

HANDLE WITH CARE

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Fine wines travel first class as a result of Hong Kong's wine-hub plans

香港銳意成為亞洲葡萄酒中心，頂級佳釀空運抵港

BY ROBIN LYNAM

When Hong Kong removed the import duty on wine in 2008 in line with the government's intention to position the city as the "wine hub of Asia", imports – not surprisingly – rose sharply. Year on year, wine imports increased by more than 80 percent to about HK\$2.73 billion (US\$350 million).

Wealthy Hong Kong wine lovers with valuable collections cellared overseas, mostly in Bordeaux or London, seized the opportunity to bring all or part of them home. Established wine retailers increased their inventory. New wine-importing businesses opened, and there was a sudden flurry of auctions.

No fewer than 10 fine-wine auctions were held in 2008, by Bonham's, Christie's, Sotheby's, Zachys Wine & Liquor Store and Acker Merrall & Condit – the last of which went on to hold a further four record-breaking auctions in the course of 2009, the most recent of which on 19 September sold all the lots and realized HK\$50 million.

Relatively little of that business, at least so far, has benefited the air-cargo industry. Most of the wine comes in by sea in temperature- and humidity-controlled containers.

PRESSURE FOR EARLY DELIVERY

"If we must ship by air to Hong Kong for a client's special request, we include temperature-controlled gel packs in the cases to keep the wines cool, and it has worked very well so far," says Acker Merrall & Condit President and Auction Director John Kapon. "Styrofoam containers provide protection against breakage. The advantage of air is speed."

Wine retailers generally move wine by air only if they are under pressure for early delivery, according to Geordie Willis, Business Development Manager of the Hong Kong branch of Berry Bros. & Rudd (BBR), Britain's oldest wine merchant established in 1698. "You'll find that it tends to be only the higher-priced wines that are shipped by air."

For all shipments BBR uses logistics professionals with specialist beverage-industry experience, including JF Hillebrand, which has

政府於2008年公佈免收葡萄酒入口稅，推動香港發展為「亞洲的葡萄酒貿易中心」，葡萄酒入口總值自此大幅增加，比對上一年上升超過八成，達至約27億3千萬港元（約3億5千萬美元）。

富裕的葡萄酒愛好者紛紛把握機會，把存放在外地（主要在波爾多或倫敦）的所有或部分珍藏佳釀運回香港。大規模的葡萄酒零售商亦趁此增加存貨。葡萄酒進口公司愈開愈多，拍賣會亦忽然熱鬧起來。

寶龍、佳士得、蘇富比、Zachys Wine & Liquor Store及Acker Merrall & Condit於2008年在香港舉辦了十多次佳釀拍賣會。而Acker Merrall & Condit於2009年更舉辦了四次創下紀錄的拍賣會，最近的一次於9月19日舉行，成交率高達九份之一，成交總額達5,000萬港元。

直至目前為止，大部分葡萄酒都是以設有溫度及濕度控制的貨櫃箱經海路運送，這些商機暫時未令航空貨運業受惠。

及時行樂

Acker Merrall & Condit的總裁兼拍賣總監John Kapon表示：「如客戶要求空運到港，我們會在箱內放置有控溫作用的凝膠包，以保持低溫，這方法一直非常奏效。發泡膠箱可防止酒樽破裂。空運的優點是快。」

Berry Bros & Rudd (BBR)成立於1698年，是英國歷史最悠久的酒商，據其香港部門的業務發展經理Geordie Willis表示，一般來說，當葡萄酒零售商需要及早送貨時，才會選擇空運。他解釋：「只有價錢較高的葡萄酒才會由飛機運送。」

BBR聘用在飲品業界經驗豐富的物流專家，

Hong Kong aims to become "the wine hub of Asia"
香港致力成為「亞洲葡萄酒中心」

Photos: Wine box: Alamy/ArgusPhoto, Wine glasses: Per Eriksson - Stone/Getty Images

been in the business of transporting wine since 1844, and Davies Turner. Cathay Pacific is among the carriers those forwarders instruct, and Willis states that BBR has been impressed by the service it has received.

If air-freighted wine is not properly protected, problems such as movement of the cork and seepage can occur. "We ship in custom-made polystyrene export cases specifically designed to withstand impact and to insulate against temperature change," says Willis. "In the past, when requested by customers, we have also used thermal blankets and in one instance an 'aero-refrigerator', an intermodal container that is refrigerated for the transportation of temperature-sensitive cargo."

GROWTH IN WINE SENT BY AIR

Although these precautions increase costs, they are more than justified for high-value bottles. At Acker Merrall & Condit's 19 September, 2009, auction a jeroboam of Domaine de la Romanée-Conti Burgundy sold for HK\$435,600.

According to Gregory De 'Eb, General Manager of Hong Kong wine cellar and storage provider Crown Wine Cellars, there has been some growth recently in the movement of wine by air.

"While most wine travels by sea, some UK and US merchants are happy to use air," says De 'Eb. "In the case of the auction houses, it appears to be customer driven if it happens at all, while the air-freighting of merchant wines appears to be driven by both the customers and the merchants themselves."

The usual reason for this is haste. Speed is sometimes essential, and BBR's Willis estimates that the company can get any wine a customer wants flown to them within nine days from the order date.

"The courier companies such as Cathay Pacific courier general handling agent Linehaul Express, DHL and Federal Express all seem to play a role here," says De 'Eb. "But there are also smaller specialist companies such as Nippon Express and, most predominantly in the UK, Seabrook Export Services, which are extremely active in the controlled air-freight field. Seabrook can even arrange movable pressurised and cooled mini-containers that can be transported by plane – very expensive, but of course very efficient."

Wine experts warn that no matter how carefully they have been shipped, bottles should not be opened immediately on arrival. Geordie Willis advises that wines can get jet lag, too.

其中包括自1844年起提供葡萄酒送運服務的JF Hillebrand，以及Davies Turner。而他們均有採用國泰航空運送葡萄酒。Willis表示，BBR對國泰提供的優良服務留下深刻印象。

若葡萄酒運送不當，可能引起酒塞移位和滲漏等問題。Willis說：「我們以特製的發泡膠出口箱運載葡萄酒，特別的設計可承受撞擊，並有隔溫作用。在過去，我們在客戶的要求下，也曾採用保溫隔熱毯，某次更用上一個「空中冷藏箱」，那是一種綜合運輸冷藏箱，專門用來運載對溫度敏感的貨物。」

空運數量有所增長

儘管這些措施令成本顯著增加，用於名貴佳釀卻絕對值回票價。在Acker Merrall & Condit於2009年9月19日在香港舉行的拍賣會上，一瓶3公升裝的Domaine de la Romanée-Conti勃根地葡萄酒便以超過435,600港元成交。

香港頂尖的葡萄酒儲存專家Crown Wine Cellars總經理Gregory De 'Eb指出，最近空運葡萄酒的數字正逐漸增加。

De 'Eb說：「大多數葡萄酒都是經海路運送，但一些英美酒商卻樂於使用空運。拍賣行使用空運一般是顧客要求；酒商委託的空運則來自顧客和酒商的要求都有。」

選擇空運大多是為了省時。有時候速度甚為重要，BBR的Willis估計，其公司最快可於九天或更短的時間內將酒空運送到顧客手中。

De 'Eb說：「負責送遞的公司如國泰航空的速遞服務特約代理Linehaul Express、DHL和Fedex似乎都扮演一定角色，但不少小型專業速遞公司，如日通以及服務範圍主要在英國的Seabrook Export Services等。Seabrook在調控空運業內甚為活躍，服務甚至包括提供迷你活動加壓冷凍箱，可直接運上飛機，費用確十分昂貴，卻甚具效率。」

專家提醒大家，無論運送過程如何小心，抵達後應避免即時開瓶。Geordie Willis表示，葡萄酒就像人一樣，需要適應長途飛行後的時差問題。