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## **Wine on: how to have fun and learn too**

**SUZANNE DENNIS**

Former accountant Tony Mitchell aims to put the fun back into Hong Kong wine tasting - and he's started out with a \$100,000 fling.

That's what it cost to start Vinovento in May, Hong Kong's first professional wine events company, focused on the management of events involving wine rather than the specific selling of wine.

His start-up costs have included office premises, a full-time administrative staffer, equipment for the office and that used at Vinovento events, marketing, business registration and website design and launch.

The company team is founder and director Mr Mitchell, Ashton Winkler and business partner Garry Smith. Previously Mr Mitchell was an accountant in Hong Kong for 12 years and before that in Australia.

He says many wine events in Hong Kong seem to be formal or pitched at an audience with a good knowledge, whereas many of Vinovento's events will contain more of a fun factor, which is slightly educational but with the focus on entertainment, so people can get groups of friends together and have a good night out and enjoy excellent wines.

"We will do wine quizzes and guess-the-wine competitions, as well as wine test matches - say a selection of Australian wines against South African or Californian," he says. "And we also do not want to just focus on expatriates, but the Chinese audience, so many events will also have, for example, a Cantonese-speaking master of ceremonies."

Mr Mitchell is also co-proprietor of the Australian Wine Centre but stresses that wines from around the world will be featured at their events. "Vinovento's first event featured Australian wines and we are now working on a Tuscan-themed wine event. We will be looking to bring all of the world's interesting wines to Hong Kong and this will often mean little-known wine regions which are producing really exciting wine."

Mr Mitchell says that wine events in Hong Kong seem to concentrate on the wines of a single producer when the winemaker, export manager or owner makes a trip to Hong Kong. "This is fine, but we felt that with the higher level of interest in wine in Hong Kong, a better range of options should be made available and a degree of impartiality brought to the market."

At a typical wine dinner in Hong Kong the guests might taste six wines from a single vineyard. "Perhaps one or two of these wines might be superb, given the vintage, region, the vineyard and the winemaking.

However, it would be most unlikely that all six wines from a single vineyard would be of the same high standard," he says. "At our events, we may select six wines from six different producers - all best in their class - resulting in an excellent chance for those attending the event to compare wines of a similar standard."

The company is also looking for unique locations, new wines from new countries and regions, speakers and tutors.

He says that since the first two events in May - they were both fully subscribed - many people have signed up for information. He sees Macau, Shenzhen, Shanghai and Beijing as possible locations for expansion.

"Another major focus for future Vinovento business will be the organising of wine events for corporates in Hong Kong," he says.

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