

Vintners savor international expo

By WANG QIAN
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The sixth Yantai International Wine Exposition began in Yantai on June 27, providing business forum for domestic and foreign wine producers and equipment manufacturers.

More than 450 exhibitors from 20 top wine producing countries including France, Spain, the United States, South Africa, Italy and Chile, are arriving in Asia's only International Grape and Wine City — a title conferred by the International Office of Vine and Wine — to showcase premium products to the event's 10,000 participants.

"Yantai enjoys rich resources and an enormous advantage in developing wine industry. We sincerely hope this expo can help more people make business in Yantai and conduct exchanges and cooperation on wine sector," said Zhang Jiangting, Party secretary of Yantai.

The three-day event has 706

booths that offer more than 2,000 types of wine, brandy, whiskey and rum set amid varied chateaus. It also offers tourism products as well as winemaking equipment.

A number of China's leading wine producers including Changyu, Great Wall, Weilong, Baiyanghe, Dynasty, and Nanshan Land are in attendance, joined by some of the world's most prestigious foreign brands — Lafite Rothschild and Mouton Rothschild from France, Chateau Montelena from the US and Nederburg from South Africa.

Among the high-profile companies is Changyu Pioneer Wine Co Ltd, China's oldest and largest vintner.

Established in 1892, the company is holding a series of activities to celebrate its 120-anniversary during the expo.

A full range of its products are on display at the company's 1,200-square-meter pavilion.

Zhou Hongjiang, general manager of Changyu, said the company now has 20,000 hectares of vineyards,

nearly 30 percent of the total in China, and 10 luxury chateaus across the world.

"We are looking for more robust growth by expanding the existing vineyards and building another 20 chateaus in the world's top grape-growing regions in the next five years," said Zhou.

Overseas winemakers, increasingly attracted by the rapidly growing Chinese wine market, are hosting a range of promotions and wine-tasting events.

"China is one of our most important target markets. We had hoped more Chinese consumers know and take to our wines through this expo, and actually we have already found some new clients," said Zakkie Bester, chief executive officer of the Riebeek Cellars, a famed wine producer in South Africa.

"Although the wine market in China is fast growing, it still needs time for Chinese to understand wine culture. I hope they can learn to enjoy diverse wines with different food and drink some wine everyday," he said.



Government officials and international guests attend the opening ceremony. PHOTOS BY JU CHUANJIANG / CHINA DAILY

Also underway is SITEVINITECH China, an international expo on technologies and equipment for

growing grapes, winemaking, bottling and packaging.

Yantai has held five international

wine festivals since 2007 that have attracted more than 300,000 guests from 60 countries and regions.

Grapes of class: Rising chateau county in Yantai

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Roaming around a vast vineyard in China, picking grapes and sampling premium vintages in a European-style castle could seem like a fairy tale.

But those experiences are easily available at dozens of picturesque chateaus scattered along the coast of Yantai in Shandong province.

"The city's favorable natural and investment environment has attracted increasing numbers of domestic and foreign winemakers that have developed vineyards and chateaus, making it the nation's major production center for high-end wines," said Sun Chengxian, chairman of the Yantai Wine Association.

Yantai lies on a latitude similar to France's premier wine producing area of Bordeaux and Italy's Tuscany region. With abundant sunshine, favorable soil and the right humidity, the area is regarded as the best growing region for quality grapes, Sun said.

A decade ago Chateau Changyu-Castel on the outskirts of Yantai became China's first vineyard to be developed to meet international standards.

It was jointly funded by Changyu Pioneer Wine Co Ltd and the Castle Group of

France, both top international wine producers.

Covering more than 142 hectares, the grounds include a chateau, a wine museum, an underground cellar, rows of European-style buildings and vast expanse of vineyards, where grapes for some of Changyu's most high-end wines are grown.

The wines — aged and bottled entirely in the chateau — soon became popular on global wine market due to their quality and unique flavor.

The exotic approach of a French-style chateau integrating winemaking, sight-seeing and recreation was well-received, prompting a number of domestic and foreign wine producers follow in Changyu's footsteps.

According to Sun, there are now more than 40 chateaus of different features and styles in Yantai.

"These chateaus are not only production sites for premium wines but also hot tourist destinations, attracting more than 1.5 million tourists and wine lovers from all around the country every year," said Sun.

In Penglai, a county-level city of Yantai, alone there are 30 luxury chateaus built by world-renowned wineries including domestic brands Junding and Century Chateaus, France's Chateau Lafite Rothschild and Treaty Port Vineyard from the United Kingdom. They have a combined

6,667 hectares of vineyards under cultivation and produce more than 20,000 tons of high-end wines annually.

Chateau Junding, backed by a 300 million yuan (\$47.1 million) investment from China Oil and Foodstuffs Corp, was developed around a scenic lake and covers a total area of 6 square kilometers. Using imported vines from France and Italy, it produces premium wines for well-heeled customers.

It is the first chateau in Asia which has a membership club offering fine wine and cuisine, golf, cigars and other luxuries.

Chateau Lafite Rothschild, one of the world's most prestigious winemakers, has acquired a 24.3-hectare site near Penglai to develop its first vineyard and chateau in China. It is projected to produce 120,000 bottles a year.

"We have conducted research on the ideal grape-planting area in Asia for 15 years, and Penglai was our choice," said Eric Kohler from Chateau Lafite Rothschild.

March 20, a key chateau project was launched in the city's Laishan district, which involves a total of 5 billion yuan in backing and covers an area of 70 square kilometers.

Sun from the wine association said "10 more chateaus will be built in Yantai by 2015 targeting the high-end wine market and further promoting wine-themed tourism".



Performances at the on-going exposition.

A city steeped in wine

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Drinking wine is now a part of the Yantai lifestyle, not surprising in a city that produces 360 million liters of wine yearly, one-third of the nation's total.

"As the birthplace of China's modern wine industry, Yantai aims to be a world-famous production and trade center for wine," said Wang Liang, the city's mayor.

Yantai's connection to wine dates back to 1892 when Changyu Pioneer Wine Co, China's first winery, was established near the coastline of Shandong province.

In 1987, the city was recognized as an International Grape and Wine City by the International Office of Vine and Wine, becoming the only Asian city to have the honor.

According to Yi Fenghuang, head of Yantai Wine Bureau, Yantai now has a complete wine industry that integrates planting, winemaking, trade and related tourism.

Some 20,200 hectares of grapes are under cultivation to supply more than 150 wineries operating in Yantai.

Together they produced 360 million liters of wine last year, generating 22.7 billion yuan (\$3.6 billion) in revenues and profits of 3.5 billion yuan.

The city has three nationally famous brands and five trademarks in the wine sector. It also has eight Shandong famous brands and 13 leading provincial trademarks.

Among the top 10 wine brands in China, Yantai is home to six including Changyu and Great Wall, which is owned by China National Cereals, Oil and Foodstuffs Corp.

Several more chateaus are planned in Yantai's satellite cities of Qixia and Penglai, and its Laishan district, which will bring the total number to 50 by the end of 2015.

To promote the city's wine industry, Yantai hammers out the 12th Five-Year plan for the wine industry.

According to Yantai's 12th Five-Year plan for the industry, the city is allocating 5 million yuan each year to support its wine sector by developing quality grape growing sites, further building wine brands and subsidizing grape growers.

By 2015, about 33,000 additional hectares will be developed for grape cultivation in Yantai.

Total yearly wine production is projected to reach 500 million liters, which would generate about 40 billion yuan in revenue.

Over the next four years, Yantai will focus on developing high-end vintages the Changyu International Wine Research and Development Center now under construction is designed to integrate research, winemaking and tourism.

It is also striving to cultivate another 20 wine brands by 2015 and is in the process of applying for a geographical indication trademark for Yantai wine.

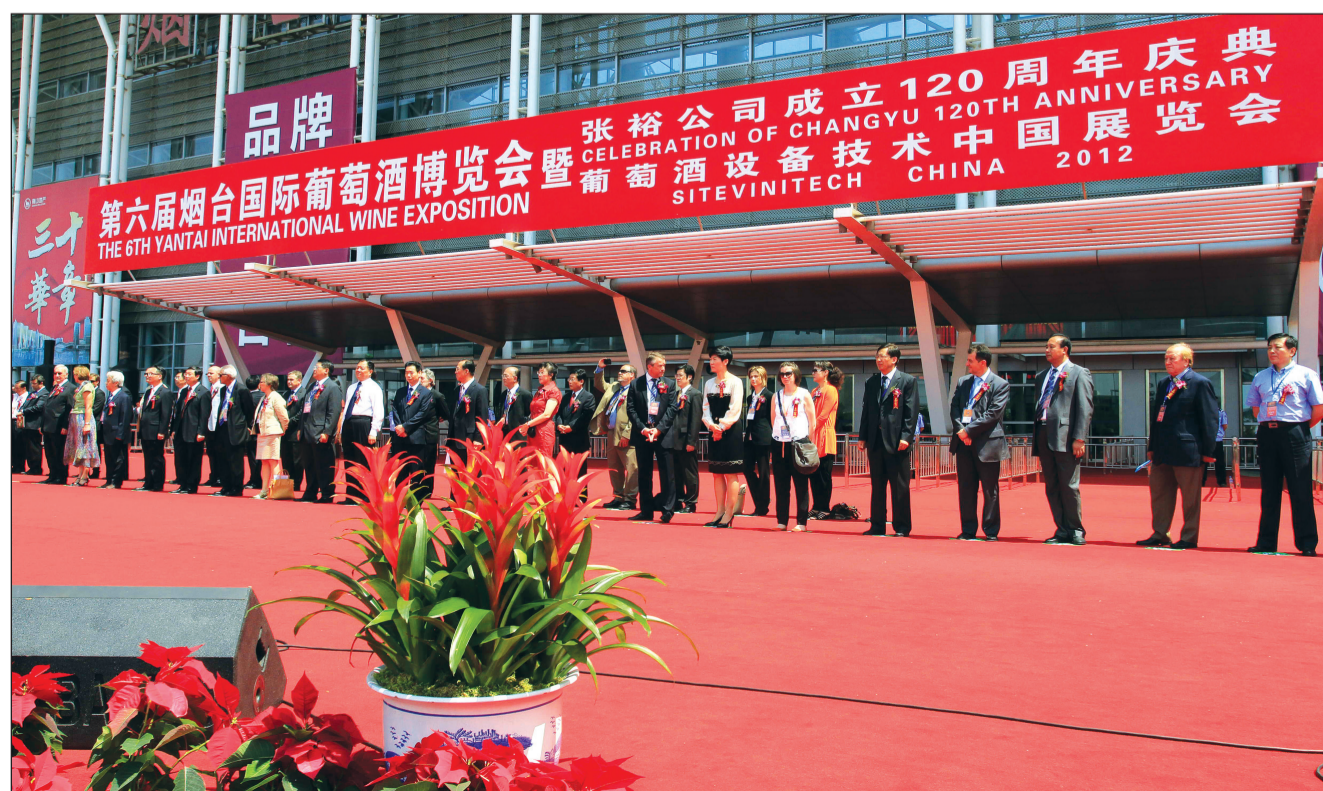
Another facility under construction — the Yantai International Wine Trade Center — will be the largest one of its kind in China and a clearinghouse for 300 wines from home and abroad.

More than 1 million tourists now visit Chateau Changyu-Castel and its wine museum every year.

The city government also plans to build a wine-themed square and shopping streets to further boost tourism.



Australian visitors are among the 10,000 participants expected for the event.



The opening ceremony for the sixth Yantai International Exposition that began Wednesday in the city.



International aficionados taste Changyu wine at the on-going exposition.