

CATS

Fastads

Career Choice

Living their passion

Instead of clock-watching at a desk-bound job, some people find true career fulfilment by going the extra mile to live their dreams

The wine educator

Mr Tan Ying Hsien, 50, started tasting and studying wine in 1983 as an undergraduate in law school and has not stopped since in his quest to slake his thirst for wine knowledge.

Turn to Page 43 to find out what drives Mr Tan.



A nose for wine

By Grace Chew

WITH more than 600 different wines in his collection, wine educator Ian Ying Hsien is the man to approach if you wish to know more about the viticulture or oenology of a particular wine.

As well as being a freelance wine journalist, he runs Taberna Wine Academy (TWA) which was inaugurated earlier this month.

Mr Tan, a member of the Ordre des Coteaux de Champagne, Confrerie des Chevaliers du Tastevin and Commanderie de Bordeaux, was invited to judge at the International Wine Challenge 2011 held in Singapore as well as at the Decanter Asia Wine Awards in Hong Kong last month.

Recently, he was awarded the Champagne Trinity Scholarship 2012 by the Institute of Masters of Wine and is now studying to qualify as a Master of Wine.

In love with wine

His love affair with wine started in 1983 while he was pursuing his degree in London.

"I used to drink only gin and tonic but after I went to Britain, gin became too extravagant for a humble student. So I found an alternative — wine," he revealed.

A lawyer by profession, he spent most of his professional career providing legal advice to international banks.

It was only in 2009 that he decided to take a sabbatical from work to indulge in his



IT'S A GIFT: "With more exposure to a greater variety of wines, wine drinkers can develop more independent views and not be led by wine brands and scores alone," said Mr Tan. PHOTO: WEE TY

hobby — wine tasting.

He later opened a wine bar in 2010 which has since been converted into a wine school.

The wine academy

TWA is located in the cosy neighbourhood of Binjai Park off Dunearn Road.

It conducts wine tasting classes, masterclasses by visiting wine experts, and wine discussion groups and research by candidates pursuing parallel wine certification such as Wine and Spirit Education Trust certificates.

"Our classes cater mainly to wine professionals in the wine trade such as wine merchants and sommeliers, but I have also set up classes for consumers who wish to appreciate wine better," said Mr Tan who currently teaches the classes himself.

Courses are structured at an introductory level to equip students with basic tasting techniques and provide an appreciation of

wine production methods.

The advanced courses provide an in-depth appreciation of specific regions, producers, styles or grape varieties.

"It is so important that we bring to life what is in the glass," said Mr Tan with a smile. "For one to truly know wine, other than gaining knowledge, one needs to train the palate for it.

"That is why the core to our courses is developing tasting skills and relating what is seen, smelt and tasted in the glass to the theoretical knowledge of the wine."

Each session typically features eight to 12 wines to demonstrate the content of the subject.

Specialist library

TWA also has one of the most comprehensive reference libraries of specialist wine books and publications in Singapore.

In the spirit of sharing knowledge, this is

made available to TWA students as well as students attending other courses.

Besides holding wine classes in the day, TWA doubles as a wine lounge in the evenings where wine enthusiasts can mingle. Classes for consumers are also held then.

Mr Tan's two in-house cellars contain wines amassed from his visits to the classic wine regions of France, Italy, Spain, Portugal, South Africa, Australia, the United States and even the Russian Tsar's former cellars at Massandra in Crimea.

Most of his wines are priced from \$100 to \$300 but his most expensive bottle is a 2001 Romanece-St-Vivant, Domaine de la Romanece Conti at \$2,100.

"We try to be reasonable in terms of price versus quality because I want TWA to be a place where people can learn more about different wines," he said.

One feature is the availability of some 300 wines served in 50cl carafes, which is two-thirds the size of a full bottle.

"This allows two people two glasses each — a comfortable limit and it gives customers an opportunity to try other bottles," explained Mr Tan.

"The remaining one-third bottle is made available as wine by the glass."

Foodwise, customers can order food from four eateries in the neighbourhood, namely Ivins Nonya Specialities, Capri Trattoria & Pizzeria, Peperoni Pizzeria and Hup Choon Eating House.

At no additional dine-in charge except a \$3-a-head service charge, his staff will pre-order and plate the food.

He hopes TWA will become an informal wine symposium where wine commentators, makers, critics and enthusiasts can share their expertise on wine.

For more information, visit *Taberna Wine Academy* at 17 Binjai Park or www.taberna.sg.