Kong recently abolished all duties on wine, beer and alcoholic beverages (except spirits) coming into the region. This makes the market attractive for all sizes of wineries.

This trip was not just about pouring our wines, but also about educating people about our wines and the region in California where these grapes are grown. Most of the attendees did not know where Lodi was or what the zinfandel grape was.

Arnold a hit

Gayaldo and Gregg Meath, representing the Lodi Chamber of Commerce, joined us on the Hong Kong trip. The first two days of the wine fair were attended by trade people: distributors, importers/exporters, restaurants and hotels. The third day included the general public.

We learned that the Chinese like good wines and will pay for them. They were mostly familiar with French, Italian, Chilean, Australian and some U.S. brands. They were unfamiliar with our signature grape, zinfandel. However, everyone enjoyed our wines, and was interested in our area and impressed that we traveled so far to display our wines.

We distributed literature about the Lodi wine region, and Barsetti Vineyards and Van Ruiten Family Winery had all of their literature translated into Mandarin. The Merced Center for International Trade Development loaned us a picture of Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger. This was quite a hit as everyone wanted their picture taken with Arnold. The third day of the wine fair, the general public kept us busy pouring all nine hours. They were pleasantly surprised when they tasted zinfandel. Attendance for the three-day event was 18,800.

According to the Hong Kong Trade Development Council, "The Asian wine market is expected to grow between 10% and 20% per annum over the next five years," adding significance to this visit for U.S. wine. The consumption value in Asia (excluding Japan) is expected to double, reaching HK\$130 billion in 2012 and HK\$210 billion by 2017.

Barsetti Gray is a principal of Barsetti Vineyards.

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