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New Ownership for the International Wine Challenge as Chris Ashton Takes the Helm

Chris Ashton to lead the prestigious competition as it separates from William Reed

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Chris Ashton to blend respect for tradition with forward-thinking approach as IWC enters new chapter

After nearly two decades under the umbrella of William Reed Business Media, the prestigious International Wine Challenge (IWC) is embarking on a new chapter. The well-regarded competition is transitioning to the independent ownership of IWC Events Limited, a new entity helmed by Chris Ashton, a familiar face within the IWC community. This marks a significant change in the history of the Challenge, which, for the first time, will operate as a standalone business, a move that reflects shifting priorities for William Reed.

William Reed, which has managed the IWC for the past 19 years, is adjusting its business strategy to focus more intensively on its World's 50 Best brand. This portfolio includes renowned events like The World's Best Vineyards and The World's Best Sommeliers' Selection, representing the company's expanding reach in global hospitality and beverage rankings.

Andrew Reed, Managing Director of Events & Exhibitions at William Reed, spoke highly of the company's longstanding stewardship of the IWC, emphasizing the competition's respected status within the global wine community. "We've been working relentlessly over the last few years to reinforce its position as the most highly regarded third-party wine endorsement scheme in the world," Reed noted. He added that with a social media and PR reach of 1.6 billion in 2023, the IWC has firmly established itself as a prominent global player in the wine competition circuit. Reed expressed confidence in Ashton's ability to continue the tradition of excellence, describing him as the perfect "guardian" for the future of the Challenge.

For Chris Ashton, this transition is a return to familiar territory. Having been involved with the IWC since 2000, Ashton's history with the event spans various ownership changes, from his early days with Quest Magazines under Wilmington PLC, through his tenure at William Reed. Now, as the new owner of the Challenge, Ashton is set to manage it independently for the first time.

"This will be my third and final time at the IWC," Ashton said, reflecting on his long history with the event. He noted his excitement at leading the IWC into a new phase while maintaining the rigorous judging standards that have become synonymous with the competition. Ashton's extensive experience—combined with his work in the wine

logistics sector since 2019—puts him in a strong position to guide the Challenge through its next evolution.

While the ownership may be changing, Ashton reassured stakeholders that the essence of the competition will remain intact. The IWC is renowned for its strict two-round judging system, a process that Ashton plans to maintain while also exploring new technological advancements to further enhance the competition. This commitment to consistency will be crucial as the IWC continues to build on its strong foundation.

One area where Ashton plans to innovate is the IWC's growing focus on sake, which has been part of the competition since 2009. With demand for sake surging globally, Ashton hinted at further developments for the 2025 competition, reinforcing the IWC's status as a premier platform for sake evaluation outside Japan.

As Ashton steps into his new role, preparations for the 2025 edition of the International Wine Challenge are already underway. He expressed enthusiasm about reconnecting with the many key players that make the IWC a success, from winemakers to wholesalers and distributors. Ashton also emphasized the importance of the IWC's judges and crew, acknowledging their role in upholding the competition's reputation for impartiality and excellence.

Under his leadership, the IWC looks set to continue its expansion while staying true to its core values. With new technology and possible category developments on the horizon, Ashton's vision blends respect for tradition with a forward-thinking approach that will likely keep the competition at the forefront of the wine world.

In an era where the wine industry is becoming increasingly competitive and fragmented, the IWC's continued emphasis on integrity and rigorous judging ensures it remains a gold standard for producers seeking independent validation of their wines. As the competition enters this exciting new chapter, the global wine community will be watching closely to see how Ashton and his team build on nearly 40 years of success.

The International Wine Challenge has long been a cornerstone of the global wine competition landscape, known for its impartiality and robust judging criteria. As the competition embarks on this new phase under Chris Ashton's ownership, there is every reason to believe that it will continue to thrive. Ashton's intimate knowledge of the IWC,

coupled with his plans for innovation, promises to drive the event forward, ensuring it remains a key player in the world of wine for years to come.