

OVERSEAS NEWS

Cinema falls in love with wine

STAR STRUCK

Along with wild westerns, cops and robbers and adventures with aliens, wine has now become the focus of Hollywood's cinematic attention. The two latest releases break new ground in Tinseltown's attraction to wine-themed movies.

Japanese-American director Cellin Gluck's version of *Sideways* is an Asian interpretation of the Santa Ynez Valley-based film that sent sales of pinot noir spiraling and culled an Academy Award. Inspired by the soaring popularity of wine in Japan, its storyline is similar to the original. Miles, the merlot-phobic writer manqué and his randy, wine-rookie companion Jack, set out on a last-fling road trip to Napa as Michio and Daisuke. The fun starts after they encounter Michio's old flame Mayuko and her friend Mina, played by the ravishing Oscar nominee Rinko Kikuchi.

Unlike its prototype, there's no merlot bashing in this adaptation, only plaudits for pinot noir and cabernet sauvignon, no bad (Japanese) language and no traumatic flare-ups. The action is suffused with 'wa' or harmony rather than the emotional angst continually on display in the original *Sideways*. This is where Gluck makes a major cultural concession to Japanese audiences who consider understanding and empathy to be key to successful relationships.

Made for US\$3 million, the production has already been accepted for distribution by Fuji TV, one of Japan's largest television and film producers.

The other film is *America's Wine: The Legacy of Prohibition*, which traces the history of winemaking in America, including the prohibition era, its spectacular resurgence and the post-prohibition legacy of anti-constitutional state laws governing the sale and distribution of wine in force even today. The documentary recounts, with archival film and photos, how prohibition began as the Noble Experiment early in the 20th century. Its purpose was to rid the country of businesses that made, sold and distributed alcoholic beverages in order to improve public health, reduce crime and corruption and eliminate burdensome taxes that were sending people to the poorhouse. Prohibition was enacted initially in 1920 when Congress passed the 18th Amendment, overriding the veto of President Woodrow Wilson.

Although prohibition represented a conflict between white protestant Americans and new immigrants, the film describes how many grapegrowers and winemakers increased production to satisfy



the needs of immigrants in the East who were still legally entitled to make wine. Others survived by switching to sacramental and medicinal wine. Interviews with wine industry pioneers like Ernest Gallo, Robert Mondavi and Brother Timothy Diener reveal how the 'Phoenix Generation' of winemakers regenerated the market after the excesses of prohibition were over.

While producer Carla de Luca's objective in making the movie was educational, it also serves as a tribute to an enterprise which not only survived traumatic times but also went on to establish a global reputation.

ANTHONY MANIFOLD