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International Wine Challenge Enters New Era with Fresh Leadership

Chris Ashton leads IWC Events Limited, introducing a new team to innovate the prestigious global wine competition.

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Lucy Marcuson, Events Manager, Lee Sharkey, Commercial Director, and Adriana Lyon-Shaw, Head of Digital Marketing

The International Wine Challenge is entering a new chapter under the ownership of Chris Ashton, now operating independently as IWC Events Limited. With a focus on expanding its global reach and maintaining its status as the world's leading wine competition, Ashton has appointed a new leadership team to drive the competition forward.

Lee Sharkey joins as Commercial Director, bringing experience from his previous roles as Publisher at Harpers Wine & Spirit and Drinks Retailing magazines, as well as Event Director for SITT at Agile Media. Lucy Marcuson takes on the role of Events Manager, having worked in events, marketing, and PR for Armit Wines, Lea & Sandeman, 67 Pall Mall, and The Drinks Trust. Adriana Lyon-Shaw has been appointed as Head of Digital Marketing, having previously worked for Alibaba and collaborated with Ashton on the Drink Japan event. Chris Boiling continues as Editor of Canopy, the International Wine Challenge newsletter, which reaches 41,000 registered users across 75 countries.

Ashton emphasized his commitment to maintaining the Challenge's rigorous judging process, which remains central to its reputation. Each April, 500 judges from 40 countries gather in London to ensure medal-winning wines are tasted 12 times, providing an extensive evaluation process. The Co-Chairs—Oz Clarke, Tim Atkin MW, Jamie Goode, Helen McGinn, Sam Caporn MW, and Peter McCombie MW—remain key figures in upholding the competition's high standards.

A major development for 2025 will be the return of the annual awards dinner to its original September timing. Scheduled for September 9 at The Guildhall in London, the event will celebrate outstanding wines, winemakers, and industry professionals. Ashton described it as a key social and networking occasion for the UK wine trade, marking the end of the summer and bringing industry members together to recognize excellence.

Now in its 41st year, the International Wine Challenge continues to be known for its impartial and influential judging process. Wines are assessed blind and evaluated for their faithfulness to style, region, and vintage, with awards including Gold, Silver, and Bronze medals, as well as Trophies for the best wines in each category. The competition remains dedicated to helping consumers identify quality wines, with its medals serving as a trusted mark of excellence.

Following its acquisition in October 2024, the Challenge is now operated as an independent business under IWC Events Limited. Ashton, having worked on the event under previous ownerships, is leading the organization's new direction with a focus on innovation and continued credibility in the global wine industry.