



# HIGH FLYER AIMING HIGHER

DENIS GASTIN

YOU would expect that anyone bearing the nom de plume Flying Winemaker would be able to boast a range of adventures and new frontiers, but few could expect the vast and incredibly diverse range of wine experiences that Flying Winemaker Eddie McDougall has posted - and in a relatively short time.

After finishing a degree in international business at Queensland's Griffith University in 2003 he then did a winemaking degree at the University of Melbourne and built into this program lots of first-hand practical experience working at a cross-section of Australian wineries in three states, including Shadowfax, Giant Steps, Clyde Park and Wood Park wineries in Victoria; Deep Woods Estate in Western Australia and O'Leary Walker in South Australia.

His next frontier was to have a first-hand experience in the traditional wine homelands. After graduating in 2008 he headed for Italy, first to leading Barolo producer Vietti then to the renowned Mas de Daumas Gassac in Languedoc. On his way back he stopped in Hong Kong to spend time with his mother and was convinced by a family friend to stay on and make Hong Kong's first wine at Eighth Estate Winery - importing the fruit, and fermenting and finishing it off locally. He also started his winemaking operation in Australia, initially with the Hong Kong market in mind.

Partly to sell these wines but also to

launch more broadly into wine sales, wine appreciation and wine education, McDougall set up a Hong Kong-based business in 2011, which he called The Flying Winemaker. His stated goal was "to take the snobbery out of wine and revolutionise its consumption across the Asian Continent", launching in Hong Kong as a first step. It made such an impact in a very short time that just one year later The Flying Winemaker was declared "No 1 Wine Retailer in Hong Kong" by *The Drinks Business Magazine*. This was followed by an award from Hong Kong lifestyle magazine *TimeOut* as one of "The Top 20 People Changing The Way We Eat And Drink".

The Hong Kong experience encouraged McDougall to commit more broadly to understanding how wine is positioned in other countries in Asia and to share this with local and international audiences. He patiently explored this territory with a TV production crew to make a 13-episode series on wine in Asia called *The Flying Winemaker*, for the Discovery Cable TV channel, which went to air in September 2014. The focus was on the many ways food and wine are consumed and enjoyed across Asia, and the unorthodox and sometimes unique methods developed for growing quality grapes in unconventional viticultural environments and the resulting wines. He covered China, India, Thailand, Japan, Taiwan, Vietnam and Bali.

The show premiered on Discovery's TV Asia Network and has reached over 160 million households in Asia and Australasia. Subsequently it was screened across Central and South America and has been available more broadly on Netflix since July 2017. It has also been showing on in-flight entertainment services on top tier airlines globally.

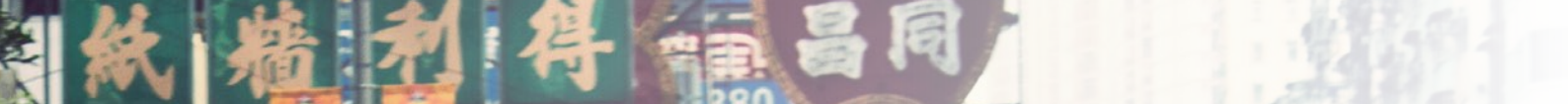
Taking his Asian wine adventure to a new level, in 2016 McDougall launched the ground-breaking *Asian Wine Review* concept. He felt that while the quality and uniqueness of Asian wines has come such a long way, consumers and decision makers in the food and beverage industry are still hesitating to commit to Asian wines, and that an active tool to give them confidence was needed.

*Asian Wine Review* is an annual booklet that presents reviews of locally produced Asian wines using conventional international tasting procedures applied by panels of professional local and international palates familiar with the Asian wine scene from both the wine production and appreciation perspective. (I have chaired one of the panels each year.) The aim is to reveal to the broader audience the unique quality that is being achieved by Asian winemakers and also to show the unique grape varieties that are being made into quality wine locally. It is very significant that at least half of the 40,000 printed copies are now being taken by people in the food and beverage trade. ▀

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The 2018 edition of *Asian Wine Review*, released in March, is the third in the series. Entries for this edition were judged in Hong Kong in October 2017. The book contains scores and professional reviews of the 159 short-listed wines from 54 producers in nine Asian countries. It is published in hard copy in three languages (English, Chinese and Japanese) and free e-copies are accessible on the website ([www.asianwinereview.com](http://www.asianwinereview.com)).

To add further momentum to this initiative, McDougall hosted the Asian Wine Festival in Hong Kong in April 2017 to get more people in the region respecting and drinking Asian wines. Over 60 Asian wineries participated in the day of active tastings and masterclasses on Asian wine topics at the event, from countries including Japan, China, Indonesia, India, Thailand and Myanmar. There were over 300 visitors to the festival - from the wine and food sector and the media, as well as consumers.

This professional exposure of winemakers in Asia has increased dramatically the number of Asian wine brands being listed in importer and wholesaler portfolios, which in turn has inspired the procurement for the on and off trade sectors.

In his own winemaking world, McDougall has now ceased his Hong Kong winemaking and is focused on producing wines in Australia, in the King Valley and Margaret River, for local and international markets. He says, “Australia is important to what I do and is an important part of The Flying Winemaker story. It's where it all started for me and is currently also the biggest market for my Australian wine. The exciting thing about Australia is that it is very proactive in its promotions to the world and has a good focus on engaging its neighbouring Asian wine drinkers, especially those in China.”

Rosé has recently become another creative frontier for McDougall. In 2016 he launched the Rosé Revolution, an Asia-wide promotion of rosé as a wine style that lends itself particularly well



to the casual yet aspirational lifestyle of the modern wine drinker in Asia. It is a wine category, he says, that is finally on the way back and notes “there is a huge opportunity for rosé in Asia, based on its compatibility to the climate, its ability to match with local cuisines and a good cross section of accessible price points”. In 2017 he held large-scale Rosé Revolution events in Hong Kong, Singapore and Tokyo. In 2016, events were also held in Shanghai and Macau, as well as Singapore and Hong Kong.

And, are there other new horizons for this adventurous Flying Winemaker? Yes, he says, of course!

“Our future is now focused on the production and distribution of my own brand of wines. The demand for them has organically grown over the years and we are now making wines not just in the King Valley but also in Margaret River and Languedoc. Our next big project in the winemaking space will be in Ningxia, China.”

