



OUTSIDERS step into the spotlight

While The Asian Cabernet Sauvignon Masters showed that Argentina, Australia, Chile and the US can craft great examples of the expression, it was offerings from China, Japan and Israel that took the judges by surprise. By *Natalie Wang*

cabernet sauvignon masters

About the competition

The Drinks Business Hong Kong Asian Masters Cabernet Sauvignon is the Asian edition of our successful global Masters series. A departure from the traditional judging of wines by region, the competition assesses wines purely by grape variety. Divided only by price bracket and, for ease of judging, whether the style was oaked or unoaked, the blind-tasting format allowed wines to be judged without prejudice about their country of origin. Wines were scored out of 100, with those gaining more than 95 points being awarded the top title of Master. Those earning more than 90 points were given a Gold, those more than 85 points a Silver and those more than 80 points a Bronze. The wines were judged by a panel of nine judges including a Master Sommelier, Hong Kong's top wine buyers and educators on 14 March at the historic Crown Wine Cellars. This report only features the medal winners.

WELL-PRICED Cabernet Sauvignon from the New World dominated the medal chart of our inaugural Asian Cabernet Sauvignon Masters, impressing judges with their quality and approachable price points.

The Asian Cabernet Sauvignon Masters is the Asian edition of our popular Global Cabernet Sauvignon Masters, where all the entries are judged solely by grape variety instead of region of origin. The entry requirements state that the wines needed to be made from a minimum of 50% Cabernet Sauvignon. The samples were blind tasted and assessed by price bracket and stylistic difference (oaked or unoaked) to identify the best of Cabernet Sauvignon in their own price range in the local market.

"It was a great tasting, with a very interesting range of styles," said Peter Nicholas, general manager of Hong Kong-based wine merchant Boutique Wines. Amanda Longworth, head of marketing and wine services at Berry

Unoaked and Oaked Cabernet Sauvignon

Company	Product Name	Region	Country	Vintage	Medal
Under HK\$100 – Unoaked					
Viña Cousiño Macul	Don Luis	Valle del Maipo	Chile	2015	Bronze
Under HK\$100 – Oaked					
Viña Las Niñas	Cabernet Sauvignon Reserva	Apalta, Colchagua Valley	Chile	2015	Bronze
De Bortoli Wines	Deen Cabernet Sauvignon Vat Series No. 9	Victoria	Australia	2014	Bronze
Les Domaines Paul Mas	Château Paul Mas, Les Faisses, Vignes de Nicole Cabernet Sauvignon Merlot	Languedoc-Roussillon	France	2015	Bronze
Viña Valdivieso S.A.	Valdivieso Winemaker Reserva	Rapel Valley	Chile	2014	Bronze
Viña I Wines	Qu Cabernet Sauvignon	Maipo Valley (D.O. Central Valley)	Chile	2015	Bronze
Grupo Belen	Guardián Reserva Cabernet Sauvignon	Maule Valley	Chile	2015	Bronze
Viña I Wines	Casa I Cabernet Sauvignon	Curico Valley	Chile	2015	Silver
Grupo Belen	Reserva One to One	Maipo Valley	Chile	2014	Silver
Bodegas y Viñedos Quinta De Maipo	Reserva Carmenere Shiraz	Valle Del Maule	Chile	2015	Silver
Veramonte	Veramonte Cabernet Sauvignon	Colchagua Valley	Chile	2015	Silver
HK\$100–HK\$150 – Oaked					
Les Domaines Paul Mas	Astelia Cabernet Sauvignon	Languedoc-Roussillon	France	2015	Bronze
Siegel Family Wines	Siegel Single Vineyard Cabernet Sauvignon	Colchagua Valley	Chile	2014	Bronze
Grupo Belen	Sepia Reserva Cabernet Sauvignon	Cachapoal Andes	Chile	2015	Bronze
Viu Manent Winery	Viu Manent Single Vineyard La Capilla	Colchagua Valley	Chile	2013	Bronze
Howard Park Wines	Howard Park Miamup Cabernet Sauvignon	Margaret River	Australia	2014	Bronze
Viña Santa Carolina	Reserva Cabernet Sauvignon	Colchagua Valley	Chile	2015	Bronze
Viu Manent Winery	Viu Manent Single Vineyard La Capilla	Colchagua Valley	Chile	2014	Bronze
Australian Vintage	Nepenthe Altitude Cabernet Sauvignon	Adelaide Hills	Australia	2015	Silver
Casarena Bodega Y Viñedos	Casarena Reservado Cabernet Sauvignon	Mendoza	Argentina	2015	Silver
Viña Cousiño Macul	Antiguas Reservas	Valle del Maipo	Chile	2014	Silver
Viña Cousiño Macul	Don Matias	Valle del Maipo	Chile	2015	Silver
Pernod Ricard Winemakers	Jacob's Creek Reserve Coonawarra	Coonawarra	Australia	2014	Silver
Viña Luis Felipe Edwards	Terra Vega Gran Reserva Cabernet Sauvignon	Colchagua Valley	Chile	2015	Silver
Viña Valdivieso	Valdivieso Valley Selection Gran Reserva	Rapel Valley	Chile	2012	Silver
HK\$150–HK\$200					
Viñedos Emiliana	Novas Gran Reserva Cabernet Sauvignon	Valle del Maipo	Chile	2014	Bronze
Viña Luis Felipe Edwards	Family Selection Gran Reserva	Colchagua Valley	Chile	2015	Bronze
Viña Valdivieso	Valdivieso Single Vineyard	Maipo Valley	Chile	2014	Bronze
Wingara Wine Group	Katnook Founder's Block Cabernet Sauvignon	Coonawarra	Australia	2014	Bronze
Mendoza Vineyards	MV Gran Reserva Cabernet Sauvignon	Mendoza	Argentina	2014	Bronze
Siegel Family Wines	Siegel Unique Selection	Colchagua Valley	Chile	2013	Bronze
Viña Valdivieso	Valdivieso Single Vineyard	Maipo Valley	Chile	2011	Bronze
Howard Park Wines	Howard Park Leston Cabernet Sauvignon	Margaret River	Australia	2014	Bronze
Grupo Belen	Gran Reserva Cabernet Sauvignon	Maipo Valley	Chile	2013	Bronze
Concha Y Toro	Marqués de Casa Concha	Puente Alto, Maipo Valley	Chile	2014	Silver
Viña Canepo	Gran Reserva Cabernet Sauvignon Finisimo	DO Marchigüe, Colchagua Valley	Chile	2015	Silver
Bodega Vistalba	Tomero Cabernet Sauvignon	Uco Valley, Mendoza	Argentina	2015	Gold
HK\$200–HK\$300					
De Bortoli Wines	Melba Reserve	Yarra Valley	Australia	2012	Bronze
Château Tanunda	Grand Barossa Cabernet Sauvignon	Barossa	Australia	2014	Bronze
Bodega Norton	Reserva Cabernet Sauvignon	Mendoza	Argentina	2014	Bronze
Jackson Family Wines	Kendall-Jackson Vintner's Reserve	Sonoma County	USA	2014	Bronze
Viña y Cava Valle Secreto	Private Cabernet Sauvignon	Alto Cachapoal	Chile	2015	Bronze
Viña Santa Carolina	Reserva de Familia Cabernet Sauvignon	Maipo Valley	Chile	2014	Silver
Cakebread Cellars	Bakestone Cellars, North Coast	North Coast California	USA	2014	Silver
Barkan Wine Cellars	Altitude 720+	Upper Galilee	Israel	2011	Silver
Andeluna Cellars	Altitud Cabernet Sauvignon	Mendoza	Argentina	2014	Silver
Twinwoods Estate	Margaret River Cabernet Sauvignon	Margaret River	Australia	2012	Silver
Santa Rita Estate	Carmen Gran Reserva Cabernet Sauvignon	Maipo Alto Valley	Chile	2014	Silver
Trivento Bodegas Y Viñedos	Trivento Golden Reserve Cabernet Sauvignon	Uco Valley, Mendoza	Argentina	2013	Silver
Concha Y Toro	Marqués de Casa Concha Limited Edition	DO Pirque, Maipo Valley	Chile	2013	Silver
Angove Family Winemakers	Family Crest McLaren Vale	McLaren Vale	Australia	2015	Silver
Wingara Wine Group	Katnook Estate Cabernet Sauvignon	Coonawarra	Australia	2013	Silver
Northeast Wines & Spirits	Xanadu Estate Cabernet Sauvignon	Margaret River	Australia	2014	Silver
Barkan Wine Cellars	Altitude 624+	Upper Galilee	Israel	2012	Gold
Viña Cousiño Macul	Finis Terrae	Valle del Maipo	Chile	2012	Gold

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Bros. & Rudd Hong Kong, agreed: "I thought the wines were generally very good, particularly in the lower price points. They were excellent quality for value and for money. I thought the quality was very impressive."

Held on 14 March at the club house of Crown Wine Cellars, located in a UNESCO Asia Pacific Heritage site in Hong Kong, the competition received more than 100 entries from the New and Old Worlds. Quality of wines was impressive across the board, as nine judges gave four Masters (wines scored 95 points or above), 12 Gold medals (wines scored 90 points or above), 37 Silver medals (85 points or above) and 42 Bronzes (80 points or above).

OLD GUARDS

The results affirmed that Australia, Chile, Argentina and the US have come of age in crafting first-rate pure Cabernet Sauvignons and Cabernet-dominated blends that display the typicity of the grape variety, characterised by high tannins, juicy blackcurrant flavours and spicy peppery hints. Different from delicate Pinot Noir, Cabernet, regardless of its growing regions and climates, is famous for its ability to show this typicity without fail.

"Cabernet Sauvignon is no doubt a benchmark grape variety in the same way Chardonnay is for whites. Made all over the world, one can enjoy an entry-level

Many judges' jaws were left on the floor as lesser-known Cabernet samples from Israel, Japan, China's Shanxi province and Washington State stunned them with their superb quality

Oaked Cabernet Sauvignon, continued

Company	Product Name	Region	Country	Vintage	Medal
HKS300-HKS400					
Casarena Bodega Y Vinedos	Casarena Single Vineyard Agrelo	Mendoza	Argentina	2015	Bronze
Viña Valdivieso	Caballo Loco Grand Cru Maipo	Maipo Valley	Chile	2013	Bronze
Twinwoods Estate	Optivus Reserve Margaret River	Margaret River	Australia	2012	Bronze
Concha Y Toro	Casillero del Diablo Leyenda	DO Pirque, Maipo Valley	Chile	2013	Bronze
Mendoza Vineyards	Finca La Anita Cabernet Sauvignon	Mendoza	Argentina	2013	Bronze
Bodegas Escorihuela	Miguel Escorihuela Gascon Pequeñas	Mendoza	Argentina	2014	Bronze
Gascon 1884	Producciones Cabernet Sauvignon				
Santa Rita Estate	Santa Rita Medalla Real Gran Reserva	Maipo Valley	Chile	2012	Gold
Chateau Ste Michelle	CSM Cabernet Sauvignon Cold Creek	Washington State	USA	2012	Gold
HKS400-HKS800					
Ningxia Gaoyuan Silver Heights Vineyard Co	Emma's Reserve	Ningxia	China	2014	Bronze
Chateau Tanunda	The Chateau Cabernet Sauvignon	Barossa Valley	Australia	2014	Bronze
Pernod Ricard Winemakers	St Hugo Coonawarra Cabernet Sauvignon	Coonawarra	Australia	2013	Bronze
Howard Park Wines	Howard Park Abercrombie	Western Australia	Australia	2013	Bronze
Viña Cousiño Macul	Lot A	Valle del Maipo	Chile	2010	Bronze
Cape Mentelle Vineyards	Cape Mentelle Cabernet Sauvignon	Margaret River	Australia	2013	Bronze
Suntory Wine International Limited	Kaminoyama Cabernet Sauvignon	Yamagata	Japan	2014	Bronze
Santa Rita Estate	Carmen Winemaker's Red Blend	Maipo Valley	Chile	2013	Bronze
Levantine Hill Estate	Levantine Hill Estate Cabernet Sauvignon	Yarra Valley	Australia	2013	Silver
Santa Rita Estate	Carmen Gold Reserve Cabernet Sauvignon	Maipo Valley	Chile	2010	Silver
Jackson Family Wines	Freemark Abbey Napa Valley	Napa Valley	USA	2013	Silver
Ningxia Gaoyuan Silver Heights Vineyard Co	Silver Heights Family Reserve	Ningxia	China	2014	Silver
The Wine House	If Six Was Nine, Cabernet Sauvignon Reserve	Napa Valley	USA	2013	Silver
Wakefield/Taylor's	St Andrews Cabernet Sauvignon	Clare Valley	Australia	2014	Silver
Jackson Family Wines	Hickinbotham Clarendon Vineyard 'Trueman' Cabernet Sauvignon, McLaren Vale	McLaren Vale	Australia	2013	Silver
Chateau Tanunda	Noble Baron Cabernet Sauvignon	Barossa	Australia	2013	Silver
Barkan Wine Cellars	Superieur Cabernet Sauvignon	Upper Galilee	Israel	2011	Silver
Pernod Ricard Winemakers	Jacob's Creek Expedition	Coonawarra	Australia	2013	Silver
Viña Maipo	Viña Maipo Protegido Cabernet Sauvignon	Maipo Valley	Chile	2014	Gold
Viña Ventisquero Ltda	Enclave	Maipo Valley	Chile	2012	Gold
Jackson Family Wines	Stonestreet Estate Vineyards	Alexander Valley	USA	2013	Gold
Gva'ot Winery	Gofna Reserve, Cabernet Sauvignon	Shomron, Central Hills	Israel	2012	Gold
HKS800+					
Shanxi Chateau Rongzi	Shanxi Chateau Rongzi	Xiangning County	China	2013	Silver
Pernod Ricard Winemakers	St Hugo Vetus Purum Coonawarra	Coonawarra	Australia	2010	Silver
Treasury Wine Estates	Beringer Private Reserve Cabernet Sauvignon	Napa Valley	USA	2012	Silver
Chateau Lynch Bages	Chateau Lynch Bages	Pauillac, Bordeaux	France	2012	Gold
Chateau Tanunda	50 Year Old Cabernet Sauvignon	Barossa	Australia	2013	Gold
Shanxi Chateau Rongzi	Shanxi Chateau Rongzi	Xiangning County	China	2013	Gold
Santa Rita Estate	Santa Rita Casa Real	Valle del Maipo, Buin, Alto Jahuel	Chile	2011	Gold
Levantine Hill Estate	Levantine Hill Estate Samantha's Paddock Melange Traditionnel	Yarra Valley	Australia	2013	Master
Wakefield/Taylor's	The Visionary Cabernet Sauvignon	Clare Valley	Australia	2013	Master
Suntory Wine International Limited	Tomi Red	Yamanashi	Japan	2012	Master
Treasury Wine Estates	Wolf Blass Black Label Cabernet Shiraz Malbec	McLaren Vale, Langhorne Creek	Australia	2012	Master

Cabernet or high-end Bordeaux or California, for instance, but its DNA profile is paramount," João Pires MS, director of Wines, Food & Beverages, Altira Macau, City of Dreams Macau & Studio City Macau, said.

"And this DNA is always related to its typical blackcurrant aroma profile, tannic edge, full-bodied rich style, spicy peppery

hints and considerable length," he added.

Australia led the Masters category with three wines clinching the prestigious Masters title. They were: Levantine Hill Estate Samantha's Paddock Melange Traditionnel 2013, a blend of Cabernet (81%), Merlot, Cabernet Franc and Petit Verdot from Yarra Valley; Taylors Wines The Visionary Cabernet Sauvignon 2013,

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and; Wolf Blass Black Label Cabernet Shiraz Malbec 2012. The country has proven time and again that it's capable of crafting masterful Cabernets that can command top market prices and indeed all three wines are in the HK\$800-plus (US\$103) price range. The country's warmer regions, such as Coonawarra and Margaret River, are established Cabernet sites. In addition, Clare Valley in South Australia is also shaping up to be a prime site for high-quality Cabernet, as seen in Taylors Wines' The Visionary Cabernet Sauvignon, a 100% Cabernet that impressed the judges with its purity of fruit, texture and quality of tannins.

SUPERIORITY

Chile's Maipo Valley excelled in the top-rated, best-value Cabernet Sauvignon category, confirming its superiority among New World Cabernets. Alto Maipo, which encompasses Puente Alto and Pirque, delivered the most top-rated Chilean Cabernet examples. World-class Cabernets are produced here, as we found in Santa Rita's Casa Real, Viña Ventisquero's Enclave and Cousiño-Macul Finis Terrae, all three of which received Gold medals. Moving inland to Chile's neighbour, Argentina, it's known that the Mendoza wine region is defined by Malbec; but as previously noted in our global Cabernet Sauvignon Masters competition, there's been a surge of beautiful Cabernets made by producers there in recent years.

This is also confirmed by our Asian masters results, where Bodega Vistalba's Tomero Cabernet Sauvignon, a pure expression of the red grape, was awarded a Gold medal. The result is extremely encouraging, as this high performer only sells between HK\$150 and HK\$199, making it arguably the best-value Gold medal winner of all the entries.

Throughout the competition, when the wines' identities were finally revealed, many judges' jaws were left on the floor as lesser-known Cabernet samples

from Israel's Central Hills and Upper Galilee, Japan's Yamanashi, China's Shanxi province and the US's Washington State not only stunned them with their superb quality, but outperformed many wines from the traditional Cabernet strongholds of Australia and Chile.

The biggest surprise was a Japanese Cabernet from Suntory's Tomi Winery, located in Yamanashi to the southwest of Tokyo near Mount Fuji. The wine was unanimously given the ultimate accolade of a Master. Its fine-grained tannins, well-executed texture and structure left a few judges convinced of its probable

A Bordeaux-blend red from China's Chateau Rongzi in Xiangning County in Shanxi also nabbed a Gold, confirming that the Asian country can produce medal-worthy top reds

provenance from a top Bordeaux estate. Eric Desgouttes, general manager of Hong Kong's leading wine merchant Kerry Wines, who gave nearly 100 points to this velvety and savoury red, said, on top of its typicity and its outstanding quality: "Its minerality is really riveting. It's truly a special wine".

A Bordeaux-blend red from China's Chateau Rongzi in Xiangning County in Shanxi also nabbed a Gold, confirming that the Asian country can produce medal-worthy top reds. "It was quite a surprise that Japan and China are doing an exceptional job. Some of the judges like myself even guessed they were fine Bordeaux. That is a really big 'wow', and these wine regions really deserve a bit

more attention, especially from a restaurant's or sommelier's point of view," Wallace Lo, hotel sommelier of Park Lane Hong Kong, said, after learning the where the wines were from.

Equally meriting the judges' praise was a pure Cabernet from Chateau St. Michelle in Washington State. The wine impressed judges with its complexity, structure and fruitiness; in short, it's a wine that "checks every box of quality Cabernet", Jennie Mack, managing director of Asia Wine Service & Education Centre, commented during the assessment. Indeed, when talking about American Cabernet, much of the attention is turned, and rightly so, onto Napa or Sonoma in California.

In the past two to three years, however, Washington State has steadily emerged as a key Cabernet player to the extent that the grape has now become the region's dominant grape variety.

Meanwhile, in Israel, two wines – Altitude 624+ by one of the country's largest wineries, Barkan Vineyards in Upper Galilee, and Gva'ot Winery from Shomron in Central Hills, sit comfortably in the privileged league of Gold-medal winners. Cabernet, being one of the three most widely planted wine grapes in Israel, along with Carignan and Merlot, provides a firm backbone either in blend or unblended versions, as were seen in these two examples. Such is the power of this versatile and masculine grape variety. Both wines were high-scoring performers, and the Altitude 624+ wine seems to deliver much for its price in the HK\$200-HK\$299 range.

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The judges hard at work

WINEMAKING TECHNIQUES

When it comes to winemaking techniques, it was clear that most of the Cabernet samples were well polished and true to their style, but there were a few instances of what the judges called

Even more encouraging than the quality of Cabernet the judges discovered from New World countries was the unpretentious and approachable retail price points for these top wines, led by Chile in particular

‘technical wines’, referring to examples that are clearly heavily influenced by human factors. It’s worth noting that technical wines are not faulty wines but rather more uniform expressions that

seem as if they have been made to a ‘recipe’. But with excessive oak use or over-extraction, the tannins are drying and coarse, giving an unpleasant sensation on the palate.

“Nowadays, you don’t often find a really ‘bad’ wine in a tasting, but it is more like tasting a lot of wines that are trying to be technical,” said Wallace Lo. “There’s nothing wrong with them, but they are just wines that are trying to fit in all the boxes in a tasting sheet, nothing more.”

A few samples with high alcohol levels were not yet well integrated with quality fruit and lacked balance, a few judges thought. Wines that were “well integrated, with fine-grained tannin and a depth of finesse and elegance” were what Wendy Chan, general manager of Wines & Spirits Division, Telford International Company Limited, was looking for when judging the samples.

The colour of most Cabernet samples was deep and luscious, varying on the spectrum from purple to dark ruby. This is a firm indication of the grape variety’s thick grape skin and its predominant dark fruit character.

“Personally, I like to see good depth of colour,” added Nicholas, a factor he focused on when judging the wines.

Most of the wines are from recent vintages, with the oldest being 2010. Freshness was generally found in nearly all the samples, and the judges had a special liking for wines with lively freshness and vibrant acidity. “For me, herbaceousness is an integral part of Cabernet Sauvignon. It just depends on the level. The green bell pepper characters should sit behind and complement the fruit characters. The classic example is the Cru Classé Bordeaux, where the herbaceousness sits well behind the fruit, oak and developing aromas and flavours,” said Nicholas.

VALUE FOR MONEY

Even more encouraging than the quality of Cabernet the judges discovered from New World countries was the unpretentious and approachable retail price points for these top wines, led by Chile in particular. Apart from the four Masters (all in the HK\$800 price bracket), five wines between HK\$100 and HK\$400 picked up a Gold, of which three – unsurprisingly – were from Chile.

Even moving to lower-price brackets, below HK\$100, it is clear there are some great producers really pushing the envelope to challenge profit margins and quality to produce three Silver medal-wines that were well balanced, pleasant and honest Cabernets. They were Viña I Wines, Palo Alto and Veramonte, not to mention the other Silver medals Chile bagged in the HK\$100 to HK\$200 range.

“Below HK\$300, there were quite a lot of Silvers and even Golds, but between HK\$400 and HK\$800 it was quite difficult

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because there was a lot of ambition in the wines; sometimes they get a little bit lost with what they are trying to achieve. Definitely some of the biggest surprises for lower price point wines there," BBR's Amanda Longworth commented.

Between HK\$400 and HK\$800, only three Golds were awarded as judges become increasingly conscious about the price tag in correlation to quality. They Golds went to; Stonestreet Estate Vineyards Cabernet Sauvignon 2013 from Alexander Valley, Viña Maipo Protegido Cabernet Sauvignon 2014 and Viña Ventisquero Enclave 2012.

This sentiment was echoed by Alan Liu, beverage and country store manager of The American Club in Hong Kong: "Some lower-price-point wines actually performed better and have better balance than higher-price-point wines. Also, the quality from New World countries is better than I expected."

However, when it comes to ultra-premium wines, including the top performing Japanese and Chinese wines, their higher-than-normal retail price points could intimidate consumers (both were in the HK\$800 or above range).

"Japanese or Chinese wines are still a relatively new category. It will take a lot of time for them to get where Bordeaux is, if they actually get there. Consumers are not familiar with Chinese or Japanese wines, so for them to pay top price for the wine is going to be hard," Pires added. *db*

'Some lower-price-point wines actually performed better and have better balance than higher-price-point wines'

The judges (back row, left to right and front row, l-r)

João Pires, Master Sommelier, director of wines, food & beverages, Altira Macau, City of Dreams Macau & Studio City Macau

Ivy Ng, Publisher, *The Drinks Business* Hong Kong

Amanda Longworth, Head of marketing & wine services, Berry Bros. & Rudd Hong Kong

Wendy Chan, General manager - wines & spirits division, Telford International Company Limited

Alan Liu, Beverage and country store manager, The American Club Hong Kong

Peter Nicholas, General manager, Boutique Wines

Eric Desgouttes, General manager, Kerry Wines

Jennie Mack, Managing director & senior wine educator, Asia Wine Service & Education Center

Wallace Lo, Hotel Sommelier, The Park Lane Hong Kong

