

L I F

D I N A R Y

HONG KONG TASTE

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Laurinda Ho

On family, food and fashion



Collective Memory

There's plenty of information out there about which wines to buy, where to buy them and how to store them. To learn more about the finer points of collector culture, I talked to some prominent local oenophiles

BY SARAH HELLER, MW



Members of the Hong Kong Wine Society, 1985

Wine collecting has a few fundamental advantages over other types of collecting: one, regular depletion, which frees up space for further collecting; and two, the act of depleting is rather enjoyable (and a boon to your popularity). The challenge for nascent wine collectors is that collecting solo isn't much fun and collector circles can be tricky to penetrate.

Internationally, Asian wine collectors have gained notoriety for the decadence and sheer scale of their collections. Consequently, many were only willing to answer my questions anonymously. The scene is quite varied. Through wine associations like the Hong Kong Wine Society—one of Asia's oldest, founded in 1981—the Ordre des Coteaux de Champagne, Confrérie des Chevaliers du Tastevin and Knights of Alba, I've encountered collectors who could literally fill castles with bottles numbering in the hundreds of thousands and others whose collections are enviably succinct.

Great collections don't just happen. Collectors shop strategically. Retired engineering CEO CK Tsang reveals that when first collecting in the '90s he actually acquired an import licence to source wines directly. His first purchase was 250 cases of Château Prieuré-Lichine '95, some of which he resold to fellow collectors. Even those making less substantial purchases tend to buy cases to get their allocations and then swap bottles with friends.

One highly respected Burgundy collector says that although she buys for consumption, not reselling, she mainly buys en primeur (EP)—before the wine is bottled—or on release to guarantee provenance. This isn't to say back vintages aren't for true collectors—in fact many older wines are priced below the EP or current release price—but mature bottles are scrutinised to the nth degree.

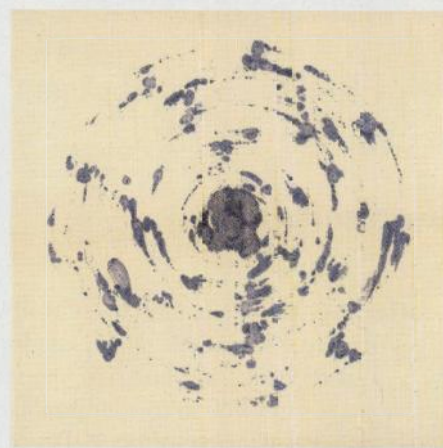
Regarding collection composition, some feel strongly that depth trumps breadth. "I go for producer styles I like and

will buy regardless of vintage to ensure I get my allocation every year," the Burgundy collector continues. "I will open the bottles and try them at various stages according to my understanding of the characters and ageing potential of each vintage." Depth also means going beyond the *crème de la crème*. "I will buy from village to grand cru from each of the producers that I collect. I believe a producer's ability is best tested by the village-level wine."

Another group is more eclectic, targeting wines that may be unavailable or unaffordable in future. The Wine Society members I polled expressed interest in backfilling their Barolo and Barbaresco selections, stocking up on Champagne and laying down "classical Australian" bottles from the likes of Wendouree, Giacosa and Rockford.

Reselling is a fraught topic, with many mature collectors anxiously tallying their remaining bottles versus projected future birthdays. Tsang says several of his friends' wives have encouraged them to sell and he has personally sold a few cases at auction. Still, he continues to purchase, focusing increasingly on drinkability (he prefers Burgundy for its ability to match Chinese food), and only slowly running down his bottle count.

All, however, agreed on one thing. Perhaps because Asia, unlike Europe, has few generational collections, depleting the collection is an important part of the gig. Though it could be uncharitably spun as "showing off," a key to fitting in well is unflagging generosity. This can take many forms, from hosting several dozen friends for an annual tasting of 60 white Burgundies or a 20-bottle vertical of a top Pomerol estate, to ensuring you put forward your best bottles at BYO events. As Tsang notes, "At home I drink quite simply: years ago I learned from [former Prieuré-Lichine proprietor] Sacha Lichine that the best wines are for sharing with friends." 🍷



Clockwise from left: Works by Aki Inomata, Ruth Asawa, Reena Saini Kallat and Charwei Tsai will be on the block at the AAA auction

ART WITH HEART

Get your paddles ready for Asia Art Archive's annual fundraising auction

Always a highlight of the arts calendar, the Asia Art Archive (AAA) auction features more than 70 works this year spanning painting, drawing, sculpture, prints and more. The works have been donated by artists and galleries to support the archive's library, online platforms and the myriad events it organises and hosts—including residencies, workshops and conferences—to preserve and promote contemporary Asian art.

"Every year we are incredibly grateful to all of the artists and galleries who so generously donate artworks for the auction, as well as our sponsors," says Claire Hsu-Vuchot, co-founder and executive director of the AAA. "It is a wonderful opportunity to acquire works by some of the most creative minds of our day and at the same time to support the making of new art histories."

This year's auction features a particularly strong lineup of works by female artists. Among the highlights are a lithograph by the late Japanese-American artist Ruth Asawa, who is best known as a sculptor but who drew every day, and works by rising stars such as Maria Taniguchi from the Philippines and Hong Kong painter Cheng Tingting. This focus mirrors the academic work over the past two years by the AAA, which is expanding its research into work by female artists around the continent, partly thanks to a dedicated new fund led by art patron Dee Poon.

The coming fundraiser is key to making sure such pioneering research can continue. "The annual fundraiser is the single most important source of support for AAA as it raises more than half of AAA's annual operation budget, which makes it possible to grow and keep our library and website freely accessible to the public," says Hsu-Vuchot. "These materials are crucial for education, scholarship and new research of art from Asia."

The AAA's fundraising dinner and live auction will take place at the China Club on November 2, and all the works destined to go under the hammer can be previewed in the James Christie Room at Alexandra House from October 14 to 17. aaa.org.hk

IMAGES: CHARWEI TSAI, WE CAME WHIRLING OUT OF NOTHINGNESS XIII, DONATED BY THE ARTIST AND TKG+; BEENA SAINI KALLAT, ANATOMY OF DISTANCE, 2013, DONATED BY THE ARTIST; AKI INOMATA, WHY NOT HAND OVER "SHELTER" TO HERMIT CRABSF - BORDER - (ZAAANSE SCHANS), 2010-2019, DONATED BY THE ARTIST AND MAHO KUBOTA; RUTH ASAWA, NASTURTIMUS, 1965, DONATED BY THE ARTIST AND DAVID ZWIRNER

SHOP LIKE A COLLECTOR

SARAH HELLER RECOMMENDS EIGHT BOTTLES TO PICK UP AND STASH AWAY FOR A DECADE (BUT THEY'LL STILL DRINK NICELY IF YOU GET IMPATIENT)

Joseph Drouhin Beune Premier Cru Clos des Mouches Blanc 2016

Arguably Drouhin's most famous vineyard, it often performs like a grand cru. 2016's bottling came out taut, energetic and bright, with an adolescent nose like biscuits, white blossoms and fresh linens. Clean, lean 2017 is looking more promising still.

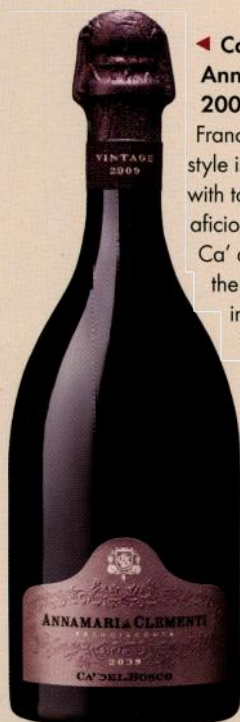
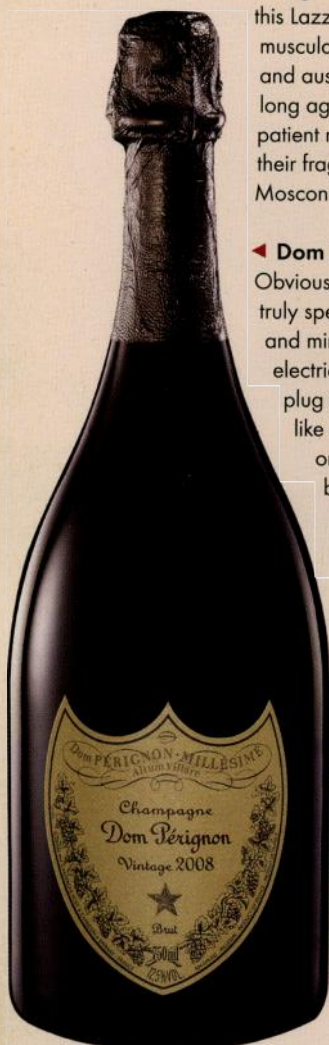
Gianni Gagliardo Barolo Lazzarito Vigna Preve 2015

Quietly toiling away for years to convert its proprietary blends into more prestigious single-vineyard crus, Gagliardo is finally releasing the (excuse the pun) fruits of its labour. 2015

was a glorious year and this Lazzarito has the muscular prowess and austerity to be a long ager, but the less patient might scoop up their fragrant charmer, Mosconi.

◀ Dom Pérignon 2008

Obvious, perhaps, but truly spectacular: acid and mineral like an electric jolt from a spark plug and aromas like Meyer lemons on a cooling sea breeze. 2008 was the magical year when everyone seemed to produce an amazing vintage prestige cuvée: Sir Winston Churchill, La Grande Dame and Cristal were also stunning.



◀ Ca' del Bosco Cuvée Annamaria Clementi Rosé 2009

Franciacorta's dry but plush style is completely in step with today's sparkling wine aficionados' preferences and Ca' del Bosco is probably the most recognisable name in the region. Annamaria Clementi, named for founder Maurizio Zanella's mother, is the benchmark prestige bottling for the region, and the suave, ethereal rosé is especially beloved.

Sadie Family Columella 2016

This grenache-syrah blend has been on the ascent as one of South Africa's most collectible

bottles since its 2000 inaugural vintage. Ever more grenache-dominant, with less and less new oak but more and more stems, Columella grows more esoteric and focused every year. The famously acid-obsessed Eben Sadie has constructed it with the verve to live virtually forever.

Châtecu Climens 2009 ▶

Biodynamically farmed Climens has been the favoured Sauternes (really a Barsac) of the small circle of local sweet-wine drinkers for the past few years at least. More precise and angular than the more famous Yquem, this has the freshness as well as the sugar to survive the decade(s).



CVNE Imperial Rioja Gran Reserva 2010 ▶

Traditional Rioja Gran Reserva are famously long-lived. CVNE (usually pronounced "Coo-nay") Imperial was first bottled in the 1920s, ages in a cellar designed by Gustave Eiffel (yes, that Eiffel) and is one of the most lyrical, graceful red-fruited riojas on the market. However, rioja's modest attitude to pricing means this will likely retain a desirable "QPR" (quality to price ratio) even in 10 years.



◀ Rockford Basket Press Shiraz Barossa Valley 2013

Well-cellared, mature Australian wines are so challenging to source on the secondary market that admirers of these classically sculpted, powerful wines obsessively buy them on release, even if older vintages can be bought relatively inexpensively.



For more of Master of Wine Sarah Heller's recommendations, follow @sarahhellermw