

PERSPECTIVES

This November saw the second edition of ProWine China, the trade exhibition in Shanghai organised by Messe Düsseldorf, creators of the world's most important wine trade fair, ProWein. It was an interesting time to be present in China, given the market slowdown as government austerity measures bite. It's hard to read the situation – some commentators believe that the Chinese market is settling into a more realistic phase, where wine sales will become more consumer driven, rather than driven by the opaque gifting market. Others believe that Chinese wineries will capture more of their own market. We talked to participants about the fair in general, and China in particular.

MICHAEL DEGEN
executive director, Messe Düsseldorf

We came to the point where we asked ourselves whether it would be appropriate to do activities in China. We decided that 2013 was a good time because Chinese consumers are learning about the variety in wines. That's a good point for starting off the ProWine show, because we stand for a large selection of wines and winemaking countries. Very many people asked: why start now, isn't it too late? There are many trade shows in China! We say ProWine has a special concept, which is this internationality in wines. We felt China is starting to go for variety and to look for international winemakers.

Everyone's saying: China, China, China, but you have to be careful when you go into markets. You have to ask yourself: Why is your business going there? When we entered the Chinese market last year, we had a number of discussions with exhibitors after the show who simply came with false expectations, because they thought they could have three days at ProWine China and establish their Chinese business. That, of course, cannot work. But there is a good educational process going on, where many people see the necessity of first creating a long-term relationship and spreading their network across the Chinese market. Then, after months, or even sometimes years, they come to the point where they can now say: "I have found a group or a person and we are friends with each other" and that is the basis for doing business in China. It really means that you have spent some time together and you can now say that we can make good business together. In China, that's a relationship. Maybe the business between you starts tomorrow or next year, but the friendship is the basic element. This means you cannot go to one trade show and establish your business. For that reason, I'd give the advice to please go to China as often as you can – maybe even try other trade shows as well. All that adds up for a better ProWine experience.

We have a huge advantage because we established our Chinese business 25 years ago and we have a daughter company with 80 people working for us, so we are established already. That's why it's working very well.

On the first day of ProWine China 2014, we had a good increase over last year, with more exhibitors and more visitors than last year. One main element is to bring in the right visitors, and we had long discussions with our partners about how we can separate general goods buyers from real wine buyers. It's very important to exhibitors that they have the right buyers at their stand, so we are very strict about only letting in professional buyers.

We get no benefit from having exhibitors who are unsatisfied afterwards because the fair did not match their expectations.

In the coming years, we see huge potential with Chinese wine producers coming to ProWein in Düsseldorf.



KATHARINA HAASE
PR manager, Laurenz V.

This is the first time we've been. The fair is smaller than in Germany, of course, but it seems to be very well organised. Visitors are 50/50 – some people really showed great interest and knowledge and knew how to taste wine, and some just tasted and didn't ask questions. We hear in Europe that the Chinese mainly drink red wines, because the colour red is important and they think red wine is healthy, but the fact is that young people who get interested in wine really start to love white wine and know that it perfectly matches the Chinese kitchen.



THOMAS GRATZER
marketing, sales and distribution,
Weingut Zantho, Austria

This is my second ProWine - we participated last year. We were very positive about the attendance and the appreciation of our wines here. We're still searching for an importer and want to close the door this time. It seems we have a good start here already. Germany is our home market, but we have started in Asia. We started in Japan recently due to ProWine last year - we had random visits by people here which weren't planned. We haven't managed yet with mainland China, but we hope this will be our 24th export market. Of course, there are different ways of tasting and people pay different attention to wines. If we are in Germany at ProWine, people know our grape varieties - Blaufränkisch, St Laurent - but here, you need to explain the



CHARLOTTE READ
Asia and Middle East marketing manager,
Villa Maria, New Zealand

I've participated in Düsseldorf over many years and the increased strength of ProWine gave me the confidence to come here. I'm looking for somewhere I can find quality distributors for our brand and this is a good place to come. Normally at a wine fair I would have asked my importer if they were going, but my established importer - Summergeat - has distribution already, so an established importer

varieties. The pronunciation is tricky for most people, but once they experience this new flavour profile they get excited. They're bored by the five-hundredth Chardonnay or Merlot and want to experience something different. We are focusing on reds, but we also have a bunch of whites and sweets.

What have I learned about this market? Well, first of all it's interesting to see that wine has a totally different status and standing than in Europe, where wine is part of everyday culture. Here, wine is still a luxury product and something you drink for special occasions, or give as a special gift. People are extremely fond of sweet wines, whereas white wine plays a minor role.

I would strongly advise people to start in Hong Kong and find an importer there. From Hong Kong it's easy to approach the mainland Chinese market. It's relatively tricky in terms of bureaucracy to start in mainland China, but once you manage these difficulties, it's a market with tremendous potential. Europe is saturated and here there is still potential to grow. ProWine is my only destination - it's well done and set up properly. At the Austrian stand we have coffee, we have small specialities, which makes it very homely. There's quite an Austrian flair at the stand - people appreciate the Mozart balls and coffee.

would not find much value. If you have brands seeking distribution, it's good to come and try it out.

Day one was very quiet and I was very worried, though it's always nice to be part of the New Zealand pavilion and be part of networking again. Being in Beijing, I don't often get together with my contemporaries and find out how the industry is going. So it was a lot of networking and not much business, but day two has been very busy and I'm happy. Normally I'm trying to find restaurateurs and sommeliers and trying to educate people, but those people don't come to these fairs. Today I'm representing different brands of the Villa Maria group - Esk Valley etc - so I'm able to have different conversations. I've been to the Chengdu fair as an exhibitor in the past, and I knew this would be much more organised and streamlined.

There's something to be said for being part of the trade and being seen. There are no big importers here, but maybe that's a function of the trading environment at the moment.

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