

epicure

INDONESIA

life's refinements

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Eastbound and down

The newly-launched Asian Wine Producers Association (AWPA) held its inaugural dinner at the Cucca restaurant, and *epicure indonesia* was on board for the ride. By Holly McDonald





The skinny On November 14, Hatten Wines hosted the inaugural AWPA dinner in Indonesia at Cucca restaurant, Jimbaran, Bali, showing off some of the very best wines from the founding wineries matched with the creative and delicious cuisine of chef Kevin Cherkas.

The event followed the launching of AWPA in Hong Kong earlier in November. Bringing together wineries from across the region that own or manage vineyards and produce wine from locally grown grapes, the founding AWPA members are GranMonte and Siam Winery from Thailand, Sula Vineyards and Grover Zampa Vineyards from India, Hatten Wines from Indonesia's Bali and Château Mercian from Japan. With wine now being made from grapes grown in 13 countries across Asia, the scope for growth is huge. Did you know, for instance, that Cambodia, Mongolia and Myanmar produce wine?

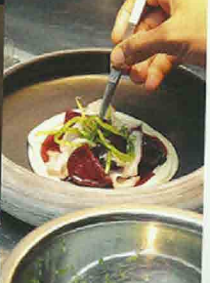
Among the guests at the inaugural dinner were Gus Rai and Dayu Soma, owners of Hatten Wines, Susata from Indonesia's Food & Beverage Association, Adnyana, head sommelier of the soon-to-open Ritz Carlton, Kertawidyawati, chairwoman of the Bali chapter of the Indonesian Sommelier Association, James Kalleske, winemaker at Hatten Wines, Pierre Lang, the general manager of soon-to-be-opened Alila Seminyak and Marysse Laroque, from Hatten, who is also the secretary of the AWPA.

Nothing kicks off a celebration better than a good bubbly, and Hatten's sparkling Tunjung, made from Probolinggo biru grapes grown in northern Bali, did the job surprisingly well – which is fair to say, as producing such a light, refreshing wine in this tropical

climate is an extraordinary achievement. Paired with a selection of tapas, it put the crowd into an ebullient mood.

Next up was a Viognier from GranMonte, the only winery producing Viognier in Thailand. Crisp, well-balanced and fresh, it went well with Kevin's honey-baked pumpkin salad. We were able to compare this with India's Grover Zampa Viognier, a more rich and powerful version that stands up well to the stronger flavours of Indian cuisine – we enjoyed it alongside smoked butterfish with beetroot yoghurt, avocado and wild fennel.

Conversations warmed up as we discussed matters oenological.



Do our palates reach their optimal point at a certain age? Does eating chillies ruin your palate? We did glean from the experts that you should most definitely skip coffee before a wine tasting, and our palates are at their peak at around 10am.

India was up again next, with a cheeky Sula Vineyards 2013 Sauvignon Blanc that sang next to Kevin's barbecue octopus served with Asian gazpacho, fresh apple, caramelised cauliflower and fresh coriander. Then a 2012 Chardonnay from Château Mercian, where wines have been produced from local grapes for more than 120 years, lent its rich, balanced taste to match a rice-crust soft-shell crab with garlic aioli, barbecued pineapple and curry leaf.

Then we moved on to GranMonte's Syrah. It genuinely impressed Adnyana: "I think I'll have to put this wine on my list," he said, enjoying it with marinated pulled pork with roasted onion, soft boiled egg and crispy potato strings. "This is not that far from the best Australian shiraz."

Then it was time for Hatten to shine again, serving its Pino de Bali with Kevin's "Bali Breakfast". This wine – which won double gold at the China Wine and Spirits Wine Awards earlier this year – was inspired by the Pineau des Charentes method, being fortified prior to fermentation and then aged in French oak for more than five years. While we had it as a dessert wine, it also works well as an aperitif served with antipasto, foie gras or rich cheeses.



In all, this was a superb pairing of food and wine, and left no doubt that Asian wines are now up there with some of the world's best.

Overheard

Eavesdropping is never more fun than at a wine dinner as the evening grows late – and with experts in attendance, the quality of commentary was high.

"This is a stunning, world-class wine."

"I have not had a better blend of Bordeaux from anywhere in the world."

"What can you smell?" "Alcohol!"

"This wine tonight has changed my way of thinking."

"Wow, I've never tasted an Indian wine before."

Flavours to remember

• The tapas dishes served with the Tunjung were a great indicator of the remainder of the meal to come. The ceviche consisted of slices of raw fish with a chilli-lime dressing, watermelon ice and a touch of fresh basil, baby corn grilled Cuban-style with young parmesan, lime and parsley and croquettes of pickled mushroom, roasted garlic and tempe cream.

• The Bali Breakfast was a light dessert bursting with flavour. Whipped coconut cream was folded with sweet runny mango, and frozen passionfruit added a layer of perky tartness.