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[Home](#) > [Inside Industry](#) > [Chinese Winemaker](#)

## Chinese Winemakers (39) Get inspiration from travel-Lillian Carter,winemaker in Wangzhong Winery

Date: 2013-01-21 11:41 Source: China Wine Online Author: Shen Yanling(sarah) Translator:

Grown up in the vineyard, Lillian Carter falls in love with wine naturally and even choose winemaker as her life career. She loves life, travel and winemaking. She has travelled to many world wine regions, like Australia, South Africa, France, New Zealand and even worked there. Her winemaking experiences in China are encouraging her to make more and more good wines.

Not long ago, we're honored to meet her in Yanqi. Such a pretty young winemaker! Now she is the consultant winemaker in Xinjiang Wangzhong Winery. On taking about this region, she felt so excited. Then we started our pleasant interview.



Lilian Carter(right) with Zhao Jin, chinese winemaker in Wangzhong Winery



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**Sarah: Would you like to introduce yourself ? And why do you want to be a winemaker?**

**Lilian:** I graduated from Adelaide University, in South Australia. And I was a bachelor of Agricultural Science (Oenology).

A series of conspiring factors. Initially, I was reluctant to pursue winemaking as my family are involved in the industry. I wanted to make my own way. I was accepted to study Landscape Architecture at Melbourne University but soon realised I really did want to be a winemaker. It was confusing at the time but I found my own way and haven't looked back.

We have a beautiful old vineyard in Rutherglen, Victoria, which has rare plantings of the Muscat variety used to make fortified wines. Wines always at the dinner table and there is some vineyard work to do.

**Sarah: After graduation, where did you work? Have you been travelled to other countries and worked there also?**

**Lilian:** I was fortunate to be accepted as one of only two young winemakers to undertake the graduate management program at Pernod Ricards Australian operation – Orlando Wines. I gained exposure to all aspects of the company over a 2 year period which provided a unique springboard to my career.

I've worked in some interesting locations –the Barossa Valley in South Australia, the Yarra Valley in Victoria, Stellenbosch in South Africa, Marlborough in New Zealand, Corsica in France, and now China.

**Sarah: What the experiences brings to you?**

**Lilian:** Traveling opens your mind to possibilities. I'm not happy to travel as a tourist – I get quite bored. Combining work and travel means that you really understand life in another country. And it gives wine a wonderful and interesting cultural context. This becomes a rich and continuing source of inspiration when benchmarking your own winemaking ideas.

**Sarah:What the chances you come to China? Can you introduce your working experience? I learnt that you once worked for Pernod Ricard (China).**

**Lilian:** Unexpectedly in 2007, my then boss, Philip Laffer (Chief Winemaker of Pernod Ricard Australia) asked if I would relocate to China and oversee the Pernod Ricard project in Ningxia. He had already spent a number of years traveling throughout China to find the right area and business opportunity.

In 2008, it was time to start making Pernod Ricards first wines in China, under the Helan Mountain label. I jumped at this extraordinary opportunity and stayed in that role for 2 years. Most recently I'm involved in an exciting new private winery in the Xinjiang region of Yanqi.

**Sarah: What's the contributions you have made to the winery?**

**Lilian:** The entire range of Helan Mountain Wines continues to be very well received and has won numerous awards at local and international shows.

Our 2008 Special Reserve Chardonnay was awarded the Trophy for the Best Wine of Asia at the Hong Kong International Wine Show in 2009. Importantly, the wines also represent excellent value as these awards have not resulted in significant price



California drives US wine exports to sales high



increases.

**Sarah:** Now, you are the consultant winemaker in Wangzhong Winery, what are the chances? Why do you want to work here? And how do you think of this region?

**Lilian:** Professor Li Demei invited me to work with him on this project early in 2012. I've been very impressed by the owners' commitment to long-term quality goals. They are passionate about the region and the vineyards and we are all excited to see what the future holds.

The location is breathtakingly beautiful and the vineyard has great potential. I'm excited by the quality of the wines we have made this year at the WangZhong winery in Xinjiang. It was the first harvest and I wasn't expecting the grapes to have such flavour intensity. The wines need time to mature so won't be released for a year or more.

**Sarah:** Have you tasted some chinese wines, and what's your comment? About the price, quality, etc

**Lilian:** I was recently a Guest Judge at the 2012 Ningxia Wine Challenge. The general consensus, from the panel of highly regarded international judges including Jancis Robinson, was that the quality of the wines has improved dramatically over the last 5 years.

There is certainly a much better average level of quality, with a few 'outstanding' wines - both at the top and bottom end of the scale. There doesn't yet seem to be a correlation between price and quality.



*Chateau Tiansai of Wangzhong Winery*

**Sarah:** Have you been to some chinese wineries? Do you have some advice for the industry, since you have worked here for several years, about the winemaking, vineyard etc.

**Lilian:** I've visited quite a few wineries in Ningxia, Xinjiang, and Shandong. Some are visually very impressive, with the latest technology and a lot of money spent on impressive facades. It would be great to see a proportionate amount of this wealth invested in significant education and research programs.

**Sarah:** What's the happiest thing in winemaking? It seems so magic. And what's the wine attract you?

**Lilian:** It is magic! Seeing the transformation from grape to juice to wine and then to another person's joy and pleasure!

**Sarah:**In your opinion what kind of wine is a good wine?

**Lilian:** Balanced wine. Its difficult to articulate and hard to achieve. I can't narrow my preference to a certain variety or style. Any wine that has a memorable personality delights me.

**Sarah:** What are the qualities needed to be a good winemaker? How to be a good winemaker do you think?

**Lilian:** Patience, discipline, flexibility, attention to detail (obsession?!) and especially a sense of humor!

It's important to have a solid scientific and technical education as well as a good palate. But this is just the foundation the rest comes from accumulating experience.

**Sarah:** What's the most important thing? How can winemakers make a good wine?

**Lilian:** By understanding what the vineyard is capable of, by studying the underlying science, and then, most importantly, by finding the balance between intervention and knowing when not to interfere – to make sure the wines inherent characters (or personality) comes to the fore.

**Sarah:** And do you have some philosophy in wine making?

**Lilian:** Keep an open mind, listen, lean and enjoy and keep learning.

**Sarah:** What's the advantage for women winemakers?

**Lilian:**There have been some articles reporting that women have better sensory abilities than men - I don't think that this is accurate when you have reached a high level of sensory training. But women need to be quite competitive!

**Sarah:** As an Australian winemaker, what do you think of Australian wines? What do you want to tell Chinese consumers?

**Lilian:** Australia makes superb and sophisticated wines from glorious and distinctive regions. The industry has many dedicated professionals with generations of family involvement. Our wine history is rich and diverse - to explore it is fascinating.

**Sarah:** What's your near plan? And your life dreams? What else do you like, besides wines?

**Lilian:** I would like to continue to improve my understanding of the Chinese wine grape growing conditions and produce wines which express the unique environment.

My life is pretty simple. I like to spend time with family and friends. And I'm fortunate to be able to combine work with visiting family and friends around the world.

As for work life balance so far not much due to travel commitments to and from Australia and Europe but in the future I have plans to explore the historic area. Perhaps in another 10 years I'll find time to learn mahjong.

Original text in Chinese: <http://www.winechina.com/html/2013/01/201301143189.html>

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