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Vinality International Academy celebrates 33 new Italian Wine Ambassadors from 20 different countries

Vinality International Academy has certified 33 new Italian Wine Ambassadors from twenty different countries. The prestigious titles were awarded after a grueling five-day course held in Verona from 23-27 March 2023 that included seminars, masterclasses and tastings, and concluded with a rigorous four-part exam. Those who passed the exam now join an international network of Italian Wine Ambassadors, responsible for promoting Italian wine across the globe.



Vinality International Academy, Pinning Ceremony 2023.

Sixty-four candidates gathered from across the world to participate in five days of tastings, masterclasses and seminars, as they prepared for the grueling four-part exam to become a certified Italian Wine Ambassador. Wine professionals from Taiwan, Singapore, Malaysia, China, Japan and India, joined candidates from America, the Netherlands, Austria and Slovenia, many of whom will now stay on in Verona to attend Vinality, the largest wine and spirits exhibition in the world, thanks to the unwavering support of the Italian Trade Agency (ICE).

As well as a distinguished academic faculty, led by Chief Scientist Professor Attilio Scienza, a selection of top wine consortia was on hand to deliver a series of in-depth masterclasses, focusing on some of Italy's most interesting wine-producing regions. This year the program was extended into a fifth day to include masterclasses from eight supporting consortiums.

In total 35 candidates passed the final exam, two of whom were returning Ambassadors seeking to upgrade to the Italian Wine Academy's Expert level status, representing an unprecedented pass rate of



55%, in what is generally regarded as one of the most grueling but rewarding wine certification programs on offer.

For the first time this year, candidates also competed for the Franco Ziliani Award for the Best Overall Student, sponsored by the Berlucchi winery of Franciacorta. The prize, in memory of Franco Ziliani, creator of the Franciacorta style, was awarded jointly to Scott Thomas and Elena Barattini. Dr. Cristina Ziliani, Franco's daughter, presented the winners of the prize with a limited-edition Magnum of Berlucchi.

Stevie Kim, Managing Director of Vinitaly International, said: *"This year we had more candidates coming from more parts of the world than ever before. While we are delighted to have a bumper crop of 33 new Italian Wine Ambassadors this year, every single person who participated in the program will have gained something. Passing the exam is a fantastic achievement, but simply participating in the course is such a profound learning experience, giving participants lifelong access to a vast network of wine professionals, producers and influencers, as well as an ongoing program of learning and networking opportunities. This year our students were better prepared than ever, and that's reflected in the resounding pass rate. We also had a record number of returning students, showing that persistence pays! Finally, our staff and faculty are reaping the benefits of delivering this course over several years now, giving our students the best possible chance of success, while maintaining the highest standards of academic rigor."*

Scott Thomas, joint winner of the Franco Ziliani Award for the Best Overall Student, said: *"Along with Elena Barattini, it's such an honor to be the first recipient of the Franco Ziliani Award for Best Overall Student. From private tastings with producers to expert masterclasses, participating in the Vinitaly International Academy Ambassadors program is a challenging but rewarding experience. Once again, I've made some fantastic friendships, tasted some incredible wines, and deepened my understanding of both the contemporary Italian wine scene and its rich historical and cultural background."*

New Italian Wine Ambassador Vinicius De Miranda Santiago said: *"This was a training that resonated with me more than the WSET Diploma for several reasons. One is that this wasn't a logical next step in my career, it's a course I took out of desire and opportunity, having no idea how deep and challenging it would be. Also, because I invested time and money that I didn't necessarily have available. And mainly because I leave the training inspired to be a better educator, challenging myself to learn and share even more about Italian wine and culture."*

New Italian Wine Ambassador Matt Dawson said: *"This is not the first time I have participated in the Italian Wine Academy program, and I'm so thrilled to have been awarded my Ambassador's pin at the second time of asking. If anything, the program was even more enjoyable, and I took a lot more from it the second time around."*

New Italian Wine Ambassador Joan Harnish said: *"I'm absolutely thrilled to have been appointed an Italian Wine Ambassador. Once again, the organization and delivery of the Italian Wine Academy Ambassador's Program has been superb. As a newly qualified Ambassador I feel responsible to promote, educate and inspire others to learn more about Italian wine, culture and native grape varieties from this beautiful country."*

Italian Wine Ambassador candidate Jemma Styer said: *"It was an absolutely amazing time and far exceeded what I was anticipating, I thoroughly enjoyed being a part of this journey with you. Although I was not prepared enough to pass the exam this year, I am feeling blessed to still be a part of the community, and excited to come back as soon as possible to do it justice!"*

Jasmeet Rehan, Italian Wine Ambassador candidate, said: *"The whole Ambassador's experience has been amazing. For me involving the producers and the consortiums was particularly enriching. The passion and knowledge that they brought to their tastings was not only informative but actually quite overwhelming. It's like an artist explaining their art with a passion and depth that no one else can! I'm thrilled to have been asked to stay on and judge at 5StarWines and know this will be the first*



of many doors that the Ambassador's Program opens for me. After the information overload I've experienced in the last five days, this Selection is an opportunity to immediately put that knowledge and learning into practice."

Victoria Mulu-Munywoki, Italian Wine Ambassador candidate, said: *"Participating in the Vinitaly International Academy Ambassador's program was such an honor. The program was rich and detailed with interesting masterclasses as well as a fabulous field trip to Franciacorta. I learned so much and met some amazing people. It's a great privilege to be part of a global community of Ambassadors. Africa represents an important developing market for Italian wine and I'm looking forward to returning to Kenya with renewed expertise and enthusiasm!"*

Full list of new Italian Wine Ambassadors

1. Arzhakova, Aleksandra (Singapore)
2. Barattini, Elena (UK)
3. Bufolin, Valentin (Slovenia)
4. Cassidy, McKenna (USA)
5. Celik, Duygu (Turkey)
6. Chin, Fiona Tzu-Ting (Taiwan)
7. Chow, Yue (Malaysia)
8. Dawson, Matt (Canada)
9. De Miranda Santiago, Vinicius (Brazil)
10. Dipino, Vincent (USA)
11. Estrada Belli, Pedro (South Africa)
12. Feng, Jiying (Jamie) (China)
13. Fitzgerald, Barbara (USA)
14. Gallegos Barcenas, Ana Bertha (Mexico)
15. Hale, Noelle (USA)
16. Harnish, Joan (USA)
17. Helfand, Jessica (USA)
18. Irwin, Matt (Australia)
19. Jenkins, Robert (USA)
20. Myklebust, Vera (Norway)
21. Nakata, Hideyuki (Japan)
22. Nordio, Marco (New Zealand)
23. Obukhovskaia, Anna (Russia)
24. Patz, Markus (Australia)
25. Poon, Susanna (China)
26. Rzepka, Laury (France)
27. Sheridan, Eric (Austria)
28. Spielmann, Nathalie (France)
29. Tai, Yi Hsuan (Fulvia) (Taiwan)
30. van Oostrom, Josje (Netherlands)
31. Wang, Chong (China)
32. Yin, Ting (China)
33. Zhang, Feng (Franco) (China)

Returning Italian Wine Ambassadors

1. Di Donato, Julian (Jay) (USA)
2. Thomas, Scott (USA)



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 and organized manner. VIA's main objective is to foster a global network of highly qualified professionals of Italian Wine Ambassadors and Italian Wine Experts who will support and promote Italian wine throughout the world. VIA was founded by Stevie Kim, Managing Director of Vinitaly International. The new VIA ecosystem is guided by the 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. To date, there are 340 Certified Italian Wine Ambassadors of whom 16 are also Italian Wine Experts.