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216 Italian Wine Ambassadors at large ready to spread the gospel: Vitaly International Academy celebrates one year of its reformatted program

Vitaly International Academy (VIA) celebrates one academic year (2018-2019) into its reformatted program following its organization restructuring with new partners and courses to appeal to international wine professionals looking to specialize in Italian wine. For the academic year 2019-2020) VIA will continue to offer its flagship Ambassador certification course around the world and will launch the intermediate-level course Italian Wine Maestro availing of its community of newly-certified Italian Wine Educators.

The first academic year of [reformatted Vitaly International Academy](#) draws to a close with 53 new Italian Wine Ambassadors and 3 Italian Wine Experts (the highest title) joining the VIA community after taking the restructured Italian Wine Ambassador courses in Hong Kong (November 2018), Los Angeles (February 2019), Chengdu (March 2019), Verona (March-April 2019), and New York (June 2019). Overall, [VIA's global community](#) counts 216 highly qualified wine professionals who are committed to disseminate Italian wine knowledge in their markets. VIA's structural transformation in 2018-2019 also saw the appointment of new institutional associates and faculty to enhance both its influence in the Italian wine industry and its weight as an international educational body.



Left to Right: VIA Faculty Henry Davar and Sarah Heller MW, VIA Founder Stevie Kim, and VIA Chief Scientist Prof. Attilio Scienza.



VIA's makeover started in June 2018 with the appointment of new Faculty members, Sarah Heller MW and Henry Davar, who started to work on reformatting the Italian Wine Ambassador course under the scientific mentorship of vine genetics academic Prof. Attilio Scienza (appointed VIA Chief Scientist). In July 2019, VIA Founder and Vinitaly International Managing Director Stevie Kim also formed an Institutional Advisory Board, inviting leading Italian wine associations to be part of the conversation: Federdoc, Federvini, Unione Italiana Vini, and FIVI Vignaioli Indipendenti have provided guidance and support to VIA's educational mission.

Kim comments on the creation of VIA's new ecosystem: *"This past year has been critical as we have made several changes with regards to course formats, emphasizing storytelling and tasting components to the curricula. It is vital for an Italian Wine Ambassador not to merely recognize the technical characteristics of Italian native grapes but also to be able to contextualize the history, culture, and food to translate the fabric of Italian people and wine. Thanks to the unwavering commitment of the Institutional Advisory Board and the supporting consortiums and associations, we have increased the number of wines to be tasted during the course from 60-80 to as many as 360, allowing the students to be exposed to an even wider array of the Italian wine varieties and originating territories."*

After these appointments and an intense period of course restructuring and material creation, VIA delivered its first reformatted Italian Wine Ambassador course in November 2018 in Hong Kong. The first revised element to the course is the new comprehensive set of theory lectures analyzing Italian wine regions north to south and from the point of view of the history, geology, climate, winemaking, grape varieties, and denominations.

VIA Italian Wine Ambassador Rose Thomas Bannister, who completed the course in New York in June 2019, explains the depth and value of the new information provided: *"I really feel that many things, which were isolated pockets of knowledge for me, really came together after the course, so I was able to make new connections and dig in a lot deeper to the mechanical, chemical, and geological notions related to Italian wine that I had more of a surface understanding of. Now I really feel that I am able not to just prattle off what happens but to explain how it happens."* Newly-proclaimed Italian Wine Ambassador in New York Amy Ezrin commented on how the technical information in the lectures nicely complemented the practical tasting component of the course: *"We had a lot of discussions about which factors contribute to the different flavor profiles and this has been extremely interesting. The technical information really explained why these flavor profiles develop as they do. Also, the genetic heritage and the research being done behind these discoveries about how different grapes evolve has been quite interesting to learn."*

The second new element to the course includes the enhancement of the tasting component in order to maximize students' exposure to Italian wines. During the guided tastings which follow the theory lectures, VIA candidates now taste about 70 wines across all regions and styles. Moreover, they also participate in the new VIA Tasting Labs, walk-around tastings where they can sample additional wines provided by VIA Supporters, Italian trade associations which represent various private or regional groups of wine producers.

To date, Supporters who are part of the VIA ecosystem include Italian Signature Wines Academy (ISWA), Italia del Vino, Le Famiglie del Vino, and the Consortia Vini del Trentino; Vini d'Abruzzo, Sicilia DOC, Franciacorta, Wine from Irpinia. Thanks to these associations in these sessions candidates now taste between 120 and 200 additional Italian wines, depending also on where the course takes place and on the availability of the wines on each market. For example, in Chengdu, China, VIA candidates tasted additional 131 labels, in New York 144, and in Verona, Italy, over 240. In addition, tasting is now also an established component of the assessment, featuring in the final exam.

Moreover, the Supporters' role is integral to VIA's special attention to bridging the gap between the international community of wine professionals and Italian local bodies. Thanks to the



Supporters program, VIA seeks to increase networking and incoming opportunities for its community members. For instance, for the next academic year, VIA is already at work to devise a number of fieldwork trips for Ambassadors in synergy with Consortia and local Italian bodies.

Another crucial implementation during the academic year 2018-2019 has been the [new Italian Wine Educator program](#) aimed at offering additional teacher training to Italian Wine Ambassadors and Experts to enable them to teach the intermediate-level Italian Wine Maestro course. In July 2019 35 perspective Educators from the United States, Russia, China, Japan, Australia, Brazil, and Europe took the online course and webinar session and are currently completing the final assignment before receiving the Educator status. Educators will then begin teaching the Maestro course in their home countries from September 2019, thus widening the base of wine professionals worldwide specializing in Italian wine and eager to connect with the Italian wine community in Italy.

After the rollout of the Italian Wine Maestro program in the Fall thanks to the newly-certified Educators, VIA will travel again to Hong Kong to run its [Italian Wine Ambassador certification](#) course from November 3rd to 7th, 2019. [Applications for VIA Hong Kong](#) are currently being accepted.

About: [Vinitaly International Academy](#) (VIA) aims to be the gold standard of Italian wine education. It offers a complete educational path with standardized courses that will teach professionals and educators to master the diversity of Italian wine in a rigorous, organized manner. VIA's main objective is to foster a global network of highly qualified professionals such as Italian Wine Ambassadors and Italian Wine Experts: in turn, they will support and promote Italian wine throughout the world. VIA was founded by Stevie Kim, Managing Director of Vinitaly International. The new VIA ecosystem avails of the guidance of Italian trade associations Federdoc, Federvini, Vignaioli Indipendenti FIVI, and Unione Italiana Vini as members of the Institutional Advisory Board. Italian vine genetics scholar, Prof. Attilio Scienza, oversees VIA's scientific and educational direction as the Chief Scientist. VIA Faculty Sarah Heller MW and Henry Davar teach the flagship Italian Wine Ambassador course. The following trade associations in the Italian wine industry have also joined as VIA Supporters: Italia del Vino; Italian Signature Wines Academy; Le Famiglie del Vino, Wi-Fi Wine from Irpinia, Consorzio di Tutela Vini del Trentino; Consorzio di Tutela Sicilia DOC; Franciacorta; Consorzio di Tutela Vini d'Abruzzo. To date the VIA community comprises 202 certified Italian Wine Ambassadors and 14 Italian Wine Experts. Since its foundation in 2014, over 560 candidates from all over the world have taken VIA's courses.