

# FINE PALATE



Robert Beynat, chief executive of Vinexpo Asia-Pacific, says China and India are key growth markets that the trade fair hopes will mature with workshops and the massing of oenophiles which it brings.



Vinexpo chairwoman Dominique Heriard Dubreuil



# GENIE UNCORKED

HK is brimming with excitement for Vinexpo organizers, writes **Alex Lai**

VINEXPO IS coming again to Hong Kong and the chairwoman of the organization, Dominique Heriard Dubreuil, sang the praises of the SAR as a wine hub at a preview of this year's exhibition.

"We have been working with the International Wine and Spirits Record for the last eight years on the forecast trend for wine and spirit consumption," said Dubreuil.

"Hong Kong, after the change in the tax situation in 2008, has really succeeded in becoming a wine hub. And the figures for the Hong Kong wine business are quite astonishing compared to the rest of the world."

From 2004 to 2008, Hong Kong wine consumption increased by 75.9 percent and the IWSR study forecasts it will surge another 70.8 percent in the five years leading up to 2013.

But a decrease in the US market has Dubreuil worried. "We could see that from August 2008 the decrease started to show in the market. The figures at the end of 2008 were not good and all of a sudden the world realized it was an issue."

But that was more than offset by a boom elsewhere, with the increases manifesting themselves at Vinexpo.

"We don't have exact figures as to the sales generated through the Vinexpo, yet the ongoing participation of vineyards speaks to their satisfaction," she said.

"The Vinexpo has a forward-looking nature. People often look for investment with good returns, and wine has proven to be a promising investment. We have exhibitors who are anxious about attending, and we have been squeezing the space to accommodate them, but not all."

The reason Vinexpo keeps returning to Hong Kong, said

Dubreuil, is due to the boom in wine consumption, even when there was an economic downturn in the West.

Annual per capita consumption in Hong Kong has hit 3.6 liters, while Japan and Singapore trail behind at 2.5 and 2.1 liters respectively.

"Asia is the driving force for the wine business, while Hong Kong is really the best location to make sure that trade representatives can gather together."

Four countries sent significantly more visitors last year to the Bordeaux Vinexpo: Norway, up 24.32 percent, Brazil, up 37.25 percent, Thailand, up 92.86 percent, and more surprisingly Japan, up 3.2 percent.

Dubreuil said: "I have noticed since we organized Vinexpo in Asia, we have had more Asian visitors in Bordeaux."

China is now an important market, or market-to-be, as Dubreuil put it.

The mainland has become not only the world's eighth largest wine consumer but also the 10th largest producer in 2008.

But the chances of the Vinexpo being held in the mainland in the near future are still slim.

"The next Vinexpo in two years is too early to decide yet. China requires foreign exhibitors and visitors to apply for visas, which can become a constraint."

However, Dubreuil said she does not have the last word.

"We are simple people. We do the show, make it a success and ask our exhibitors where they want to go next."

The Vinexpo in Hong Kong will take place from May 25 to 27, which is in the middle of Shanghai's World Expo. Would there be any negative effect on the attendance rate?

"I think foreign exhibitors and visitors will probably take the opportunity to visit Shanghai. Vinexpo is all about business."

We'll drink to that.

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