

Press Release
For Immediate Release

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First Vinality International Academy Ambassador course held in Los Angeles proclaims seven Italian Wine Ambassadors

Seven wine professionals operating in the U.S. and the U.K. markets achieved the prestigious Italian Wine Ambassador certification after successfully completing the first Vinality International Academy (VIA) Ambassador course ever held in Los Angeles, California, from February 18th to 22nd, 2019. Organized by Vinality International in collaboration with Veronafiere and the support of ICE – Italian Trade Agency, VIA’s tasting-intensive Italian Wine Ambassador program debuted in L.A. last week, bringing 27 wine professionals from the United States, the U.K., Italy, China, and Bulgaria on a journey across Italy’s rich oenological heritage—a voyage of discovery where they tasted 106 wine labels and learned about Italian wine territories, native grape varieties, and regional food culture.



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Left to right: Stevie Kim (VIA Founder); Petra Belliti and Orazio Campoli (new IWAs); Sarah Heller MW (VIA Faculty); Sheila Donohue, Massimo Serradimigni, Catherine Stratton, Emily Wynbrandt, Rebecca Lawrence (new IWAs); Henry Davar (VIA Faculty).

The Vinality International Academy global community continues to grow steadily with 7 Italian Wine Ambassadors newly certified in Los Angeles. The overall count then raises to 177 accredited members (of which 13 are *Experts* and 164 *Ambassadors*), even if the broader alumni community reaches 500 wine professionals worldwide that have been through the program since 2015. The new Ambassadors certified in Los Angeles are all experienced wine professionals based in the United States and the U.K. and include:

- **Rebecca Lawrence**, Wine Educator and Assistant Manager at The Vineking – Independent Wine Merchants in Redhill, U.K.;
- **Massimo Serradimigni**, Importer and Distributor at Winebow in Skokie, USA;
- **Catherine Stratton**, Wine Educator at C.S. Selections LLC in Playa del Rey, USA;

- **Petra Belliti**, owner of DiVita Tours in San Diego, USA;
- **Emily Wynbrandt**, Importer and Distributor at Mucci Imports in Brooklyn, USA;
- **Orazio Campoli**, Sales Manager at Lyra Wines in Los Angeles, USA;
- **Sheila Donohue**, Importer and Distributor at Vero Vino in New York, USA.

The Italian Wine Ambassador course in Los Angeles was officially launched on Monday February 18th at the Line Hotel in downtown L.A. by VIA Founder Stevie Kim and Italian Trade Agency commissioner Florindo Blandolino. Blandolino met VIA Faculty Sarah Heller MW and Henry Davar as well as the 27 candidates at the course venue and spoke about the Italian Trade Agency’s commitment to promote Italian wine on the American market, the largest foreign market for Italian wines. The Italian Trade Agency will continue to support VIA’s educational projects in the United States throughout 2019, such as the next Italian Wine Ambassador course Stateside, which will take place in New York from June 24th to 28th, along with VIA’s flagship course in Verona, Italy, at the end of March in the lead-up to Vinitaly.

The Italian Wine Ambassador course staged in Los Angeles was reformatted in Autumn 2018 to allow candidates to learn about Italian wine in a systematic way and to taste even more wines than before. In Los Angeles, candidates tasted 65 labels during the guided tastings that followed the theory lectures, and also additional 41 labels during the Tasting Labs—the latter a new dedicated moment in which students could practice tasting and discover other Italian gems. In Los Angeles, the Tasting Labs were supported for the first time by the official VIA Supporters, Italian trade organizations which chose to assist VIA in its educational mission abroad. Wine associations ISWA - Italian Signature Wines Academy, Consorzio Italia del Vino, and Consorzio di Tutela Vini del Trentino debuted as VIA Supporters in Los Angeles, providing a wide range of labels for the students to taste.



Photograph: VIA Founder, VIA Faculty and full group of candidates for VIA LA pose in front of Shepard Fairey’s famous mural “The Peace Tree” which is painted on a wall of the Line Hotel in L.A. where the course took place. Fairey’s artwork also inspired the visual campaign of OperaWine 2018, the opening event to Vinitaly held annually in Verona

Italian Wine Ambassadors certified in Los Angeles praised VIA’s efforts in making the course systematic, comprehensive, and tasting-intensive. Newly-proclaimed Italian Wine Ambassador Massimo Serradimigni describes the uniqueness of the learning experience offered during the course: *“I have never taken any course like VIA. From the origin of the grape vine to the culture that we discussed, the history, science, geology... I am just scratching the surface, it was one of the most enriching experiences of my life!”*

Emily Wymbrant, who also achieved the Ambassador title, appreciated the community-building aspect inherent VIA’s educational path: *“I think with VIA, one of the main components, aside from the course material*

which is very comprehensive, is the community that it builds, and the ability to meet other like-minded professionals in the Italian wine community.”

Italian Wine Ambassador Rebecca Lawrence commented on how the new format is reflected in the revised exam at the end of the course: *“I am really excited. I think the new course format is great. Obviously it still got that foundation with the multiple-choice, so you can show off the breadth of your knowledge, but the short answer questions really show the depth, and give you the chance to really do a deep dive on the subject. And, obviously, I think the tasting is fundamental because there are so many grapes and if you are going to be an Ambassador you need to know what they taste like and be able to describe them.”*

The next VIA Italian Wine Ambassador course will be staged in Chengdu, China, from March 16th to 20th, and subsequently in Verona, Italy, from March 29th to April 2nd. Additional information on the next certification courses can be found on [Vinitaly International website](#).

About:

The grand Vinitaly 2019 will be held from April 7th to the 10th. Every year, Vinitaly counts more than 4,000 exhibitors on a 100,000+ square meter area and 130,000 visitors from over 140 different countries with more than 30,000 top international buyers. The premier event to Vinitaly, [OperaWine](#) “Finest Italian Wines: 100 Great Producers,” which will be held on the 6th of April, one day prior to Vinitaly will unite international wine professionals in the heart of Verona, offering them the unique opportunity to discover and taste the wines of the 100 Best Italian Producers, as selected by Wine Spectator. Since 1998 Vinitaly International travels to several countries such as Russia, China, USA and Hong Kong thanks to its strategic arm abroad, Vinitaly International. In February 2014 Vinitaly International launched an educational project, the Vinitaly International Academy (VIA) with the aim of divulging and broadcasting the excellence and diversity of Italian wine around the globe. VIA this year launched the seventh edition of its Certification Course and today counts 164 Italian Wine Ambassadors and 13 Italian Wine Experts.