

## Media Kit - Vinality International Academy (VIA)

### A brief history

Vinality International Academy (VIA) was originally launched in February 2014 in the form of “Executive Wine Seminars” to accompany Vinality International’s events abroad. While the Executive Wine Seminars are still part of Vinality International’s **guided tasting program**, the **VIA Italian Wine Ambassador Certification Course**, as we know it today, started in April 2015 as a five-day intensive training course on Italian wine. The course was and still is targeted at highly qualified international wine educators, journalists and tradespeople. Since its inception, VIA has come a long way: keeping up with the times, updating its content and increasing its competitive value with each passing year.



From left to right, the VIA Team. Faculty Henry Davar IWE and Sarah Heller MW/IWA, founder Stevie Kim and Chief Scientist Prof. Attilio Scienza.

### The heart and soul behind the VIA project

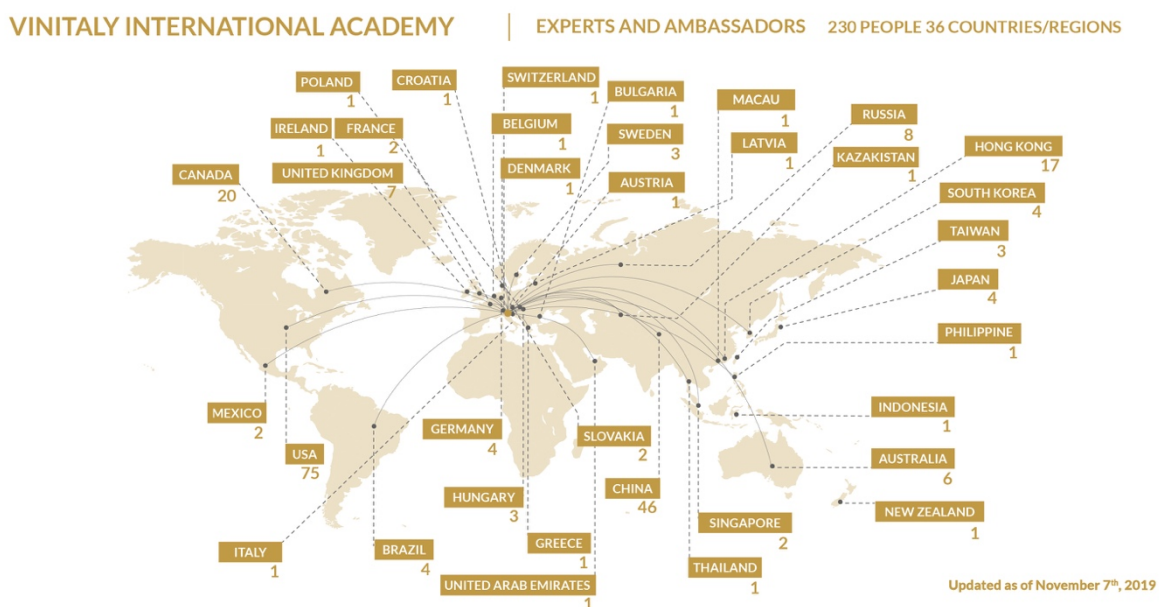
VIA founder, Stevie Kim, firmly believes in training and embraces an educational approach in both her work and personal life. As Managing Director of Vinality International, she has launched a variety of wine related initiatives. Driven by her passion for Italian wine, Stevie made it her mission to spread the gospel of Italian wine culture around the world.

At the core of VIA is science, and that is why only a scientific minded Professor like Attilio Scienza – his last name literally means “science” – could fill the post of VIA Chief Scientist in 2018. Scienza teaches courses on genetic improvement of grapevines at the University of Milan Department of Agricultural and Food Sciences, as well as Viticulture at the University of Turin in Asti. He has lead many national research projects in the field of physiology, agricultural techniques and vine genetics. He is author of over 350 publications on vine and viticulture in national and international journals, conference proceedings, text books and monographs. His various and numbered awards and achievements over the years have made him a household name in the world of Italian wine.

Sarah Heller MW and Henry Davar IWE are the talented and skillful Faculty of the Academy. Sarah is a content creator, visual artist and wine branding expert based in Hong Kong. She is a partner and buyer for the Almásy Collection, brand ambassador and design collaborator for Lucaris Crystal and the wine editor for Asia Tatler. Henry started his career on Wall Street, but after studying with the American Sommelier Academy he transitioned into wine full-time. He became a certified VIA Italian Wine Expert in April 2017 after his first and only attempt at passing the exam. In the VIA community, he was the first to accomplish this achievement.

### The VIA community

To date, VIA has trained 230 Italian Wine Ambassadors. Among these, 15 gained the highest level of certification, the Italian Wine Expert title.



### VIA tomorrow

In November 2018 the certification course format was renovated, and to date it has been delivered in a number of cities. With a new format and an improved focus, new resources are required. On this account, we are working with our Chief Scientist Prof. Attilio Scienza to develop textbooks that will fit the refined version of the course. In the meantime, a new syllabus has been created, reflecting all of the aforementioned changes.

### Tasting Labs

VIA Tasting Labs have been introduced to help students gain access to as many wines as possible. The Labs are made possible by our generous Supporters and take place after the guided tastings sessions. These tastings allow students to taste a broad range of wine varieties and styles, from various territories. They help students to become familiar with distinctive grape traits, a vital aspect in preparing for the exam and a wine career as an Italian Wine Ambassador.

### Group video project

The new format also introduced a group project. While the video project is only worth 10% of the final grade, the Faculty feels very strongly about this being the perfect opportunity for candidates to show off their

presentation skills, knowledge and passion. In addition to its didactic applications, the group video project has been particularly well received by candidates as a way of connecting with other participants.

### **The application process**

Wine professionals, to include: consultants, educators, sommeliers, importers, distributors, winemakers and journalists, who meet the required standards may apply to take part in the Italian Wine Ambassador Certification Program. Applicants must have been awarded the **WSET Diploma**, an **equivalent wine education certification** OR have gained a qualifying score through the Italian Wine Maestro course. The VIA Italian Wine Ambassador Certification Course is a tremendous undertaking and participants are asked to be fully committed in order to obtain the title of Ambassador/Expert.

Those interested in applying to the VIA Program should register on the [Vinality International website](#). Students who meet the entry criteria will be sent a registration form with further instructions within one month. Once the registration process is completed, students are urged to begin independent study of the reference material that is sent to them after registration: the Syllabus, *Italian Wine Unplugged and Grape by Grape*. Returning students registering to re-sit the course will receive a 50% discount.

Participants preparing for their upcoming course are strongly encouraged to actively immerse themselves in the Italian wine community. This can be done by listening to the [Italian Wine Podcast](#) and entering the VIA social media community by joining VIA group chats on WeChat and Whatsapp.

### **Upcoming courses**

The next VIA course will be held in Verona from April 10<sup>th</sup> to 14<sup>th</sup>. We highly recommend that those interested in applying keep an eye on the [Vinality International website](#).

### **Course logistics**

The Italian Wine Ambassador Certification Course takes place over a 5 day span. The first 4 days include morning lectures and afternoon guided tastings. The latter part of the afternoon is dedicated to the Tasting Labs. Video projects are due by the end of day four. The fifth day is entirely dedicated to the exam process and Pinning Ceremony at the end of the day.

### **The online Italian Wine Educator course and Maestro Course**

With the success of the Maestro pilot program, run by Michela Morris IWE in Canada, VIA has now rolled out the program worldwide through the online educator program.

The aim of the Maestro Course is to provide a foundation before students progress to Ambassador level. It will therefore produce a cohort of students applying for the VIA Ambassador course that are already familiar with the VIA ecosystem and have gained a basic standardized level of knowledge.

Running these Maestro courses around the world first requires a team of educators – which is where our network of experienced Ambassadors come in. [The online educator](#) program was launched to teach Ambassadors to become educators of the Maestro course. Program qualification allows an Ambassador or Expert to then run Maestro Courses in their own market.

What makes the Maestro Educator Qualification unique is that we certify the educator, not the school! This means you can take your Maestro course with you wherever you go, allowing a flexible approach to offering access to Maestro.

This, and much more, is all part of the VIA Ecosystem, a living and growing community of wine professionals spreading the philosophy of Italian Wine on a global level. The pillars of the VIA Ecosystem include the Advisory Committee - Federvini, FIVI, Federdoc, Unione Italiana Vini -, the Supporters, who sponsor and contribute to all events and Tasting Labs during the courses, our highly qualified Faculty and all of the wine professionals attending the VIA Programs. For further information on Vinality International Academy's core values visit the [Vinality International website](#).



### **The perks of being part of the VIA community**

The VIA community fuels professional advancement for its members. Individuals from all over the world who become part of the VIA group enjoy international recognition for their expertise on Italian wine. Members of the VIA community are presented with further educational opportunities, such as VIA field trips and wine business conferences.

### **Mutual beneficiaries**

#### **- The\_Supporter programme**

A prominent and fundamental part of the VIA Ecosystem is the recognition and backing of Supporters. Supporters assist VIA in its project to promote Italian wine heritage abroad. Current supporters include Italian wineries, protection Consortia, Regions, private Consortia and Italian Enterprise Networks. In order to bring together the needs of the Supporters with those of the attendees, VIA has implemented various initiatives to stimulate growth and cooperation within the educational, communication and business sectors.

The Tasting Labs are evidence of this approach. The Labs, a daily window at the end of each day of class, give Supporters the chance to present candidates with a selection of labels and to educate them about the wine's origin. Becoming a VIA Supporter allows you access to the dense network of contacts within the entire Community of Italian Wine Ambassadors and Italian Wine Experts both during the courses and throughout the year. VIA Supporters can profile contacts and therefore find potential Brand Ambassadors. VIA pays particular attention to Supporters on its website, offering visibility and support through its social networks, press releases and through all other forms of Media Communication.

#### **- Media partners**

Wine schools, magazines and bloggers are encouraged to contact VIA to create a media partnership. All VIA media partners have to meet a set criteria: 10K followers for social media influencers, 5K sales for printed magazines and 1K average views per blog. Every VIA media partner is expected to go out with a community e-blast per upcoming course, coverage of new Ambassadors and Experts via newsletters, social media coverage of courses and, if applicable, one interview per course with VIA 's Founder or VIA Faculty.