



Written by
Jancis Robinson
29 Sep 2014

Australian triumphs in Ningxia



Two years ago in 10 winemakers chosen for Chinese adventure we published details of an unparalleled competition for winemakers in which 180,000 RMB (worth \$30,000) was being offered to the maker of the wine judged best in China's most determined winemaking province Ningxia.

Fifty winemakers had submitted applications and a panel of international wine experts chose the original 10 candidates. In the end, seven winemakers made it to Ningxia in September 2012 as part of the inaugural Ningxia Winemakers Challenge: Benoit Beigner (France), Jose Hernandez Gonzalez (Spain), Penny Jones (Australia), Patricia Miranda (Chile and New Zealand), Eleni Papadakis (US), David Tyney (Australia) and Carl van der Merwe (South Africa). Our main photograph (above right), taken in Ningxia when they were all there to make wine in 2012, shows on the back row left to right Carl van der Merwe, Eleni Papadakis, David Tyney and in the front row Penny Jones, Benoit Beigner, Patricia Miranda and Jose Hernandez Gonzalez.

Each of the seven made a red wine in 2012 and three of them returned to Ningxia in 2013 to make a white wine. A panel of six China-based wine experts, whose professions span retail to writing to winemaking (see below), judged all 10 of these wines in Beijing last Thursday. They praised the overall quality of the wines and noted how distinct they were despite coming from the same vineyard parcels. The chair of the panel, respected wine judge and wine academic Ma Huiqin of China Agricultural University, said the red wines were particularly impressive given that heavy rains made the 2012 harvest the toughest in recent memory.

Two notaries from Ningxia and a chartered accountant from the US oversaw the scoring (the Chinese are very keen on outside supervision). The winners for white wine were David Tyney (50,000 RMB), Jose Hernandez Gonzalez (30,000 RMB) and Benoit Beigner (10,000 RMB). The winners for red wine were David Tyney again (50,000 RMB), Penny Jones (30,000 RMB) and Patricia Miranda (10,000 RMB). Cao Kailong, director of the Bureau of Grape and Floriculture Industry in Ningxia, announced the results with four of the winemakers present. He said a new project will bring 60 winemakers to Ningxia.



The winner David Tyney, shown here receiving one of his prizes from Cao Kailong, is a consultant winemaker and has worked in his native Australia, in New Zealand and in Yunnan in China.

Earlier in the day, the six judges tasted 47 wines from the established producers in Ningxia. Most of the judges have been tasting Ningxia wines for more than a decade and noted continued overall improvement. There was particular praise for the growing number of wines that show pure fruit, more complexity and 'character'. The three-hour tasting included a lively discussion of topics involving Ningxia and wine, including marketing strategies, consumer attitudes, the regulatory environment, and whether or not the region has a distinct style.

The 47 wines, mainly reds, reflected the diversity of Ningxia's wine industry in terms of business models (including state-, foreign-, and family-owned operations) and size (from boutique wineries to those run by China's largest producers). The Ningxia Wine Challenge is an ongoing series of events to promote the region and get feedback. Previous tastings were held in Hong Kong (2013), Nanjing (2012) and the regional capital of Yinchuan (2013 and 2012). The winners of the Beijing event will be announced this weekend in Yinchuan as part of the Ningxia region's annual wine festival.

The judges for The Ningxia Wine Challenge and The Ningxia Winemakers Challenge were:

Lilian Carter Winemaker at Wangzhong in Xinjiang. Carter worked in 2008 at Domaine Helanshan in Ningxia and gained an understanding of the region. She was a judge in the 2012 Ningxia Wine Challenge.

Marcus Ford Purple pager and general manager of Pudaowines in Shanghai and Beijing. Ford also has a decade of experience as restaurant manager at M on the Bund in Shanghai. He was a judge in the 2012 Ningxia Wine Challenge. See his report on these tastings in [Chinese winemaking - a progress report](#).

Ma Huiqin Professor at China Agricultural University. Known as one of the country's leading experts on wine marketing, Ma has consulted on projects throughout China, including on irrigation and vineyard disease. She is chair of the panel and was a judge in the 2012 Ningxia Wine Challenge.

Jiang 'Maxime' Lu Founder of wineonline.cn. Lu is involved in many parts of the wine trade, including as a writer, educator, wine club founder and consultant to companies and private individuals. He trained in Bordeaux and has organised numerous Chinese wine tastings.

Liyan 'Dorian' Tang National director of wine education for ASC Fine Wines. She has taught Wine Spirit & Education Trust (WSET) classes in China for a decade for the country's leading importer. She is currently enrolled in the Master of Wine programme.

Charles Sow Beverage director for Temple Restaurant, Beijing, where the event was held. His wine list took top spot for its Chinese selection in the 2014 China Wine List of the Year contest. He has extensive experience as a sommelier.