

Tuscany's pride

An evening of Italian elegance and indulgence at Asian Heritage Row's Mezza Notte

Ernest Hemingway once said "wine is the most civilised thing in the world", while Thomas Jefferson's sentiment was: "No nation is drunken where wine is cheap and none sober where the dearness of wine substitutes ardent spirits as the common beverage."

Richard Goodine couldn't agree more with these pearls of wisdom, having been in the industry for the last 15 years. He knows just about everything there is to know about wine, from marketing to making it. Currently, he is the Asia-Pacific export director for Italian brand Banfi, a vineyard said to be Tuscany's pride, having been voted Italy's Best Wine Estate for 11 consecutive years up to 2004.

Relatively newer than other estates, Castello Banfi is considered a rarity among Italian estates, not only because of its size — measuring some 7,100 acres, of which 2,400 acres are planted with vines, but also because it was started from scratch less than 20 years ago. The land was covered with bushes and shrubbery when Americans John and Harry Mariani discovered it in 1978.

Goodine has been with the company almost since its inception and is much sought-after for his knowledge on the subject. He has spoken at the Vancouver Playhouse International Wine Festival,

the British Columbia Food and Beverage Conference and The Society of Wine Educators Conference 2005. His articles have also been featured in the *Bangkok Post*, *Residence Magazine* and the *Wine Lover's Journal*.

His expertise and passion is reflected in his demeanor and enthusiasm for all things related to the grape.

It is said that wine has the ability to beguile the wise and make the serious smile, and Italian wines, unlike others, have a tradition spanning 300 years. However, Goodine is of the opinion that the country is going through a renaissance where wine is concerned, particularly in Montalcino. He says the drink has become a popular choice of the young and old in the last 30 years.

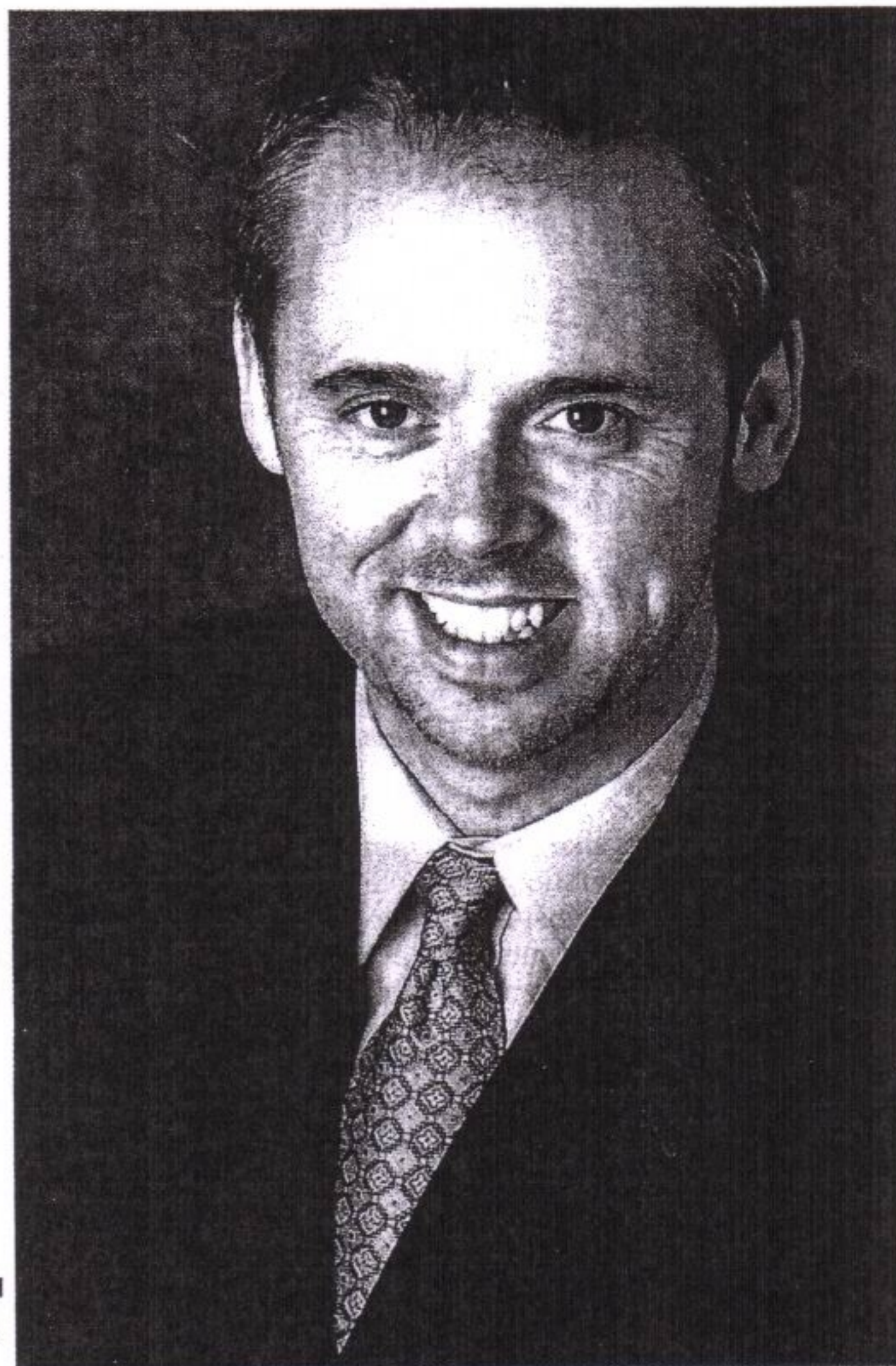
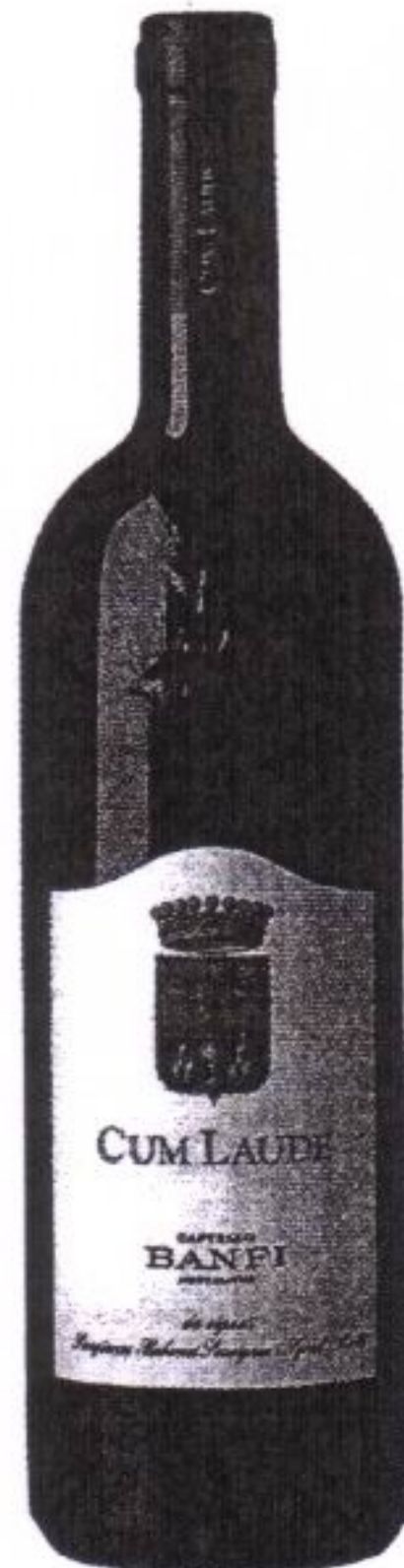
When asked what he would recommend to a novice, Goodine says he believes personal taste is a big factor in enjoying wine. He does, however, recommend the San Angelo Pinot Grigio. "As Tuscany's first Pinot Grigio, Banfi proved that this grape can flourish further south in Italy than its place of origin, which is Veneto," he says.

Goodine predicts that the Pinot Grigio will be the rising star in the Banfi family, although the Rosso di Montalcino has been the shining star in the last few years. He adds that the Brunello was also sold in big quantities last year.

"My favourite wine for daily consumption has to be the Le Rime for white and the Chianti Classico for red. Both deliver great fruit, great balance and body while being very easy to drink," Goodine says.

On choosing a good wine, he says there really is no pre-set criteria. "All you need to determine is if the consumer likes the taste. No one should be told what to enjoy or what food or set-up the wine has to be served with," he elaborates.

On keeping the wine in perfect condition, Goodine says it is best to keep wine in a dark place with a consistent temperature. "Whites should be consumed younger and reds can age longer,



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generally speaking. After that, it comes down to initial structure or body and personal taste," he says.

A corked wine will reveal itself from the smell of musk and mould and will always taste less fresh. The technical term for cork taint is TCA, referring basically to undesirable smells or tastes found in a bottle that can only be detected after bottling, ageing and opening.

"It's important for people to keep in mind that TCA can develop in any wine with a cork closure and it is not a statement about the producer. We spend a lot of time bottling."

Wine appreciation seems to have snob appeal but Goodine feels it really is for the masses. It shouldn't be something that is open only to a select few, he says. "The golden rule is not to listen to those who try to wield knowledge as a weapon. Wine is like food and should be enjoyed. Whatever you read and whatever knowledge you have should be taken with a grain of salt. By all

means ask the right questions but take the time to ensure the best quality corks are used and in the cleanest conditions. There really are no hard and fast rules; don't take the answers as gospel truth and most importantly, wine appreciation should be fun."

To get a taste of some of Banfi's premier wines, HSBC is inviting selected guests to attend an evening of Italian indulgence, where guests can tuck into Tuscan fare at Mezza Notte on Asian Heritage Row on June 14.

The lucky few HSBC premier members also stand to win one of five grand prizes — a trip for two to Tuscany, where a stay at the medieval Castello Banfi and a tour of the sprawling Ricasoli wine estate await them.

The fortunate two will tour the winery, which is famous for its Chianti and Brunello di Montalcino. To qualify, members have to invest RM100,000 in any of HSBC's selected investment products and customers. ■



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