

Friday, November 8th, 2019

## **Vinality International Academy global community salutes 14 new Italian Wine Ambassadors and 1 new Expert after Hong Kong certification course**

The Vinality International Academy (VIA) welcomes into its global network 1 Italian Wine Expert and 14 Italian Wine Ambassadors following the successful completion of the advanced VIA Ambassador course in Hong Kong held from November 3<sup>rd</sup> to 7<sup>th</sup>, 2019. Organized by Veronafiere, Vinality, and Vinality International, the 2019 Hong Kong edition of the course marked the one-year anniversary of the official launch of the reformatted, tasting-intensive program, which debuted in November 2018 in Hong Kong. VIA's international community of highly-trained professionals now counts 15 Experts (the highest title reserved to top-scorers and tasters in the course) and 215 Ambassadors, thus 230 certified industry players.



Students of the VIA Hong Kong class of 2019 pose for a group photograph with VIA Founder Stevie Kim, VIA Faculty Sarah Heller MW and Henry Davar, and the VIA Team.

On Thursday November 7<sup>th</sup>, 2019, in the Hong Kong Convention and Exhibition Centre, the Vinality International Academy welcomed 14 newly-certified Italian Wine Ambassadors and 1 Expert into its global community. The Ambassadors and Expert operate in a variety of international markets including China, Japan, Singapore, Hong Kong, Australia, Thailand, Hungary, Kazakhstan, the United States, and Italy. The majority are wine educators but also work in marketing and sales, import/export, restaurants, and consultancy. Here is the full list:

### VIA Italian Wine Expert

1. Irving So, Wine Educator, Japan

## VIA Italian Wine Ambassadors

1. Jue Li, Wine Educator, China
2. Heming Huang, Importer, China
3. Asami Yoshikawa, Wine Educator, Japan
4. Artem Lebedev, Wine Educator, Kazakhstan
5. Andrea Agnelli, Marketing & Sales, Singapore
6. Davy Leung, Wine Consultant, Hong Kong, China
7. Giovanni Aiello, Sommelier, Australia
8. Sariya Kampanathsanyakorn, Wine Educator, Thailand
9. Anthony Groucke, Sommelier, United States
10. Jacopo Fanciulli, Wine Consultant, Italy
11. Elmar Hofer, Sommelier, Hungary
12. Yvonne Ou, Wine Educator, Hong Kong, China
13. Bizhen Chen, Wine Educator, China
14. Justin Chen, Wine Educator, Hong Kong, China

The 2019 Hong Kong edition of the Ambassador certification course marked the one-year anniversary since the launch of the reformatted, tasting-intensive program that was inaugurated in Hong Kong in November 2018. In Spring 2018, moreover, VIA entered a [new phase of expansion](#) with the appointment of the new Chief Scientist Prof. Attilio Scienza, a new Institutional Advisory Board comprising 4 major national trade associations (Federvini, Federdoc, Unione Italiana Vini, and Federazione Italiana Vignaioli Indipendenti), 2 new Faculty members (Sarah Heller MW and Henry Davar) and a network of local trade associations such as wine consortiums acting as official Supporters. With new players aboard, VIA worked on [reformatting its curriculum](#), as well as on enhancing and standardizing the tasting component.

The Ambassador course now features theory lectures on all the Italian wine regions, thematic theory sessions on hot topics in Italian wine culture (e.g. Barolo or Italian sparkling wines), guided tastings and additional tasting labs with additional wines organized in collaboration with VIA Supporters. The reformatted exam also tests a wider variety of skills and includes a written paper (multiple-choice and open-ended questions as well as a short essay), a practicum (blind tasting) and a group project (storytelling video). VIA Faculty member Sarah Heller MW commented on the progress made in one year since the new format was implemented: *“This year’s edition of VIA in Hong Kong marks a year of the new version of VIA and we couldn’t be prouder of the progress that has been made on both the course development, organisational, and institutional end but also the knowledge level and dedication of our student community. We were thrilled to be able to welcome a new Italian Wine Expert, and overall the strong performance, particularly on the tasting and short essay portions of the exam, is a testament to the fact that the new VIA is going from strength to strength here in Asia and worldwide.”*

Hong Kong candidates appreciated the in-depth learning experience of the VIA Ambassador course as well as its comprehensiveness, despite the obvious challenges of the new training program and the vastness of the subject. Irving So, wine educator based in Japan, on his proclamation as Italian Wine Expert commented: *“I am really happy I finally passed, it’s been a really exciting four days of deepening my Italian wine knowledge. I want to thank Stevie and the team and Sarah and Henry. It’s a great course, getting deeper and deeper, very comprehensive. We don’t just look at grape varieties, we look at where they are grown, how they are being grown, the differences they express, the terroir of the region. It’s a very deep course.”* VIA Italian Wine Ambassador Justin Chen who works in Hong Kong as a wine educator, added: *“It’s been an amazing experience for me since it’s the first time that I take the course. I really think this is the best Italian wine course in the market. I think If you like Italian wines, this course does not only tell you about the wines and the grapes, it also tells you about the history, viticulture, the soil, and the food. It’s a bit overwhelming, but really comprehensive. If you like Italian wine, you should definitely consider taking the course.”*



VIA Faculty members Sarah Heller MW (right) and Henry Davar (left).

Highlights of the 2019 Hong Kong Ambassador course included ‘Warm-up’ sessions on iconic wines from the South of Italy such as Etna and Aglianico and a thematic focus on Italian sparkling wines. VIA Faculty member Henry Davar explained the rationale behind these sessions in the Hong Kong curriculum: *“The VIA Ambassador certification course continues to evolve, and Hong Kong is once again the first city to see this progress. This year, we’ve added two new ‘Warm-up’ sessions—deep dives into some of Italy’s great grapes and terroirs. The original ones on Nebbiolo and Sangiovese didn’t go away, they just got folded into their respective regional sessions, in effect making those sections that much richer. This week, we premiered the Warm-ups on the wines of Mount Etna and on the various expressions of Aglianico in Campania and Basilicata. Based on how the candidates performed on the exam, it seems they’ve embraced the new materials. Look for VIA to continue to grow in this way”*.

The Tasting Labs in Hong Kong were offered by the VIA Supporters such as Italian Signature Wines Academy, Italia del Vino, Famiglie del Vino, the consortiums Vini del Trentino, Sicilia DOC, Franciacorta, Vini d’Abruzzo, Wi-Fi Wine from Irpinia, Primitivo di Manduria. Thanks to the VIA Supporters, candidates now are able to taste and learn much more about the Italian wines available in the market. In particular, in the Guided Tastings and Tasting Labs more than 200 wines overall were tasted throughout the week in Hong Kong.

The VIA Hong Kong class of 2019 together with VIA Faculty and VIA Founder Stevie Kim continued to celebrate the end of the course by tasting Italian wines and meeting Italian wine producers present at the Vinitaly Hong Kong expo (part of the Hong Kong International Wine & Spirits Fair) in full swing until Saturday November 9<sup>th</sup>, 2019. The VIA team is already forging ahead for its [flagship VIA Italian Wine Ambassador](#) course in Verona, Italy, in 2020, and applications are currently being received.

**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, Consorzio Primitivo di Manduria. To date the VIA community comprises 215 certified Italian Wine Ambassadors and 15 Italian Wine Experts. Since its foundation in 2014, over 560 candidates from all over the world have taken VIA’s courses.