

COOL CLIMATE WINE SYMPOSIUM

UK's wine industry comes of age

Stephen Quinn, writing for *Sommelier India*, was one of 600 delegates at the recent Cool Climate Wine Symposium where more than 100 speakers discussed current wine production and marketing issues

The ninth International Cool Climate Wine Symposium, said to be the world's premier wine conference, was held in the United Kingdom for the first time in May. Industry commentators saw it as a sign of recognition of the coming of age of the UK's wine industry.

About 600 delegates from 30 countries arrived in Brighton for the symposium, held every four years. More than 100 speakers discussed and debated current wine production and marketing issues over three days.

Opening keynote speaker, Jancis Robinson

MW said the location reflected the growing reputation of the UK as a quality wine producer, as well as noting London's position as a key centre of the global wine trade.

On the first day the British government announced that English producers, Chapel Down and Ridgeview had been chosen to be official suppliers for No 10 Downing Street receptions.

Tamara Roberts, Ridgeview's CEO, said the announcement illustrated the government's support of "the incredible quality, breadth and depth of the British food and drink industry". Mark Harvey, managing director at Chapel Down, said the support from No. 10 had arrived at "an incredibly exciting time for a dynamic and ambitious English wine industry".

English Wine Producers is the UK wine industry's marketing arm. Marketing director, Julia Trustram Eve described the recognition as "an essential endorsement" of the industry. English Wine Week, organised by English Wine Producers, started straight after the conference.

Ridgeview are a family owned company dedicated to the production of high quality, traditional method, sparkling wine from classic Champagne grape varieties. Chapel Down received six medals at this year's International Wine & Spirits Competition, including a gold for its Three Graces 2010. Its new release, Kit's Coty Chardonnay 2013 was

Jancis Robinson, keynote speaker at The Cool Climate Wine Symposium



Photos: Julia Claxton for the ICCWS

awarded the trophy for the best UK white wine costing more than £15 (\$20) at the Decanter World Wine Awards 2016.

This proved to be the most popular wine in a blind tasting of 14 English still wines hosted by wine writer and television presenter, Oz Clarke. People voted for their favourite wine via their mobile phone using software designed by Slido.com, and results appeared almost immediately on a screen above Clarke.

Cool climate wines offered “thrilling possibilities”, Clarke told his audience. Who, he asked, took the prestigious cool climate regions of Tasmania in Australia or Canada’s Okanagan Valley seriously 40 years ago? “Many said it was not possible [to make quality wine] in Okanagan and Tasmania, and we can do it too,” he remarked to loud applause, with better viticulture and greater ambition in recent years after early disappointments.

In 1964 only about 1,500 bottles of wine were made in UK. This year the figure was 6.3 million. A landmark event occurred in 1998 when Nyetimber was named the world’s best sparkling, Clarke said, an event similar to the achievements of Cloudy Bay in making the world aware of New Zealand wine.

At one of the more than 60 seminars held during the conference Richard Halsted, CEO of Wine Intelligence, offered some positive predictions for an industry witnessing a decline in consumption in traditional markets like France and Spain. About 57% of Chinese wine drinkers were aged under 35, compared with 29% in the United States and 31% in Australia. “China has added 10 million wine drinkers in the past two years, and will add another 30 million by 2025,” Halsted said.

Meanwhile, in the United States, a typical millennial wine consumer will spend 70% more this year on wine than the equivalent member of the baby-boomer generation, he said. “By 2025 millennials and ‘next gens’ will make up more than half of the American wine



Chris Foss, member of the organizing committee, welcomes delegates at the opening ceremony

drinking population. And by 2025, 17 million people of Hispanic origin will drink wine at least once a month compared with eight or nine million now.”

Emerging markets like India and China would become important for the wine industry over the next decade, noted Halsted. He defined emerging markets as those with a population “relatively new to wine, where few people drink wine”.

Emerging markets for wine currently matter, but they will matter even more in the next decade. The new consumer was likely to want different things in terms of wine categories. “Is the industry up to the task?” he asked.

Halsted’s company predicts that China will have 154 million wine drinkers by 2025 compared with 48 million in 2016. “Once



Dr Jamie Goode, keynote speaker for the final session



Delegates at Sealife Brighton, believed to be the world's oldest aquarium

A landmark event occurred in 1998 when Nyetimber was named the world's best sparkling

people have the white goods and the iPad and the discretionary income, they will move on to things like wine."

Peer to peer recommendations via social media were very powerful, he said, predicting a big growth in sparkling wine consumption among millennials. "It's the gateway product, Prosecco especially." Factors such as television programmes showing beautiful people drinking sparkling wine has influenced consumption.

Steve Charters MW from the Burgundy Business School said it was vital to understand culture when communicating and marketing wine in emerging markets. The French had unconscious assumptions about wine, but it was not the same in China. "In China even the idea of matching food with wine is nonsense. Many Chinese prefer tea with their meals. It's vital to understand culture and avoid pre-conceptions."

Professor Damien Wilson from Sonoma State University said globally twice as many people were drinking wine now compared with the 1980s but they were consuming about the same volume. "People are drinking less but focusing on better quality."

Dr Wilson noted the "purchase promiscuity" of millennials. As a general rule, he said, the more the consumer knows about wine, the more promiscuous they become in terms of buying wine. "We cannot blame them because we throw so many new products at them each year. In the United States last year almost 11,000 new alcohol products were launched."

Dr Jamie Goode was the keynote speaker for the final session. He noted the lack of an agreed definition for cool climate wine. "Simply put, it is appropriate climate for growing grapes. Cool climate is a state of mind."

The big challenge for wine producers was finding a "route to market," noting that distribution was "as important as winemaking". Cool climate wines tended to be more expensive than those produced in hot countries so it was logical, he said, "to aim [prices] at the top end of the market".

The symposium ended with the announcement that Canada had been chosen for the next International Cool Climate Wine Symposium, to be held in July 2020. Details can be found at ICCWS2020.ca ♦