

Press Release
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Vinality International Academy Celebrates 6 New Italian Wine Ambassadors certified in Hong Kong

Vinality International Academy (VIA) hosted the 26th edition of its rigorous Italian Wine Ambassador Certification Course 27-29 November 2023 in Hong Kong, certifying 6 new Italian Wine Ambassadors.



2023 VIA Hong Kong Students

November 2023 marked an exciting return to Hong Kong for VIA. The Asia Pacific region has become an important epicenter for VIA, with 64 Italian Wine Ambassadors already certified there, including 11 in Hong Kong alone. Spreading Italian wine joy is a cornerstone of the program and VIA remains committed to an educational outreach that stretches to all corners of the globe. In this 26th Edition of the VIA Italian Wine Ambassador course, VIA Faculty member Sarah Heller MW taught the course in person at the Grand Hyatt Hotel in Hong Kong. Seven students successfully passed the rigorous exam; one student was already a certified Italian Wine Ambassador and six new Ambassadors joined the VIA community. Vinality Managing Partner Stevie Kim remarked: *“It was a pleasure to hold the VIA course in Hong Kong once again, a location that is crucial to the Italian wine industry and dear to our hearts since our first course there in 2017.”*

Students prepared for the course at home, studying 40 hours of video lessons on the bespoke VIA learning platform and reading two textbooks before attending the course in Hong Kong. Students participated for 3 days, tasting 48 Italian wines and taking the difficult 2.5-hour exam. The result? Seven students passed, with 6 becoming newly certified Italian Wine Ambassadors. Singapore student Sean Ou summed up his delight at passing the exam: *“I’m over the moon really, so appreciative of this course in all its complexity. Now I am looking forward to becoming an Educator for the Maestro (introductory level) course and hoping to send my colleague to VIA Verona in 2024. I will be taking steps to help build this amazing community.”*

The new Ambassadors are Nico Boulay of Hong Kong, Peter Bourke of Australia, Hei Tung Zita Chan of Hong Kong, Aubrey Lau of Hong Kong, Sean Ou of Singapore and Yongzhi Angie Tan of Hong Kong. Dongrui Bella Ma of Hong Kong passed the exam for the second time.



The VIA Hong Kong Students who passed the exam with VIA Faculty Sarah Heller, Italian Consul General in Hong Kong and Macau Carmelo Ficarra, and Trade Commissioner at ITA – Italian Trade Agency (Hong Kong office) Paola Bellusci.

The Vinitaly International Academy certification course is recognised as the gold standard of Italian wine education. The VIA community comprises over 1300 candidates, of whom 346 have now achieved the title Italian Wine Ambassador and 16 of those are qualified as Italian Wine Experts. The VIA Community, composed of all students who have ever studied the program since its inception in 2017, form a supportive and professional network that extends far beyond the limits of the classroom and includes lasting friendships, an open forum for sharing wine information, and career opportunities.

Students who take the VIA course come from every aspect of the wine sector, including educators, journalists, importers, hospitality, retailers, and beyond. Faculty member Sarah Heller MW reflected on the impact of VIA, *“We challenge students to join a profound and up to the minute conversation about Italian wines and what makes them so unique in the world. We aim to engage and immerse our students, give them new tools to communicate these wines and a solid foundation to become true Ambassadors, promoting Italian wines around the world.”*



VIA holds satellite courses at various times during the year. The Flagship Course is held annually in Verona in the days leading up to Vinitaly, the international wine and spirits exhibition organized by Veronafiere. The next Flagship course will be held 4-8 April 2024. Applications will open on the VIA website in December 2023. Satellite courses in other locations around the world will be announced later in the year, through VIA social media and on the VIA website. To apply: <https://eventi.vinitalytour.com/en/sign-up-via/> or send an email at via@justdothework.it.

About: [Vinitaly International Academy](#) (VIA) aims to be the gold standard of Italian wine education. It offers a complete educational path with standardized courses that will teach professionals and educators to master the diversity of Italian wine in a rigorous and organized manner. VIA's main objective is to foster a global network of highly qualified professionals of Italian Wine Ambassadors and Italian Wine Experts who will support and promote Italian wine throughout the world. VIA was founded by Stevie Kim, Managing Director of Vinitaly International. The new VIA ecosystem is guided by the Italian trade associations Federdoc, Federvini, Vignaioli Indipendenti FIVI, and Unione Italiana Vini as members of the Institutional Advisory Board. Italian vine genetics scholar, Prof. Attilio Scienza, oversees VIA's scientific and educational direction as the Chief Scientist. VIA Faculty Sarah Heller MW and Henry Davar teach the flagship Italian Wine Ambassador course. To date, there are 346 Certified Italian Wine Ambassadors of whom 16 are also Italian Wine Experts.