



The merry workers and their prized cask

A Barolo is Born

IN A CELLAR, DEEP BELOW THE SURFACE OF SHOUSON HILL, A GROUP OF WINE LOVERS GATHER. THEIR EXCITEMENT IS PALPABLE; THEY ARE ABOUT TO MAKE HISTORY AND ANA BOULTER IS ON SITE TO SEE EXACTLY HOW THEY DO IT



ABOVE The newly cleaned bottles, ready for the Barolo

IN ONE OF CROWN WINE CELLARS' cold and dark wine caverns, between shelves laden with boxes of fine wines and champagnes, a small group of people bustle around like Santa's little helpers, excited and jovial. A large oak barrel is centre stage and in it, Jim Thompson, chairman of Crown Worldwide Holdings, tells us, "is a very special Barolo." The wine is special not only because of its pedigree – it comes from Italian vineyard owner Sergio Barale – but also because it has been brought to Hong Kong on a unique mission.

This will be the first barrel of wine to be bottled in the traditional manner (by hand) in a cellar in Hong Kong, and as Gregory De'eb, general manager of Crown Wine Cellars explains, it's been a long time coming. "The idea arose about a year ago when Crown Wine Cellars hosted a dinner for a group of Knights (from the Italian order of the Knights of Alba), including the Italian Grand Master," explains the affable South

African, who is also celebrating his birthday on this remarkable occasion. "We were brainstorming after dinner on ways to let people know about Barolo, as it has not been marketed well in Hong Kong. The final concept was to bottle high-end collectable Barolo wine in Hong Kong for the very first time from a barrel in the month of the 10th anniversary celebrations of Hong Kong's return to China."

Over a year later, the barrel and bottling day arrived. The event is presided over by Simon Tam, director of the International Wine Centre in Hong Kong, and the joker in the group. "We're better at emptying bottles than filling them," he quips before explaining the process in detail.

First up, the siphon must be cleaned with a mixture of potassium metabisulfite, which contains a preservative and an antibiotic, and water. "The worst thing that could happen," explains John Dibble, who has been appointed Grand Master of Hong Kong, "would be if the wine were contaminated. Often when people say a wine is corked, it