

PERSPECTIVES

The 34th London Wine Fair, held at London's Kensington Olympia from 2 to 4 June, changed tack this year. Traditionally it has had an international appeal. This year organisers decided strategically to focus on the UK market. Stephen Quinn asked participants from four major wine-producing nations why they attended the fair, given the change of focus. Organisers said this year about 670 producers and importers showcased more than 12,500 wines.

ELIE MAAMARI

chief winemaker and export manager, Château Ksara

The focus on 'local' was the main reason for deciding to attend the new-look London Wine Fair. The £12bn (\$20bn) UK market is important to Château Ksara, Lebanon's oldest winery, and other Lebanese producers, and we wanted a fair that was tailored to the demands of that market. The UK is Lebanon's biggest export market [absorbing 32% of the country's wines]. London is now one of the culinary capitals of the world with exciting and new restaurant concepts, as well as innovative ways to introduce consumers to new wines. We are looking for the best way to tap into these opportunities.



Though the UK had always been a historic wine hub, it's now more egalitarian. Consumers are no longer 'scared' of wine. They are better informed and they continue to demonstrate a willingness to push new boundaries of taste experience, especially [with] wines from emerging nations. Lebanon may be an old winemaking country, but we still have a lot to do in convincing the modern consumer of our credentials and we can only do this [by engaging with] daring consumers. British drinkers read wine lists with more confidence. Wine bars appeal to a large group of customers and pubs carry an extensive range to suit all budgets. This is good news for Château Ksara. We produce 14 different wines, and the diversity of the UK [market] makes our job easier. The vibrant activity in the on-trade reflects a greater consumer awareness. With the off-trade, we at Château Ksara want to spread its message beyond the Lebanese restaurant sector, which while lucrative can never really establish our reputation as a modern wine producing country with wines of the highest quality. We want our company to be a fixture on the shelves of the UK's supermarkets and the independents and believe that the fair's new focus will bring them closer to buyers, sommeliers and other wine professionals. In fact, the profile of visitors at this year's fair was a key factor in our decision to attend.

It's very easy to get lost at huge fairs like ProWein in Düsseldorf. Lebanon only produces 8m bottles, so in a way we are looking for a fair that reflects our boutique profile and creates a more intimate business environment. Selling wine is about establishing relationships. Wine is a very personal 'product'. It has a story and it must be backed up by a consistency in quality. Conveying all these qualities to potential clients requires a particular setting and we hope that the 2014 London Wine Fair can be that place. We are committed to achieving a genuine foothold in the UK market.



FRÉDÉRIQUE DE LAMOTHE
director, Alliance des Crus Bourgeois du Médoc

"The British market has always been a key one for the Crus Bourgeois du Médoc, and this has been the case for decades. It is a mature market and consequently we need to keep a close relationship with the main players (trade and press). The London Wine Fair is a good opportunity to showcase the wines of the Crus Bourgeois family [the group presented more than 100 wines].

"The Alliance of the Crus Bourgeois du Médoc is a self-regulating body that serves the interests of wine producers in the Médoc. This group represents the largest number of winemakers in

the Bordeaux region, and has 260 members. It runs the annual selection procedure that identifies the wines entitled to Cru Bourgeois status for a given vintage. The group is also responsible for marketing and promotion in France and abroad including the UK.

"The Crus Bourgeois du Médoc want to show the diversity of wines from seven prestigious AOCs in the Médoc area that are affordable. The fair is a unique opportunity for the UK trade to taste and discover our wines that are ready to enjoy now."

Brinda Bourhis, Crus Bourgeois' international PR spokesperson, added: "I don't think the LWF focus is totally a local one and it seems that the organisers are making major changes to make it become international as it was in the past. Coming back to the Kensington venue is a good idea and should attract more visitors. There are still many foreign exhibitors so that shows it [the fair] is still of international scope."

Family Business



AMY CIARAMETARO, marketing manager, Virginia Wine Board

Almost all of Virginia's wineries are small with limited production, making these artisan wines uniquely suited for shops and restaurants that offer eclectic, unique and expanded wine lists. This was a major reason for attending the London Wine Fair. Because of the many micro-climates in Virginia and the experimentation of the region, attendees can taste some of the unique wines that are doing well in the state. As well as classic grape varieties such as Viognier, Cabernet Franc and Petit Verdot, some varieties gaining in popularity include Tannat, Petit Manseng, Vermentino, Nebbiolo and Albariño.

This is the sixth year that Wines of Virginia has exhibited at London's wine

fair. Virginia is establishing a track record for what the United States' east coast can produce. The climate and soil of Virginia tend to place the region's wines stylistically and literally somewhere between other US West Coast wine regions and its European neighbors to the east. The wines are usually fruit forward but also have higher acidity and balance and are similar to European wines. Many of the winery owners and wine-makers are attending the fair personally. So by stopping by the booth attendees can talk first-hand with the winemakers and owners about the wines, [and get] details about how the wine is made, quantities produced and amounts available for the UK market.

New to this year's fair are wines from North Gate Vineyards in Virginia's northern area near Washington DC and also wines from the Shenandoah Valley.

Some of the wines that many Londoners may recognise include Barboursville Vineyards, Boxwood Winery, Breaux Vineyards, Williamsburg Winery and Veritas Vineyards.



MARIE-SOPHIE LODRON export manager for the UK, Austrian Wine Marketing Board

Austria has been a long-term contributor to the London Wine Fair. In a well-established cooperation with the Austrian Chamber of Commerce, the Austrian Wine Marketing Board has been an exhibitor for more than 20 years now. The repositioned LWF to a more national-oriented show remains equally interesting for Austria. The new and intensified focus on the on-trade makes the presence of Austrian wine important, because sommeliers have for a long time been Austrian wine's most enthusiastic promoters.

The presence of 24 Austrian wineries at the fair underscores the continued growing interest and ongoing success of Austrian wines in the UK. These hand-crafted wines are sought after for their unique [and] food-friendly varieties and styles, and come from some of the world's most distinctive terroirs.

At the end of May Austrian wine managed a powerful performance at the Sommelier Wine Awards in the UK, gathering 41 medals, including five gold. The gold medals went not only to the flagship white varieties Grüner Veltliner and Riesling but also to two red wines - a single-variety Blaufränkisch and a Blaufränkisch cuvée blend. This signals the increasing recognition of Austria's quality red winemaking and suggests that Austrian wines could be ideal for on-trade venues in the UK.

Austria's signature grape varieties and an in-depth look at wine and food pairings are being featured in a series of seminars and tastings at the fair. The Austrian Wine Marketing Board is holding a seminar each day at their stand called 'Cool wines by the glass'. There, Austrian wine expert Jason Turner is providing an overview of Austria's winegrowing regions, wine styles and signature grape varieties, and is offering advice on serving suggestions and recommended drinking temperatures. Daily themed tastings entitled 'Austria's most food friendly wines' are being held at the stand. They are designed to reflect the diversity of Austria's regional wine styles and illustrate their outstanding ability to match a variety of cuisines from around the world."



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Since 1844 the name HESS stands for pioneering spirit and quality. Nowadays we are a family owned Swiss company and the proud owner of 7 wineries on 4 continents (USA, Argentina, South Africa, Australia). Our main focus is to keep searching for the perfect vineyards in order to produce unique and characterful wines.

HESS FAMILY WINE ESTATES
Terroir Wines Crafted On 4 Continents