



**Sommelier** **INDIA**  
THE WINE MAGAZINE

SPRING 2024 ₹300

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# EXPERIENCE HARVEST & WINEMAKING AT FRATELLI

Explore the harvest season at the Fratelli estate—a haven where luxury intertwines seamlessly with the magic of the vineyards. Discover a world where indulgence meets the rhythm of nature, and every moment is a testament to the artistry of winemaking. Partake in exclusive harvest-themed events and activities, from grape-picking experiences that connect you with the land to wine blending sessions that allow you to witness making of the finest vintages.



SCAN TO EXPLORE

# from the Editor

Dear Wine Enthusiasts,

As we embark on a new year filled with promise and possibilities, it gives me great pleasure to welcome you to the first issue in 2024 of *Sommelier India* – The Wine Magazine.

In this edition, we've curated a range of articles that traverse the vineyards and explore the exceptional winemaking and dedication that go into each bottle. From our cover story about Napa Valley wineries (p.26) and Sula's premiumisation with the Source range of wines in Nashik (p.34) to Caroline Frey's pursuit of biodiversity in the vineyards of her four estates across France (p.52), join us on a sensory expedition that captures the essence of terroir and the artistry of winemaking – not forgetting Willamette Valley in Oregon where vintners like Rajat Parr and Dr. Madaiah Revana are producing excellent wines along Burgundian lines (p.46).

But this is just the tip of the iceberg. There is so much more in this edition. Read about the great diversity to be found in the premiere crus of Chablis (p.58) followed by tasting notes of recommended wines to drink. And if you are thinking of a wine holiday, discover the numerous pleasures of the Douro Valley and be sure to taste its Tawny Ports (p.42)..

As we look to the future, our commitment to delivering insightful content remains unwavering. Dive into exclusive interviews with visionary winemakers, discover emerging trends shaping the industry, and allow us to guide you through tasting articles about which wines to drink.

We are grateful to our dedicated readers, contributors, and the growing community of wine enthusiasts who share our passion for the vine.

Here's to a year of better wines to drink, good reading on wine, and the camaraderie that makes the world of wine so unique.



Reva K. Singh, editor-in-chief with a glass of mulled wine

*Reva K. Singh*

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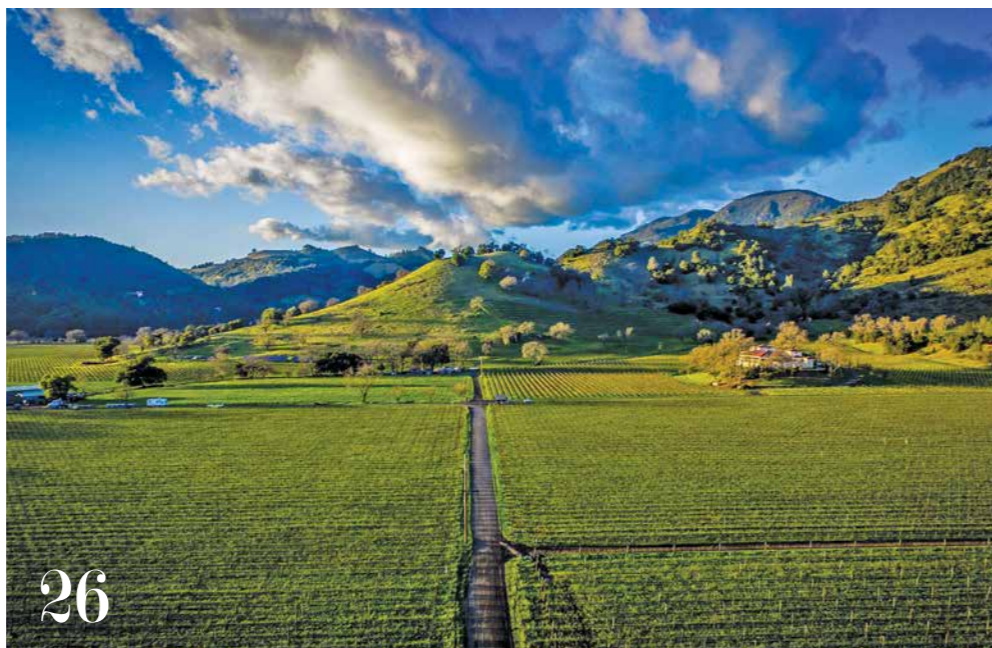
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**Jon Wyand** is a multi-award winning photographer. He has been shooting wine as his speciality for 20

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# Oenophile's notebook

News, views and trends for the wine enthusiast Compiled by Reva K. Singh

## Chandon India makes history with a still wine for the first time in 60 years

Maison Chandon is the international arm of Moët Chandon, which is part of the luxury conglomerate of Louis Vuitton Moët-Hennessy. Moët & Chandon produces a staggering 30 million bottles of champagne every year, housed in more than 17 miles of underground cellars at the Moët estate in Épernay. With centuries of experience behind the company, it was Robert-Jean de Vogüé, president of Moët & Chandon, who took the strategic decision in 1959 to export, not just bottles of champagne, but also their winemaking expertise and understanding of terroir in new countries around the globe.

When Chandon came to India in 2014, Moët Hennessy selected Nashik as the most suitable terroir for producing international quality sparkling wine made in the *champenoise* method. Traditional Champagne grapes, Pinot Noir, Chardonnay and Pinot Meunier were substituted by Chenin Blanc and Shiraz, the grapes grown in Nashik, resulting in fine, award-winning wines like Chandon India Brut and Sparkling Rosé.



(L-R): Kaushal Khairnar, Head Winemaker Chandon India, Dan Buckle, Winemaking Director Chandon Australia, and Ipsita Das, MD Moët Hennessy India pictured at the Nashik winery at the launch of Aurva

Sparkling wine is at the heart of Chandon, but so is crossing boundaries and innovation. In this, Nashik has led the way by producing a still wine for the first time in the Maison's 60-year history – Chandon Aurva from 100% Shiraz grapes locally sourced and harvested by hand. About 40% of the grapes used are grown at Chandon's estate in Dindori and 60% by Chandon partner growers in Nashik. Aurva, meaning 'of the earth' in Sanskrit, is a masterpiece of innovation and collaboration by Kaushal Khairnar, chief winemaker at Chandon India, and Dan Buckle, winemaking

director and Shiraz expert at Chandon Australia. Created as the new Indian classic, Chandon envisions Aurva will place Indian wine on the world map of luxury wine. With fruity and floral aromas – redolent of Nashik's unique soil – Aurva has velvety tannins and flavours of plum, cherry, and blueberry, with a touch of spice. It is the perfect match for India's diverse cuisine. Bottled with a screwcap for maximum freshness and convenience, Aurva is ready to drink now but also has the potential to age if cellared well. Priced at Rs 4,250, Chandon Aurva is available country wide.

## VISITING

### Rajat Parr, celebrated sommelier and winemaker in India

Rajat Parr was in India last November. A famed sommelier, author of two books on wine, and a celebrated wine taster and winemaker, Rajat was raised in Kolkata and left for the USA in his twenties. He returns often to India to meet family, and does so quietly. On his latest visit, he presented his wines at events in Kolkata and Mumbai, thanks to the initiative of Sanjay Menon of Sonarys.

In Kolkata, at an exclusive private wine dinner, there was a fascinating face-off between some of Rajat's wines and those of French winemakers he was influenced by from regions like Jura, Savoie and Hermitage. Local wine enthusiasts, principally members of the Wine Club in Kolkata, gathered in strength at a sumptuous and well-paired dinner. The glassware was on point, the wine face-off was intriguing, and Rajat's back stories added an important dimension to the experience. My standout wines were a Pet Nat from Rajat's Phelan vineyard, a Rosé Massale Chardonnay from Stephen Tissot's

*The wines tasted at the face-off between the French winemakers' and Rajat's wines in Kolkata*



Rajat Parr caught referring to the programme at the Mumbai Masterclass vineyard in Jura, and a Pinot Noir from Domaine de la Côte, a Rajat venture in partnership with Californian winemaker, Sashi Moorman in Santa Rita Hills.

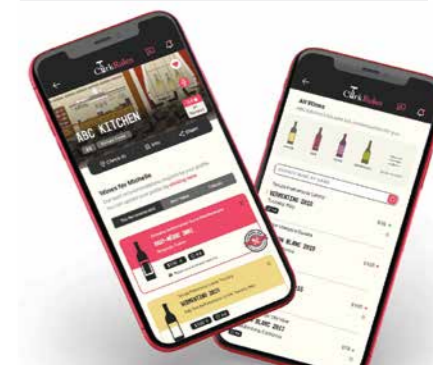
A day prior to the event held in Mumbai, there was a private masterclass hosted by The International Wine and Food Society. The masterclass conducted by Rajat featured Syrah wines from the Northern Rhône region. Five wines covered the appellations of Croze-Hermitage, Saint Joseph, Cornas, Côte-Rotie, and Hermitage. There was also a sixth Syrah, a fresh and approachable Rajat creation from the Bassi vineyard in California.

Listening to an experienced sommelier and winemaker was fascinating. His perspective on grapes, terroir, and winemaking is unsparing and educative. – V Sanjay Kumar

*Rajat Parr's wines are imported by Sanjay Menon of Sonarys Co-brands Pvt Ltd*

## CorkRules, a revolutionary new wine app

The revolutionary new wine app, CorkRules caters to all one's wine needs in one convenient platform. From discovering new wines to managing your cellar and even purchasing your favourite bottles at retailers or restaurants, CorkRules is a game-changer in the world of wine enthusiasts. What sets CorkRules apart is its user-designed interface, providing a visually appealing and intuitive experience. With just a few



taps, users can connect with friends and delve into a world of wine knowledge, learning and discovering together. With state of the art technologies, CorkRules also offers personalised recommendations tailored to your unique taste preferences, whether you are a seasoned connoisseur or a newbie.

*For more information, visit [www.corkrules.com](http://www.corkrules.com)*

# Cognac 101

All you wished to know about Cognac, but never asked. **Sovna Puri** fills us in

**Is Cognac a grape brandy?** The answer is, yes, it is. The next logical question is, can grape brandy be made anywhere in the world from any grape? And the answer is, yes, it can. So naturally you ask, can Cognac be made anywhere in the world from any grape? And the answer to that is, NO!

**Why? And what's the difference between Cognac and any other grape brandy?** Well, Cognac must be made from specific grapes, using a specific distillation method, and must come from a specific region in France. Cognac has to be aged in oak barrels for a minimum of two years. However, a grape brandy can be made from any grape, anywhere in the world with no specified distillation method. But the producers are very particular about Cognac's provenance and specifications.

**How many grape varieties are permitted to be used for Cognac?** Although six grape varieties are permitted, most Cognacs are made using Ugni Blanc. Are both red and white grapes used to make Cognac? No, only white grapes can be used.

**What are the steps involved in making Cognac?** The grapes are harvested and fermented, followed by distillation and maturation. Cognac must undergo double pot still distillation by law in a still traditionally known as 'Alambic Charentais', and be aged for a minimum number of years in oak barrels.

**Are any additives permitted in the making of Cognac?** Caramel to adjust colour. Sugar is also permitted, but in



small quantities.

**How do you drink Cognac?** Since you want to enjoy it for what it is, Cognac can be drunk straight up (neat), especially high-end Cognac. But you can also have cognac-based cocktails, which if well made, are delicious.

**Can you name some branded cocktails?** 'Brandy Alexander', 'Brandy Manhattan', 'Between the Sheets' and 'Classic Sidecar' are some well-known brandy-based cocktails you may want to whip up for the winter. Finally, all Cognacs are brandies, but all brandies are not Cognac... and when you sip Cognac next time, remember, you're sipping luxury and refinement.

## How you store your wine may determine how well it drinks

**A**t warm India temperatures, a wine will mature more quickly and not always in the best way. The ideal storage temperature is 10° to 15°C. Once it tops 25°C for a prolonged period, your wine may taste cooked or burnt. Consistency is as important as temperature. Fluctuating temperatures may affect your wine and can also make the cork contract and expand, and eventually start to leak. High humidity is better than somewhere very dry. You should also try to keep your wine away from sunlight and strong electric lighting. This is one of the reasons why most wine bottles are dark green or brown. Strong UV rays will cause your wine to age prematurely or oxidise and turn brown.

Ref: Irish Times

## WHICH WINE

### The Source Pinot Noir released in 2023

**A** notoriously difficult grape to grow, Pinot Noir usually fares best in cooler temperatures, but it has adapted well to the climate in Nashik. The terroir of the vineyard, type of fermentation and even the type of yeast affects the typical flavour of the grape.

A light to medium-bodied red wine, with a deep ruby colour, the Source Pinot Noir from Sula is made from carefully selected grapes grown in the cool climate vineyards of Nashik. The wine is aged in French oak barrels for five months, giving it a soft velvety texture and a long lingering finish. It's a great choice for white wine fans who are moving towards drinking red wine. Wines from Pinot Noir are soft and delicate compared to Shiraz and Cabernet Sauvignon which are much more robust.

Pinot Noir is grown around the world in a wide range of quality from an inexpensive wine to the most expensive wine on the market running into five digits. The Source Pinot Noir costs Rs 1,250 in Maharashtra.



## VISITING

# Bordeaux delegation in Bangalore



(L-R) Renaud Limbosch - Ch Tifayne, Hemagini Rskshit from the French Consulate, Brinda Bourhis, Laurent Mujot, Abhay Kewadkar, Smita Agarwal, Ann-Xaviere Vernay - Ch Guiraud, Deepak Menezes, Sangamitra Banik - Ch Lafaurie-Peyraguey

**T**he Consul General of France in Bangalore, Thierry Berthelot, in partnership with Abhay Kewadkar, co-founder of Tetrad Beverages, recently held a wine dinner at the ITC Windsor Hotel, for a delegation from Bordeaux World Heritage Editions and its finest winemakers from 1er Grand Cru Classé vineyards.

The winemakers included David Ornon of Château Lafaurie-Peyraguey Sauternes and Faugeres St Emilion (presented by Sanghamitra Banik of

Wine Sutra); Anne Xaviere Vernay of Château Guiraud, Sauternes; Emmanuel Boidron of Château Corbin Michotte, St Emilion and Cantelauze, Pomerol; François Huguenot of Château Sociando Mallet, Haut-Médoc; and Renaud Limbosch of Château Tifayne, Franc Côtes de Bordeaux.

Bangalore's wine lovers had been waiting for this event, especially after the success of the one last year. The Bangalore Wine Club became a partner and opened up the event to many wine

lovers.

The evening began with a speech by the Consul General who welcomed the gathering saying how love for wine is widespread in France. Wine, he said, was a way for the French to share their hearth and home and enjoy convivial conversation.

Deepak Menezes, general manager of the ITC Windsor spoke about the Indian meal specially prepared to accompany the wines that were flown in for the event, while the winemakers spoke passionately about their wines as we tasted them. I learned a lot from my table-mate Francois Huguenot about the nuances of aging Bordeaux wines. It isn't as straightforward as you think.

The event was anchored by Abhay Kewadkar, who worked for months with his French counterparts from Bordeaux - Brinda Bourhis, MD of Winevox along with Laurent Mujot, author of the book, "Pairing Bordeaux wines with Indian Cuisine". At the end of the evening all guests received a complimentary copy of his book.

-Shoba Narayan

## Young Sommeliers Olympiad 2023



From left to right: Kirti Rathore (1st Runner Up), Manav Kattey (Winner) & Vedashree Gangapurkar (2nd Runner Up)

**T**he level of skills and knowledge of the competitors has only increased in the last few years and this year was no different. The six finalists were put through a rigorous testing procedure which included testing their skills, knowledge, personality and aptitude for the job. The competition had nine rounds through which the winners were selected. The tasks they were tested for ranged from opening and decanting still and sparkling wines, pouring the same level of sparkling wine into six glasses to blind tasting and decoding still and sparkling wines. The competition included beer, spirits, non-alcoholic beverages, food pairing and a *viva voce* interview with the jury. The finalists will receive study and cash scholarships plus travel opportunities with industry leaders including Sommelier Gagan Sharma.

## NEW IN INDIA – TEQUILAS FROM MEXICO

### Komos Tequila

A category-redefining tequila crafted with winemaking techniques

Made in Mexico, Komos is a collection of very smooth, light tequilas that are great neat with ice, or in a cocktail. Komos launched in the US in 2020 and, now, India is one of the first countries in Asia to have Komos. Richard Betts, master distiller and co-CEO of Komos said, “Our goal was to create something that would be at home in fine establishments across the globe. We know that people in India appreciate quality and we are excited to share Komos with them.”

Using perfectly ripe, hand-selected agave, Komos offers four expressions.

**Komos Añejo Cristalino** is aged for one year in French oak, white wine barrels and filtered through charcoal to create a deliciously smooth, crystal



Komos Tequila: Ceramic collection

clear spirit. It offers notes of sugared pineapple, agave freshness and lime zest.

**Komos Reposado Rosa**, aged for two months in French oak, red wine barrels from Napa Valley, delivers rich, delicate flavours and opulent aromas. The rich pink hue of the liquid is naturally

derived from grape skins.

**Komos Añejo Reserva** undergoes a minimum 12-month aging process in carefully selected barrels, including French oak, American bourbon, and sherry casks, which is expertly blended. The result is a luxurious liquid that showcases distinctive fruit flavours derived from the influence of sherry casks.

**Komos Extra Añejo** is aged for a minimum of three years in both French oak, white wine barrels and American oak whiskey barrels. Notes on the palate include dried orange peels, candied ginger, and toasted pecans.

For more information, contact: Prasan Chawla, Chason Beverages. E: info@chasonbeverages.com T:+91 85957 44342

### Don Julio

A Mexican tequila of exceptional quality from Diageo

Don Julio tequila's legend began in 1942 when a young Don Julio Gonzalez started La Primavera, his first tequila distillery in the Jalisco Highlands of Mexico with its extreme climate and rich volcanic soil. Given Don Julio's extraordinary devotion to making exceptional tequila, his legend lives on. Since 1947, over three generations of Jimador families have worked with Don Julio. It's their unmatched mastery in planting, farming and harvesting agave and their devotion to Don Julio's process and

methods that keeps the legend of this tequila alive.

Don Julio's India portfolio comprises **Don Julio Blanco**, popular for cocktails such as palomas and margaritas, with hints of citrus. **Don Julio Reposado** has mellow and elegant flavours of citrus notes and spice layers with hints of ripe stone fruit. **Don Julio Añejo** which is rather complex in nature is a blend of lime, grapefruit, mandarin and citrus aromas with a rich touch of caramel. **Don Julio 1942** a luxury icon is a homage to the man who started it



Don Julio can be savoured neat or as a Don Paloma, Margherita or a Picante

all. It has a rich, complex flavour with notes of caramel and chocolate on the nose and heady flavours of tropical fruit, warm oak, vanilla, and roasted agave on the tongue.

For more information contact: Karishma Changlani, karishma.c@prpundit.com

## Cellar 33 makes a splash at ProWine Mumbai

A buzz surrounded Cellar 33, the Bordeaux-based import-export and marketing agency, co-founded by Amrita Singh DipWSET and Mattia Antonio Cianca DipWSET, which made its second appearance in Mumbai in as many years. This time, their presence was even bigger and better – featuring 90 wines from 21 wine producers across six European countries. Adding to the buzz around the stall were the star producers accompanying the team.

Famous soil microbiologists, Lydia and Claude Bourguignon created a stir with their unusual wines, made in tiny quantities from a pristine four-hectare vineyard in Cahors; while Michele Ciani, owner of the noted organic producer Aquila del Torre from Friuli-Venezia-Giulia in northeast Italy, attracted crowds with his wines made from native grapes, Refosco and Friulano.

Also present was Mosel superstar Markus Molitor's range of award-winning Rieslings; and Spain's Heredad de Atencia, maker of the structured 'Super-Manchan' wines



Mattia Antonio Cianca and Amrita Singh

from La Mancha along with Bodegas Murviedro from Utiel-Requena, whose portfolio included an excellent Cava and non-alcoholic sparkling wine.

Wines from six diverse Bordeaux producers, including the noted Château de Pressac and Château de Birazel were present. Italy, was well-represented by excellent wines from the regions of Valpolicella,

Puglia, Piedmont and Sardinia in addition to Friuli. Grower-producer Champagne Gaston Révolte, based in Avenay-Val-d'Or, had many people lining up to taste his trio of premier cru champagnes. Along with the high-profile producers was a team of six award-winning, highly qualified sommeliers, from across the world pouring wine.

Mattia said, “We wanted to have the best professionals represent those producers who could not attend. Moreover, it was a great opportunity to bring international award-winning professionals closer to the Indian sommelier community.”

Amrita and Mattia are excited about the opportunity India represents. “We would like to see India achieve world-class status in the realm of beverage growth in, both, wine and spirits,” said Amrita. “Cellar 33 has received an incredible response at ProWine. The next step will be to collaborate with quality importers and focus on bringing these highly appreciated wines to India.” —Ruma Singh

## NATURAL WINE | Nothing added, nothing taken away

Distinct and unadulterated, natural wines offer huge rewards for those prepared to give them a try, writes Fiona Beckett, food and wine expert. “Natural Wine essentially refers to wines that are made without the use of chemical pesticides and herbicides, with minimal sulphites and using wild yeasts found in

vineyards rather than those manufactured in a lab. In addition, natural wines are often unlined and unfiltered and, in some cases, even made without oak – or at least no new oak – in an effort to preserve the flavour of the terroir. ‘Nothing added, nothing taken away’ is the natural winemakers’ mantra.

## Sommelier India Wine Club launched in style at Antara Dehradun

An evening of camaraderie and good cheer

The inaugural wine dinner of the SI Wine Circle at the private dining room of Antara was a great success. The wines, generously sponsored by Fratelli, were introduced to guests, course by course. The special five-course meal was delicious, the service impeccable and the featured wines – Noi Sparkling Wine, MS Chardonnay, Shiraz Rosé and Fratelli Merlot – drank exceedingly well. From the effervescent Noi to the velvety Fratelli Merlot, each sip was a delight. The guests, seasoned wine aficionados and enthusiastic newcomers, alike, expressed interest in exploring the world of wine. All in all, it was a lively evening of indulgence and discovery!



Left: GurAmrit Bhalla

Bottom, centre: Another view of the dinner table with (L-R) Bunty Singh, Veena Kapoor, Ashoke Bhalla and so on

Above: (L-R) Reva K. Singh, GurAmrit Bhalla, Sanjiv Dugal, Aruna Mehta, Ren Madan, Nilima Pandit, Aftab Seth, Bunty Singh, Veena Kapur (just visible), Ashoke Bhalla, Bob Verma, Ashok Pandit, Pola Seth and Kamalesh Sharma

Bottom: Ashok Pandit and Pola Seth



Above: Nilima Pandit and Aftab Seth

### Information you can use

#### FREEZE LEFTOVER WINE FOR COOKING

If you have leftover wine that you know you won't finish before it turns, pour it into ice cube trays and freeze it. That way, you can easily add small portions to recipes that call for wine without opening a new bottle.

#### WINE SERVING TEMPERATURES

To chill a bottle of wine quickly, wrap it in a damp towel and place it in the freezer. The dampness helps the wine cool faster than if the bottle were dry. Serving red wine at a slightly cooler temperature (around 12° to 15°C) can make it more refreshing, especially during the hot summer days.

## COLUMN



### ASHISH DEV KAPUR

uncovers the secrets of exceptional wine lists at restaurants around the world

## The Art of the Wine List

A good wine-by-the-glass programme unlocks a variety of styles without the customer committing to a full bottle. It's like a wine tapas menu

As a wine enthusiast, the moment you are seated in a restaurant, your eyes inevitably gravitate towards the wine list – a tantalizing journey that promises to elevate your dining experience. In my over two decades as a restaurant owner, I've had the privilege of exploring wine lists at restaurants across the world and uncovering the secrets behind what makes a wine list exceptional. It is safe to say that crafting a great wine programme is an art and a science that requires a delicate balance of passion, knowledge, and business acumen. Let's uncork the elements that contribute to a memorable wine list from both the consumer's and restaurant owner's perspective.

Nestled in Gurgaon, my restaurant **The Wine Company** is the quintessential rendezvous for the romantically inclined Gen Z, embarking on their inaugural tryst with the world of wine. A symphony of flavours unfolds, offering a curated selection of 25 wines by the glass – a tantalizing array featuring Prosecco, Pinot Grigio, Tempranillo Blanco, Chardonnay, Malbec, Grenache,

Pinot Noir, and more. We are not just serving sips; we are encouraging our young crowd to globe-trot through wine, discovering their taste buds' favourite destinations. It's like a chill journey, building your wine vocabulary one glass at a time. As Paulo Coelho famously stated, "All wines should be tasted; some should only be sipped, but with others, drink the whole bottle."

A good wine-by-the-glass programme unlocks a variety of styles without the customer committing to a full bottle. It's like a wine tapas menu, offering a taste of everything. As they say, "Why settle for one when you can have a tasting flight and turn your table into a runway for grapes?"

Wine lists come in various formats, each catering to a distinct dining experience. The compact 'Connoisseur's Corner' may focus on rare and aged vintages, appealing to seasoned enthusiasts. In contrast, the 'New World Odyssey' may feature bold, innovative selections for those seeking a contemporary twist. Some wine lists showcase a thoughtful selection that complements the cuisine. From



WINE BY THE GLASS

SPARKLING

Grover Zampa Soiree Brut (India)  
Grover Zampa Soiree Brut Rose (India)  
Cinzano Prosecco (Italy)

ROSÉ & WHITES

Sula Zinfandel Rose (India)  
Grover Art Collection Rose (India)  
Grover La Reserva Blanc (India)  
Fratelli Chardonnay (India)  
Sula Sauvignon Blanc (India)  
Campo Viejo Viura Tempranillo Blanco (Spain)  
Jacobs Creek Chardonnay (Australia)  
Borsao Macabeo (Spain)  
Stival Pinot Grigio (Italy)  
Senorita Chardonnay (Chile)



REDS

Grover La Reserve Syrah Garnacha (India)  
Sula Cabernet Shiraz (India)  
Senorita Cabernet Sauvignon (Chile)  
Cosecha Merlot (Chile)  
Campo Viejo Rioja Tempranillo (Spain)  
Jacob's Creek Shiraz Cabernet (Australia)  
Borsao Garnacha (Spain)  
AG 47 Malbec Shiraz (Argentina)  
Camas Pinot Noir (France)  
Dante Di Fiorenza Chianti (Italy)



The wine list of the Wine Company in Gurgaon has 25 wines by the glass

crisp Sauvignon Blancs to robust Cabernet Sauvignons, a diverse array invites the wine enthusiast to explore and pair wines with different dishes.

Embarking on a gastronomic odyssey at Chicago's culinary haven, **The Publican**, is a symphony orchestrated by Chef Paul Kahan and Sommelier Leslie Lamont. Their meticulously curated wine list is categorised

under themes like 'Ripe & Fruit Forward', 'Lean & Mineral' and 'Rich & Silky'. It's a vinous journey that invites patrons to savour the nuanced dance between wine and food.

Meanwhile, in the exotic embrace of Bangkok's Mediterranean gem, **Quince**, a dessert wine spectacle unfolds. The dedicated menu features Greek Muscat, late harvest Riesling, Porto, Sherry, and lush Chenin Blanc sweet wines. It's a decadent finale, a sensory voyage that lingers on the palate.

**T**echnological innovations are orchestrating an evolution for wine programmes. The use of Coravin as a wine preservation system has long allowed expensive wines to be served by the glass, while avant garde technologies like Juno assist in serving wine at its optimal temperature as an important part of achieving the desired tasting experience. This device uses 'reverse microwave technology' to chill white and red wine to sommelier-recommended temperatures in just three minutes!

With the advent of wines adorned with immersive labels, the sensory journey extends beyond the bottle's contents. A trailblazer in this domain is Sparflex, introducing a wine foil that, when scanned by its corresponding app, springs to life, unfolding a canvas animated with images and text, weaving the narrative of the wine within – an artful fusion where the exterior becomes a portal to an entire immersive experience.

With wine markups, the savvy restaurateur engages in a delicate balance, finding the sweet spot between profitability and patron satisfaction. Restaurants that pride themselves on judicious markups cultivate a devoted following, where the clientele relishes the allure of a well-priced bottle. Simultaneously, astute patrons recognize that

markups contribute to the total culinary experience – covering high rentals, staff costs and the restaurant's ambiance. The standard industry practice involves pricing wines at three times their cost. This markup however, must be dynamic, with the pricing of expensive bottles slashed to one-and-a-half times their cost.

**Balthazar**, the iconic New York eatery, with a 400-plus bottle list, ensures accessibility through half-bottles and carafes. Half-bottles offer numerous advantages, especially for high-end and aged wines. Patrons who want to splurge might not have the financial means to spend, say, \$200 on a bottle of Caymus, but they might be willing to pay \$100 on a half-bottle. The smaller serving size also offers the perfect solution when figuring out a wine pairing for a seafood appetiser and red meat entrée: half a bottle of white and half a bottle of red.

**A** whimsical pricing strategy gracing select establishments is the art of decoy pricing. Here, a conspicuously high-priced wine takes centre stage, casting a flattering light on the seemingly more reasonable and affordable options. It's a theatrical manoeuvre that stimulates sales of the accompanying, ostensibly more approachable, wines.

In the realm of a sophisticated wine programme, the true magic unfolds not just within the pour but in the expertise of the servers who weave the narrative of each bottle. Training staff becomes an investment in refining their palate and helping them to understand the multifaceted world of wine.

At **Nammos** Dubai, a glamorous restaurant known for its stunning sea views and beach club, our server advised, "For a rich and rare white, I would suggest you try our Domaine

Saint Prevert Châteauneuf-du-Pape Blanc, 2012. It's a delicious, full-bodied white that has aged beautifully and pairs very well with grilled seafood. Though Châteauneuf-du-Pape can be made from a variety of different grapes, this bottle is a rare 50% Rousanne and 50% Clairette."

Such servers traverse terroirs, decipher tasting profiles, and metamorphose into adept storytellers of the vine. The result is more than service; it's an encounter with winemaking craftsmanship.

Consider the imagined 'Cellar Conversations', a setting where staff transcends the role of order-takers to seasoned sommelier companions. They navigate patrons seamlessly through the wine list, proposing the perfect pairing with an intimate knowledge of individual preferences. The impact is transformative – customers don't merely drink; they engage in an exploration of flavours curated by a knowledgeable guide.

This cultivated expertise not only elevates customer satisfaction but also leaves an indelible mark on the overall dining experience. In the world of wine, true brilliance lies not just in uncorking a bottle but in the mastery of imparting knowledge, turning each pour into a nuanced symphony for the senses.

So, fellow wine explorer, as you peruse the wine list on your next gastronomic adventure, remember to flirt with different wine styles. In the world of wine, the journey is just as crucial as the destination. Savour the anticipation of discovering a new love – a testament to the artistry behind the perfect pour. Cheers to the boundless world of wine, where every list provides an opportunity for a delightful revelation! ♦

**In the world of wine, true brilliance lies not just in uncorking a bottle but in the mastery of imparting knowledge, turning each pour into a nuanced symphony for the senses**

COLUMN



JUGSURAIYA

describes the eureka moment when he discovered a whole new, unexplored landscape of white wine

# Serendipity and the white, white world of wine

It was pure serendipity. The word means the making of delightful discoveries by chance, and was coined in 1754 by the English novelist, Horace Walpole, in a letter to a friend.

It is derived from a fairy tale called The Three Princes of Serendip, which was the old name for what is called Sri Lanka and which means the Golden Isle.

Walpole borrowed the word from an English translation of the Italian version published in Venice in 1557, which itself is said to have been derived from a Persian folk story the origins of which are lost in the mists of fable.

Serendipity must have been working in the wings when, some weeks ago, I went to our local liquor store to pick up a few bottles of wine.

I selected four bottles of Grande Noir, a French Pinot Noir that Bunny and I are partial to. The helpful shop assistant fetched them for me and put them in a box for easy carrying. When I got home, opened the box, and took out the wine I discovered that what I'd got was not Pinot Noir, but Chardonnay, made by the same winery which makes the Pinot Noir, with the same label showing a fat, black sheep which gives the brand its name.

My faux pas was the cause of some consternation. The reason being, that though both of us are enthusiastic

wine drinkers, our tastes for it are metaphorically Marxist: we drink only reds. Malbecs of the world unite; you have nothing to lose but your Chablis.

It's not that we'd never tasted whites. We had, on rare occasion, when that was all there was on offer, and generally at lunchtime when, as a rule, we try and avoid, or minimise, drinking anything alcoholic.

On the basis of this scant acquaintance we had dismissed whites, all whites, as being anaemic impostors in the vinous world. In the musicology of wine, for us reds were resonant, rich baritones; whites the tra-la-la background chorus, piping soprano verging on falsetto.

So, should I go return the Chardonnay, admitting my gaffe, and revealing myself to be a naif bumpkin who didn't know his Amarone from his elbow? Shuddersome to think what

Robert Parker would have to say about such scapegrace gaucherie. We decided to bite the bullet and imbibe the Chardonnay and uncorked a bottle that evening at dinner, which was fish.

And that was when we had our Eureka moment of serendipity. Or, as Bunny aptly amended, our seren-sip-ity. It was like discovering a whole new, unexplored landscape of libation, a liberation from potational parochialism. It was like a Shakespeare lover or Bardologist who for long

**In the musicology of wine, for us reds were resonant, rich baritones; whites the tra-la-la background chorus, piping soprano verging on falsetto**



Le Grand Noir Chardonnay, full-bodied white wine

**We decided to bite the bullet and imbibe the Chardonnay and uncorked a bottle that evening at dinner**

had persisted in reading only Shakespeare's tragedies, studiously ignoring the comedies, and all of a sudden encountering a Falstaff or a Festes. Or like a Mozart lover who listened only to the symphonies and then chanced upon the operatic enchantment of the overture to "The Marriage of Figaro".

Keats likened his experience of coming across Chapman's celebrated English translation of Homer to that of "stout Cortez" (the famed Spanish conquistador) gazing upon the Pacific for the first time, the immensity of his discovery rendering him speechless, "silent upon a peak in Darien".

We felt a bit Cortezish and speechless, "silent upon a palate of Chardonnay". Since then, we've expanded our wine alphabet, so that ABC doesn't stand for Anything But Chardonnay but, Also Besides Chardonnay, and learnt that we can enjoy our Pinot Grigio, and have our Pinotage too.

And we thank that Felix Culpa, the happy fault which on our wine list helps fill in the blancs, Sauvignon or Chenin, take your pick. ❖

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## COLUMN



RUMASINGH

On tasting Assyritiko from Santorini's Domaine Sigalas during the London launch of Volcanic Wines of the World

# Santorini and its acclaimed white grape – Assyritiko

**Beloved of wine critics and sommeliers for its complexity, versatility and food friendliness, Assyritiko thrives on Santorini's stark volcanic soils**

Santorini is not just one of the most beautiful Greek islands in the Aegean Sea. It is more than that. Its charm is enhanced by Greek mythology and set in ancient movements of the earth such as the volcanic eruptions that created the island's crescent-shaped caldera, the only one of its kind anywhere. Shrouded in myth and shaped by the forces of nature, Santorini is unique. Besides its picture-perfect beauty that attracts tourists in hordes, with dazzling white houses topped by distinctive blue domes and narrow winding lanes with bright bougainvillea, it is also steeped in winemaking history.

Santorini is the natural birthplace of one of the world's most acclaimed native grapes – the white grape, Assyritiko (A seer-tee-ko). Beloved today of wine critics and sommeliers for its complexity, versatility and food friendliness, Assyritiko thrives on Santorini's stark volcanic soils, whipped by strong ocean breezes, achieving a level of perfection as nowhere else in the world.

During the October launch event of the Volcanic Wines of the World in London – a newly-formed trade body that brings together wine regions located on volcanic soils – I found myself walking in with a keen sense of anticipation. Many of the wines born on volcanic soils are connoisseurs' delights, and I was sure I

would find Assyritiko.

I did. I also met Spyro Lemanis, the hospitality director of Domaine Sigalas, arguably the most famous of the tiny island's 18 wine producers. With him I tasted the wines and listened to stories of Santorini. I was enthralled.

Santorini might boast a long history of vine-growing, but Domaine Sigalas set up production as late as 1991. The young Paris Sigalas, then a high school math teacher, would visit his family home on the island during the summer holidays and work on the vines with his father and grandfather, both vine-growers. At the time, they grew grapes in tiny quantities for the domestic market. But the far-sighted Sigalas realized that one day Assyritiko's fame would spread, creating a demand that would be hard to meet. So, Domaine Sigalas was founded as a crowd-sourced entity. Friends put in money to create a modern winemaking facility on the island.

It was the start of a journey. Within 10 years, Sigalas began exporting his wine to the US, selling to a Greek populace that had made their home there. And while the demand for Santorini's Assyritiko has soared in wine markets, Lemanis tells me there is little chance of expansion or volume growth.

"We work out of a tiny volcanic island; there

is a ceiling on how much we can produce." In a good year, Sigalas might produce 200,000 bottles, in difficult years, perhaps half of that.

The other major factor controlling production are the strict rules governing PDO Santorini (Protected Designation of Origin). It is designated a white wine only appellation – Assyritiko rules here. Yields are controlled strictly, to deliver quality, but are naturally low owing to extreme weather conditions with warm dry summers and very little rainfall. No irrigation is permitted, so vines depend on moisture created by fog from the caldera and the strong sea winds that whip the island, depositing condensation on the parched, volcanic soils.

A second limiting factor is Santorini's historic 'kouloura' or basket vine-training system, used for growing Assyritiko. This requires skilled manual tending, as the vines hug the soil as they grow, coiling into tightly woven baskets. This unique system ensures that the grapes can never grow too big or too many and is, as Lemanis describes it, "a marvel of prehistoric engineering" that has been sustained for centuries.

"It is ideal for our conditions on the island. In the warm summer, the wood shelters the bunches from the sun in a protective hug. As sea water evaporates and condenses in the dawn, the moisture drops into the soil and is absorbed by the vines." A higher, more conventional trellis would waste precious moisture, says Lemanis.

Retreat to a quiet corner and swirl my glass of Assyritiko and let myself be transported once again to the Greek isles. My dry Assyritiko is laden with ripe tropical fruit yielding to hints of citrus peel and stone fruit, but with dominant notes of stone, smoky flint and salinity held up by tingling acidity. Refreshing, yet so complex.

The versatility of the grape is demonstrated in the high quality of its other avatar – Santorini's Vinsanto – a rich sweet wine, that is made in even tinier quantities from late-harvested Assyritiko. It is aged oxidatively in large casks which encourage evaporation and concentrate

the flavours of honeyed almonds, creamy chocolate, and toasted hazelnuts. The high sugar is balanced by Assyritiko's naturally high acidity, creating a wine that is both rare and very special; and worth buying if you can source a bottle.

But Lemanis has another surprise up his sleeve – a unique Santorini red wine crafted by Sigalas, from the rare native grape,

Mavrotragano. Sigalas had discovered a few vines left on the island, and carefully nurtured them to create a red wine which was virtually unheard of in Santorini. As PDO regulations cover only Assyritiko, Mavrotragano is vinified outside PDO rules, grown on low trellises rather than in the kouloura basket, and irrigation is permitted. Lemanis describes Mavrotragano as "Assyritiko in red grape form". It makes a richly-layered and concentrated wine, with notes of cocoa, spices and chunky dark berries that linger long on the palate.

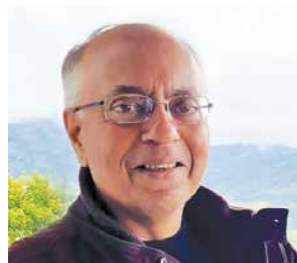
Meanwhile, I am drawn back to the legends that surround the island of Santorini. One speaks of Euphemus, son of Poseidon, and his love for a beautiful nymph. To protect her from Poseidon's wrath and give her a home, he is said to have dropped a fistful of earth into the sea from which sprung up a beautiful island – Santorini, the jewel among the islands of the Cyclades. But my favourite legend is the one that speaks of Santorini as the original site of Atlantis, the mythical lost city of gold, which is believed to lie beneath the impossibly deep waters in the heart of the island's caldera. I do believe that golden Atlantis exists in Santorini. And, today, it has appeared in the form of Assyritiko in my glass. ❖



Paris Sigalas pictured with the historic basket vine-training system, 'kouloura', used for growing Assyritiko

**The versatility of Assyritiko is demonstrated in the high quality of its other avatar – Santorini's Vinsanto – a rich sweet wine, that is made in even tinier quantities**

## COLUMNOSING AROUND



### V SANJAYKUMAR

compares his peak experiences as an amateur golfer with the many high points of his wine journey

# From Golf Fairways to Fine Wines

My wine journey is more than a decade old, it has been intense, and there have been more than a few wines that brought what is called, an 'aha' moment

As an amateur golfer, my career highlights included a single-digit round, an eagle on a par 5, and a hole-in-one that cost me a packet after. What topped all these was a trip to the state of Georgia in the United States. I won a public lottery, travelled to the USA, and spent a whole day watching the very best golfers compete at the Augusta Masters. In the vast beautiful grounds was Tiger Woods. It was a stunning experience to watch him compete.

What could qualify as my peak experience in wine?

This is arguable. My wine journey is more than a decade old, it has been intense, and there have been more than a few wines that brought what is called, an 'aha' moment. It is hard to describe it, but when the moment arrives one takes a deep breath and looks up at the Heavens.

It happened to me in Piedmont, Italy, at a winery called Ceretto, a large producer that had a young sommelier who told us he wept for the first time when he tasted the wine he was pouring. It was their **Cannubi San Lorenzo 2009**. There were a few drops in my glass but they counted. On the nose were floral aromatics mixed with tobacco and earth, the palate had acidity, fruit, and tannins in a nice tango.

It happened again with my first sniff of the **Mascarello Giuseppe e Figlio Monprivato**

**Barolo 2013**. The aromatics were so good I had no wish to drink it. And there was an Amarone from the famed producer **Dal Forno**, the Monte Lodoletta 2011 and a Rosso from the other Veneto magician called **Giuseppe Quintarelli** called Ca' del Merlo. Both had what can best be described as a 'Drops of God' quality.

I came late to the pleasures of Burgundy. Those who have tasted the Pinots and Chardonnays from its various domains point to **Domaine Romanée-Conti** as the ultimate producer and their precious Pinot Noir as the Holy Grail. To sip a DRC as it is called is almost an impossibility because the prices are stratospheric. The current bottle price is anywhere between \$4,000 and \$5,000. The best chance someone like me has is a celebration of a landmark birthday. The 50th or the 60th birthday is when some of us feel quite reckless.

And so it happened, a friend had a bottle purchased some years ago, he was astounded by the rise in prices, and we spent many an hour impressing upon him to open it rather than gaze at it in his cellar while prices soared. He graciously agreed. The big day came around, tickets were booked, and calendars cleared. Deep breaths and uncommon anticipation followed. The host was a little nervous. Would the experience match the expectations? DRC bears a heavy burden, and the grape Pinot is by

itself a light, temperamental grape that varies its charms by the year. French Pinot Noirs, in general, are not loud, there is no instant karma, the engagement is sophisticated, and the mating ritual is often delicate and sensual.

There were four of us willing to be transported and we had no idea what it would be like.

The bottle itself was heavy, and the label had a chemistry-sample look, just clean lettering on white, but the burgundy colour on the neck cover looked quite rich. The liquid sat in the glass, a little wan and pale. It had a beautiful pink-red-light brown shade, as if candy floss had melted into red cherry. It is pinot-like I thought and then remembered that this was the standard for other Pinots, this was the benchmark and not all the other Pinots that I had imbibed from hills, valleys, and dales from terroirs of far-flung countries and continents.

There are Pinots in New Zealand in Marlborough, Martinborough, and Otago. The USA has Pinots in Oregon and California. Italy has its own Nero. France has many Pinot regions including Alsace, Jura, and Loire. There are Swiss altitude Pinots, and there is the Spatburgunder from Germany. Even Chile these days has single vineyard Pinot expressions. But among them all, the Holy Grail is Burgundy, and its most prized chalice is DRC.

The opening ceremony began, the cork came out clean as a whistle. The wine was poured carefully into Burgundy glasses. The wine was quite translucent, the 2012 was light at the edges. It had a very herbal nose with rosemary, thyme, light candyfloss and green pepper. Elegant and not in your face. The palate was, 'Oh so elegant'. The attack was broad, again herbs dominated, and the finish was of resins and mild tannins. There was a hint of the wild in there, of underbrush influence. Did this come from whole bunches in use? I was happy this element persisted despite the use of new oak barrels. Over the next hour with interaction with air, every



Romanée-Saint-Vivant is a Grand Crus vineyard in the Côte de Nuits in Burgundy

aspect of the wine was harmonious. It was pleasurable, the intensity gathered slowly but was never excessive.

A few days later the memories lingered and the experience stayed with us. I tried to summarise. Fair to say there was a lovely farm-to-table aspect to the DRC, a wine one felt was made by a farmer. The terroir spoke directly without undue oak interference. While it was light in every respect in the beginning, it added 'weight' and it harmonised all the voices in the chorus by the second pour. It was subtle more than intense, very elegant and restrained, it sought to seduce with many touches.

There is fruity wine, tannic wine, acidic wine, and earthy wine depending on what leads from the front. In this **Romanée St Vivant** we found a savoury wine, not salty but spicy, not Asian spice but cool climate European spice, not liquorice but basil, thyme and rosemary, the more subtle yet persistent of spices.

I returned to Bangalore in a warm glow. My better half raised an eyebrow. "Happy?" I nodded. "That's it?" she asked, a little surprised. I had mixed feelings, suddenly. There was a tinge of regret. What if I had such a bottle? Would I have opened it? Or would I have been happier with an unopened bottle, just holding it and wondering what the experience would be like? One looks for magic in life yet at times it is best perhaps that the genie stays in the bottle? ❖

Would the experience match the expectations? DRC bears a heavy burden and the grape Pinot is by itself a light, temperamental grape that varies its charms by the year

## COLUMN



SHOBANARAYAN

Asks if the much-vaunted view that wine is not the best drink to pair with spicy Indian food is true

# Why does India prefer beer to wine?

**H**as beer overtaken wine as young India's drink of choice? To continue the question, what can the wine industry do about it? But first, some figures. Bangalore has about 85 brewpubs. It doesn't have a single wine bar. Go into The Bier Library on a Friday evening and you'll have to wait in line for a seat. Why is this so?

"Beer is accessible, less pretentious, lower priced, available in a single serve, made by Indian brew masters for Indian palates and suits Indian food," says Devesh Agarwal, past president of the Bangalore Wine Club and founder of The Wine Connoisseurs group. Now, his wine friends fear that they may lose him to beer.

The other difference between beer and wine has to do with expertise and ingredients, says Agarwal. Beer is made by local brew masters and uses foreign ingredients (hops, malt, etc). Wine, on the other hand, uses local ingredients – the grapes are grown in India – but relies on foreign winemakers for expertise. Local brew masters tweak the drink to suit the Indian palate. Foreign winemakers force the Indian palate to change for the wine. Is this a sustainable situation in a country with as robust a culture of food as India?

A long time ago, an American wine writer, in response to a reader's question on "which wine goes with Indian food", answered "Beer." When I first read this, I felt enraged because I thought the American wine writer brought with him biases about Indian cuisine and our country's relatively new appreciation for wine. After all, beer came with the British while wine is only a few decades old in India. But now, maybe it is time to accept the truth that wine perhaps is not the best libation to go with our spicy Indian food.

**B**ut this doesn't mean that wine is a lost cause in India. For the wine culture to grow here, we need to look at non-European cultures that have created a love for wine. Take the US for instance. It had total prohibition, it is considered a "new world," but within a short period of time, it has created an ecosystem for wine. One reason is because early winemakers didn't treat wine with the preciousness and reverence that it is accorded in India. Sure, wine appreciation needs to happen, but for that a wine palate needs to be fostered. The way America did it was by simply nudging more young people to drink more wine. They created wine spritzers, wine coolers, Sangrias, put wine

in tetrapaks, and bottled cheap wine in gallon jugs – all of which got more young people to pour themselves a glass.

In India, only now are we putting wine in tetrapaks, but it is an important first step. What does a youngster want when he drinks? He wants a tasty glass of alcohol that he can afford. Wine in India starts at Rs 900 a bottle. You can get a can of beer for Rs 150.

In Europe, particularly in France, Italy or Spain, wine is considered part of the family meal. We all know that. Pouring a thimbleful of wine into a child's glass just so he can say "Cheers," is normal in families. India, on the other hand, has a cultural aversion to alcohol. A significant portion of our population is teetotal. Even though this is slowly changing, beer seems to be reaping the benefits faster than wine.

There are a few small steps taken to popularise wine. The last time I visited Grover

Vineyards, I tasted wine infused with paan-like flavours. I expected to hate it, but found it familiar and delicious. It would likely go very well with a South Indian banana leaf dinner. Grover is also playing around with other Indian flavours. It is likely that other large wineries are doing the same.

**T**he great thing is that wine doesn't need to crack the entire Indian market in order for it to gain ground. Most urban Indians these days are well-travelled and love non-Indian cuisines. We may go home to our *ghar-ka-khana* but are quite happy eating bread and cheese or pasta – foods which naturally work with wine.

The focus, I feel, should be on making wine popular with young people. In order to do that, wine bars are a great way to go. Put on some good music, create some cool vibes and pour wine at a price point that a first-time employee can afford. ♦

**The last time I visited Grover Vineyards, I tasted wine infused with paan-like flavours. I expected to hate it, but found it familiar and delicious**

**A long time ago, an American wine writer, in response to a reader's question on "which wine goes with Indian food", answered "Beer." When I first read this, I felt enraged**

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PHOTOSTUDY

## Dirk van der Niepoort

# Portugal's most famous

# winemaker

Award-winning photographer, **Jon Wyand** is excited at the prospect of shooting Dirk Niepoort for the first time

The Douro region in Portugal is a historical register of iconic names defying any idea of precedence: Taylor's, Symington, Sandeman, Croft, Fonseca et al. It's a long list. If you stand on Gustav Eiffel's bridge that crosses the Douro River from Porto to Vila Nova de Gaia you will see these names all displayed above the red roofed lodges that cascade down the slopes of the south bank towards the river.

It's many years since I had last visited the region and in those days I almost immediately caught the train from Porto station upriver to Pinhao to the terraced vineyards and white painted wineries and the wonderful hospitality that awaited.

This time I wanted to cover new ground and was continuing from Pinhao, south to Dao and returning via Barraida. But first a client needed me to call on Dirk Niepoort, another celebrated name in Port at his lodge in Vila Nova de Gaia. It looked an easy journey from the airport but when you leave the motorway and encounter the warren of narrow, sloping, one-way cobbled streets the GPS ceases to be your friend. Suffice it to say the second time around I decided a pedestrian approach would be better. Street numbers are small and intermittent, the famous names invisible at street level. Niepoort's lodge is behind an old iron gate that looked unopened in living memory.

I had met Dirk Niepoort only once previously. I remembered him as a larger than life figure topped with chaotic curly hair, dispensing high energy. How in all my years had I never photographed this man? I was excited that the hour was at hand. It was Dirk who came to unlock that gate.

It felt as if I was entering a secret world through a large creaking door. Distant roof lights illuminated the dusty air in the alleys between huge vats and large barrels. The dust was from the dirt floor and the view limited to a few yards beneath the roof lights. Barrels decorated with old insignia and numbers greeted you as you passed. It was a dark, catacomb-like atmosphere which I was reluctant to disturb, but warm rather than menacing.

I never travel with lighting, or, for the last few years with even a tripod. Digital cameras have such wonderful sensitivity that I can manage with a steady hand. But it WAS dark in here..... What proved to be half way into the depths of the building Dirk stopped and turned in a pool of light coming from the right. "Here's the office, the light's better here."

And so it was, illuminating walls of old ledgers and sample bottles in a small office. Growing concern gave way to great relief as I saw my picture take shape in seconds. Dirk is not an impatient man, just dynamic and busy and had disappeared on other business leaving me to "sort myself out". I had my stage, I just needed him to perform for me, which he did with calmness and understanding and even seemed to be enjoying himself. ❖



Dirk van der Niepoort, a celebrated name in Port, pictured at the Niepoort lodge in Vila Nova de Gaia

# NAPA VALLEY

## Change is the Constant

Within a few decades of the history-making Judgement of Paris, Napa Valley established itself as one of the world's premium wine regions. Ruma Singh visited a few Napa wineries that highlight the region's development and versatility

In a world filled with ancient and historic wine regions, Napa Valley, the heartland of premium California winemaking, may be considered something of a Johnny-come-lately. The first mention of vines in Napa appeared only in the 1700s, and referred to wild vines. European vines appeared only in the 1800s with the immigrants who brought them along when they came to prospect for gold in California's Gold Rush. *Vitis vinifera* soon found a natural home in Napa and, through the efforts of pioneers like Charles Krug, George Latour, Andre Tchischeff and others, modern Napa established and grew, interrupted only by the phylloxera scourge and Prohibition before hitting its stride again.

Geographically, Napa Valley is blessed with multiple positive aspects, but it only really made it to the headlines with the historic Judgement of Paris in 1976, when the hitherto unknown wines of the region beat the top names in French winemaking. This gave the necessary impetus to the region's

winemakers to up their ante and harness Napa's bounty – diverse, ancient soils (from sedimentary to volcanic, with everything in between, allowing almost any grape to grow); ideal topography (the valley is nestled in the protection of two mountain ranges) and a dry Mediterranean climate, ideal for premium viticulture.

In a few short decades Napa established itself as a region capable of making technically superb wines and grew exponentially. The overarching Napa Valley AVA (American Viticultural Area) was established in 1981 and soon 16 nested AVAs were added, each one producing wines with unique characteristics that reflect their terroir. This was aided by the spotlight on what soon became Napa's cult wine. Screaming Eagle launched its first vintage in 1992 at \$75 a bottle. Today, the official price has several more zeros added to it and the wines are virtually impossible to get!

On a recent visit to Napa Valley, I visited several wineries. Here is a cross-section that represents Napa versatility as it exists today.

### Staglin Family Vineyard

Family-owned, classic style. Rutherford AVA



Family and friends around the Staglin dinner table. Bottom: A bottle of Stagliano Sangiovese, named after Garen Staglin's father, Pasquale Stagliano

Napa is proud of the fact that 95% of its wineries are family-owned. Among these is Staglin, a highly-regarded 24-hectare, certified organic estate owned by the Staglin family. Before Shari and Garen Staglin bought the property in 1985, it belonged to the Latour family, owners of Napa's Beaulieu Vineyards, and was run by legendary viticulturist Andre Tchelistcheff. Situated on the western slopes of the Mayacamas mountains in Napa's premium Rutherford AVA, Staglin has the perfect terroir for Napa's top grape, Cabernet Sauvignon.

Staglin is famous for its small production but big heart, as seen in its Music Festival for Brain Health held post-harvest every year. This year's festival saw country superstar and multiple Grammy nominee, Martina McBride headlining a day-long event of music, wine, and gourmet food with over 70 wineries pouring their wines for the all-day event, including Screaming Eagle, Harlan Estate, Colgin, Bryant Family, Continuum, Scarecrow and many more. The food for the event

was by Chef Ken Frank of La Toque, hospitality director Jaime Orozco told me as we toured the estate that includes a modern underground 27,000-foot winery.

The vineyards are dotted with fruit orchards. I ate a juicy fig, sun-warmed and straight off the tree, and learned that Staglin makes approximately 5,000 cases annually, focusing on Chardonnay and Cabernet Sauvignon under two labels – Salus and Staglin.

"We also produce an estate-grown Sangiovese, a rare Sangiovese rosé and a Bordeaux blend, INEO. The rosé is a tiny production, and available only at the estate," says Orozco. Garen Staglin's father was Pasquale Stagliano, hence the name Stagliano on the Sangiovese and Rosato di Sangiovese bottles. The noted David Abreu has been their viticulturist since 1985.

With a name that commands respect for its quality, Staglin's reputation keeps it at the top of Napa's best-regarded estates.



## Antinori Napa Valley

Famed owner, from Tuscany. Atlas Peak AVA

Put together 26 generations of winemaking history with a (relatively) new, high-potential wine region and what do you get? A match made in heaven. When patriarch Piero Antinori first visited Napa in 1986, he fell in love with its Cabernet Sauvignon and was quick to invest in a 1,210-acre estate on prime mountain land. He is said to regard Antinori Napa as his second home after Tuscany.

“He believed that having vineyards planted at high elevation (up to 1800 feet) on the rocky volcanic soils of the eastern mountains of Napa Valley were critical for successfully growing Cabernet Sauvignon,” says estate manager Glenn Salva, “Today 64% of our 550 acres of vineyards are planted to Cabernet Sauvignon. We gambled by purchasing land in a relatively unknown area of Napa Valley, high in the eastern mountains, known today as the Atlas Peak AVA.”

Antinori Napa offers what is arguably one of the most stunning vistas Napa has to offer. Overlooking a bowl-shaped valley in an amphitheatre-like setting, the estate boasts a rare 30,000 feet underground cellar built as a three-year project in 1987, which houses its wine and is the location for tastings.

The Antinori Napa portfolio is deliberately limited to just a handful of labels. Their A26 Chardonnay (named after the three Antinori daughters of the current 26th generation) is elegant, showing depth, complexity and purity of fruit. The Chardonnay is grown in Foss Valley, with its alluvial soils and a sink of cold air during the growing season – perfect for Chardonnay which comprises approximately 25% of Antinori Napa. “The Chardonnay is a discovery for us. This is not why we came to Napa Valley.”

Rapidly growing in reputation is the Townsend Cabernet Sauvignon which reflects Piero Antinori’s vision and perseverance, explains Salva. The grapes are from the best vineyard parcels, with a touch of Cabernet Franc added for fragrance. Proficio is named for the Antinori family crest which reads Te Duce Proficio (“Following your guidance, I flourish”). Released first in 2019 after 30 years of research into mountain viticulture, only 150 cases are made, selling



Marla Carroll, winemaker at Antinori Napa Valley winery

for \$300 a bottle, a red blend of Cabernet Sauvignon with a 70:30 proportion of Cabernet Franc.

But the wine in the Antinori portfolio that generated the greatest excitement for me was the Cabernet Franc. The 2019 vintage was a stellar expression of Napa’s experiments with the grape with an eye to the future. It was elegant yet had soft and juicy red fruit with a delicious freshness typical of the grape’s expressions and without the muscularity that Cabernet Sauvignon brings.

The Antinori emphasis on research in the vineyards and the cellars continues in Napa: experiments with new clones; new techniques in the vineyards and new approaches to fermentation, trying different types of oak for barrels, their sizes and age, and varying length of aging.

“Today we are managing over one million grapevines on the estate,” adds Salva, who has been with the estate from 1986. “We don’t want Antinori Napa to produce Italian wines. It must have Napa’s own authenticity enriched by generations of experience. We have the quality, the culture, the knowledge, and the place to produce something different.”

Antinori Napa Valley winery located on the eastern mountains of the Atlas Peak AVA



## Promise Wines

Boutique, rising star. Pritchard Hill

When Steve McPherson swapped a thriving career in showbiz to turn wine producer, he was fulfilling a promise made to his wife Jennifer hence the name Promise Wines. As a showbiz mogul, McPherson was credited with turning around the fortunes of ABC Entertainment where he was once president and associated with the development of some of ABC’s most successful shows, including “Lost, Desperate Housewives”, and “Grey’s Anatomy”. But wine was always a passion, with his growing years spent in France watching his father learn about the nuances of wine from Steven Spurrier at L’Academie du Vin in Paris.

“Promise is truly the physical manifestation of a deeply personal dream,” he says of the promise he made his wife on his wedding day to produce wine, a common love for both. “While I am proud of the work I did earlier and I still love movies and TV, my new life has made me a better husband, father and friend.”

The McPhersons are hands-on decision makers on the estate, and despite Promise’s fast-growing reputation for making outstanding wines it is run much like a family homestead. Small is beautiful here: their production started in 2004 with just 48 cases of wine and has gradually scaled up to just 1200 cases over four labels, all named after emotions. A Napa Valley Bordeaux-style blend is named “the gratitude”, a Russian River Valley Pinot Noir is called “the love”, and a Pinot Noir rosé is named “the joy”. At the top is their flagship Promise Napa Valley Cabernet Sauvignon, 16 vintages strong this year.

The wines are sold out almost immediately on release to a much sought-after membership list that includes several high-profile celebrities, whose names they are reluctant to divulge.

Promise buys grapes from carefully handpicked producers, even as it readies its own estate vineyards on a 100-acre estate on Pritchard Hill adjoining the Bryant Family. This is also where a new winery is planned.

The flagship Promise Cabernet Sauvignon is a carefully selected



Steve McPherson pictured with his wife, Jennifer

blend of mountain-grown fruit (from Pritchard Hill and Stagecoach vineyards) and valley floor (Oakville) (see box). “We think this is a perfect combination of what world-class Cabernet Sauvignon can be, both bring out different elements of the grape. Our rosé and Pinot are both from Sonoma. I have a love affair with Burgundy which is reflected in our Burgundy-influenced Pinot Noir. Our rosé is a homage to the spectacular rosés from the south of France,” he adds, admitting that his abiding admiration for France has influenced his winemaking style.

McPherson follows his passions as he expands his portfolio, unusually adding a champagne and a bourbon to it in 2023. “This will be the inaugural release of a Promise Grand Cru Champagne from Le Mesnil sur Oger in the famed Côte des Blancs of France. We have been fortunate to work with Stéphane Renault, a brilliant young winemaker.”

In the new year, they will release a single barrel of their 12-year-old Family Reserve Kentucky Bourbon. The bourbon is in homage to Steve’s great-grandfather, Walter Henry McPherson, who would make whiskey at the back of his blacksmith’s shop in Kentucky for family and friends. “The single barrel whiskey is earmarked only for longstanding Promise members,” adds McPherson.

“Every year our organic garden provides an overflowing bounty for homemade jams, pickles, and just plain good eating.”

As with many top Napa producers, sustainability is key to their mission: they practice organic viticulture and have also adopted elements of biodynamic viticulture. With the focus on excellence, it is little wonder that the Promise motto is also the McPhersons’ catchphrase: “Always drink the good stuff first.”







## Château Montelena

Historic, classic Napa. Calistoga AVA

It is impossible to mention Napa without mentioning Château Montelena. The producer leapt into the limelight in 1976 when its 1973 Chardonnay defeated the best of Old-World Burgundy in the historic Judgement of Paris tasting. Understandably, Montelena and the Barrett family names are inextricably linked with the rise of Napa's wine fortunes, and their Chardonnay occupies pride of place in the US National Register of Historic Places. Today, crowds of fans continue to be drawn to the iconic stone-faced Château Montelena which found instant fame after the movie, *Bottle Shock*.

Whipping around the vineyards in a buggy on a warm July afternoon, it is clear to see that Bo Barrett, named CEO after his father the late Jim Barrett, is keeping things moving. Jim bought Montelena in 1972. Today the vineyards are being replanted, with parcels of gnarled old vines alongside strong, youthful ones. With vineyards going up to 370m, the estate boasts of a diverse range of soils and mesoclimates which permit optimal ripening and produce perfectly structured wines.

Montelena is proud of its history, but refuses to rest on its laurels. Bo Barrett has declared that he is not interested in 'replicating wines year on year'. This statement refers to their philosophy of crafting wines that express the growing conditions of the year, and embracing the differences of each vintage. "Rather than trying to make the same wine from year to year, we simply strive to make the BEST

wine that we possibly can in each year," I was informed by my host.

At Montelena, sustainability is not a goal or target, but a philosophy woven inextricably into its identity. "From the beginning, our owners recognized the benefits of farming responsibly and conserving natural resources in the pursuit of creating age-worthy wine." Montelena has also embraced new age technology with AI-driven tech, 100% solar energy powered, in its pursuit of making excellent wine. Every decision, from rootstock, clonal selection, row spacing or row orientation has been carefully optimized based on new data.

Château Montelena makes approximately 35,000 to 40,000 cases per year, produced across all their wines, with six core wines in their portfolio currently. Interestingly, while Montelena won for its Chardonnay, it is their Cabernet that they have always cherished. Today, their flagship wines include their Estate Cabernet Sauvignon and Estate Zinfandel, along with top sellers Napa Valley Cabernet, Napa Valley Chardonnay, Napa Valley Sauvignon Blanc and their Potter Valley Riesling.

Conscious of their historic status, each year they hold back five to 10% of their Estate Cabernet and Chardonnay production for their popular library tastings (including their premium Cellarmaster Tasting for members), periodically making small quantities of older vintages available to the public. While Matt Crafton is Montelena's winemaker, Bo Barrett, remains a very hands-on CEO; during my visit, bottling was underway at the winery and he was personally overseeing operations.

Left: The iconic stone-clad Château Montelena. Below: A bottle of the highly prized Montelena Cabernet Sauvignon



## Tank Garage Winery

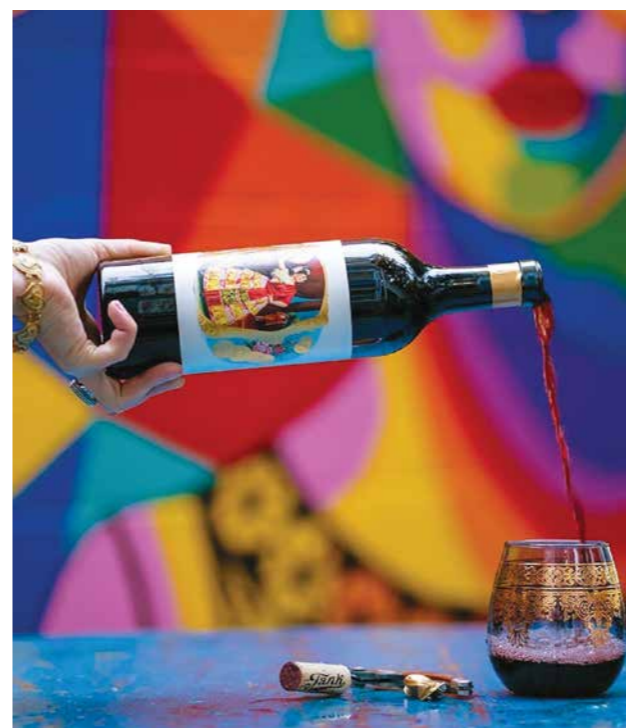
Boutique, loved by Gen Z. Calistoga AVA

Tank Garage may be described as the antithesis of a typical Napa winery. Irreverent in its approach to wine production, everything from its labels to its blends gently shows the middle finger, sometimes literally (they made a wine named Middle Finger) to tradition. Yet this is no amateurish project, as owner James Harder and winemaker Bertus van Zyl skillfully combine technical know-how with out-of-the-box thinking.

Tank Garage does not own vineyards, but sources fruit from renowned parcels around the state. Its limited edition, small-batch, wines are sold out annually, on release. With names like Talk Dirty to Me (a Bordeaux blend), Soft Core (a carbonic red, featuring Valdiguié, Negrette, Grenache), and Hippy Sippy (Chardonnay pét-nat), the wines grab eyeballs and boast of rarely-used grapes (Teroldego, Petite Sirah, Alicante Bouschet among many others).

Tank Garage has doubled its sales since its launch in 2014, showing that Napa is ready for change. As in the case of many Napa properties, it also places emphasis on sustainability and innovation.

Another bonus: Tank's wines are considered



affordable by Napa standards. No wonder then that millennials, and those tired of the status quo, make a beeline to its unique tasting room in Calistoga, located in a Prohibition-era petrol bunk, an eyebrow-raising location. When I walked in for a tasting on a hot July afternoon, I saw a tasting room unlike any in Napa: funky, cool, and relaxed.

My favourite from the tasting? A skin-contact Trousseau Gris called Occhiali da Sole, from the famed Fanucchi-Wood Road vineyard in the Russian River Valley. Featuring a Hollywood starlet in rose-tinted glasses on the label, the wine is layered, with red fruit and tropical notes overlaid with a textured saline finish.

Tank Garage wines, the antithesis of Napa wines from their labels to their blends, are much sought after by millennials

## Cardinale Winery

Family-owned, premium. Oakville AVA

The Jackson family might well be regarded as the ultimate Napa winemaking dynasty. Its multi-generational ownership covers wineries in countries around the world, besides California. At the head is matriarch Barbara Banke, widow of founder Jess Jackson.

While the Jackson family wines cover several properties and make wines at multiple price points, including their popular brand Kendall-Jackson, at the very top of their quality pyramid is Cardinale. Cardinale produces a single wine each vintage – a Cabernet Sauvignon.

Right from its launch in 1982, Cardinale's singular mission was focused on producing the highest-quality Cabernet Sauvignon. The vineyard sources change from year to year to create a distinctive wine that is a blend of multiple sub-appellations in Napa Valley – mountain and valley floor AVAs – resulting in a limited production, powerful and seamless Cabernet Sauvignon that requires patient decanting. The Cabernet is native yeast fermented and bottled unfiltered after being aged in French oak.

The winery has a strong sustainability focus and climate-sensitive approach. Katie Jackson is co-founder of the International Wineries for



Above: Christopher Carpenter, winemaker at Cardinale Winery. Right: Bottle shot of their top wine, Cardinale Cabernet Sauvignon 2019. Bottom: The Cardinale Estate

Climate Action with Miguel A Torres, which has a 10-year climate action plan, "Rooted for Good", with ambitious targets to achieve by 2030. Since 2001, Cardinale's winemaker is the noted Chris Carpenter, whose multi-faceted background in viticulture enables him to grasp the intricacies of both vineyard and winery. A music lover, he is believed to treat the blending of grapes like a conductor blends elements of an orchestra to create a perfect symphony to reflect the characteristics of the vintage. The wine is blended just prior to bottling to show the development of the two years' spent maturing in barrels.

With a very small, high-end production, Cardinale offers limited availability to a members-only list.



## Raj Patel wines

Niche, trendy. Downtown Napa



Raj Patel, a boutique wine producer with a niche portfolio

The wine world is now familiar with the story of Raj Patel, the Indian-origin producer whose eponymous wines were selected to be served at the White House gala hosted by US president Joe Biden for Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

Despite seeing early success, Patel has not cashed in on his instant fame. A boutique producer with a niche portfolio, Patel operates from downtown Napa, working with experienced French oenologist Julien Fayard to produce wine which he sells out of a controlled allocation system to a list of members. He owns no vineyards, but leases specific parcels of vines in noted Napa vineyards which he uses annually for his production.

With wines priced from \$60 (Sauvignon Blanc) to \$170 (Coombsville Cabernet Sauvignon) Patel keeps a steady eye on quality, and delivers it.

## SIDE BAR

### Understanding Napa terroir – mountain high, valley low

Napa Valley's geography allows it to produce perfectly ripe grapes that produce some of the world's top-rated wines. To understand why, let's look at Napa's unique topography.

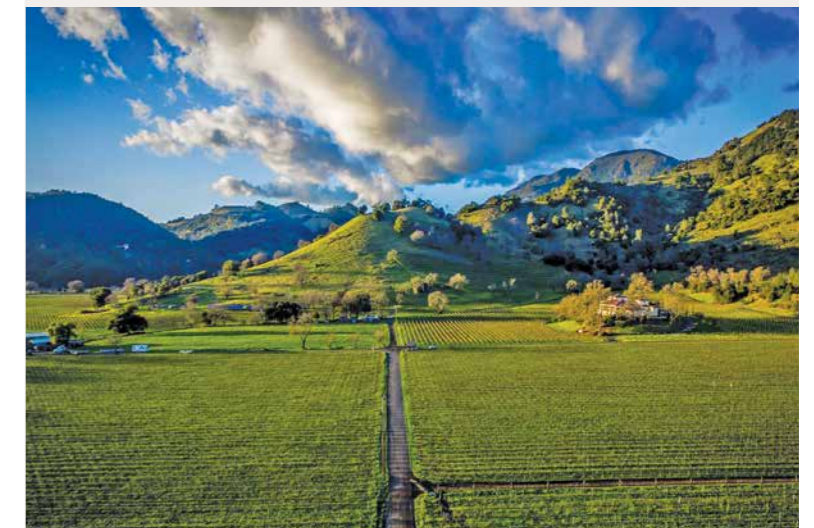
The 16 nested AVAs of Napa Valley may be divided into mountain AVAs and those located on the valley floor, between the two sheltering mountain ranges, the Mayacamas and the Vaca. The fog seen in many images of the region, that sweeps in from gaps in the mountains, creates a layer that lies in a blanket over the valley, allowing the vines above the fog line greater sun exposure and fewer shifts in temperature between day and night than those on the valley floor. This is known as Napa's unique 'inversion layer' effect.

The soils play an important role too: the mountains have thinner, rocky soils, while the valley floor has a diverse range – from alluvial to sedimentary.

Mountain AVAs, that include Atlas Peak, Mount Veeder, Diamond Mountain, Spring Mountain, Howell Mountain, create wine with intense flavours, layered complexity, and age-worthy tannins. At lower elevations, the fruit has a more vivid floral character, a rich mid-palate, and finer tannins.

Wines from the valley floor AVAs (including Calistoga, St Helena, Rutherford, Oakville) tend to be more lush, juicy and are overall rounder, with a fruit-driven profile, a rich mid-palate, and finer, elegant tannins.

Many producers source their grapes from multiple vineyards in the valley, combining mountain-grown grapes with those from the valley, creating a balance and complexity that typifies Napa red wines, especially its famed Cabernet Sauvignon.



Château Montelena vineyard at Napa Valley



The Source Resort opened in 2017 and is situated on the site of the original winery where it all began

# THE SOURCE

## Sula's premium collection

With the launch of The Source wines, Sula Vineyards has earned its place in the premium wine segment. Rajeev Samant, CEO, Sula Vineyards, spoke to Brinda Gill about his impressive journey

**R**ajeev Samant, CEO and founder of Sula Vineyards, says, "I worked very closely with our winemakers and team to come up with the idea of The Source. It is all about small-batch premium wines of a more European, Old World style. Till then, Sula wines were more New World. The Source brings wines that are artisanal, undergo barrel ageing, or are produced with lesser-known grape varieties in India. These offer the consumer a choice of new, luxury wines at an affordable price point."

Sula Vineyards was founded in 1999, a few years after Rajeev Samant returned from California where he had pursued an undergraduate degree in Economics and a Master's degree in Engineering Management at Stanford and later worked for Oracle Corporation in Silicon Valley. Having experienced the spirit of entrepreneurship and innovation in California, and the verve of Napa Valley, he was keen to create a successful winery in Nashik. And over the past 25 years he has achieved just that and more.

Sula Vineyards has emerged as the world's most-visited winery; Sula wines, spanning Sula, Dindori, The Source and Rasa labels are top selling wines in India. Sula is one of India's most-awarded wine brands and Nashik is regarded as the wine capital of India, primarily owing to Sula's presence.

Given the popularity of Sula Vineyards as a must-visit destination in Nashik, the company opened a resort in 2017. The resort was built on the site of the original winery, and was named The Source to honour Sula's beginnings. Visitors arrived in great numbers to enjoy the surroundings of the vineyards, visit the winery and enjoy wine tastings and wine-paired meals.

Around the time work on the resort was going on Rajeev observed that discerning Indian wine drinkers were looking for something new and different. There was a growing awareness of fine wines, and wines from different grape varieties and styles. An increase in disposable income coupled with a willingness to spend on premium imported wines came together with an openness to trying out wines at a higher price point that were artisanal.

"Through our sales and visitors to the winery we discovered that wine drinkers with discerning tastes were becoming more premium in their tastes and their spending habits and moving away from Indian wines and drinking imported wines. We believed we could produce equally good wines at a price point between the Indian and imported wines," said Rajeev. "So a decision was taken to fill the sweet spot between Rs1000 and Rs1500 a bottle with a range of premium wines named The Source to go with Sula's resorts."

The new category was launched in November 2017 with The Source Grenache Rosé. A lovely pale pink, dry wine with citrus and tropical fruit flavours. The Source Grenache Rosé leans towards the rosé styles of Provence, distinguished from the Sula Rosé that was already in the market made from Zinfandel grapes and more Californian in style.



Rajeev Samant, CEO and founder of Sula Vineyards

**Discerning Indian wine drinkers were looking for something new and different. There was a growing awareness of fine wines, and wines from different grape varieties and styles**

The front label of The Source Grenache Rosé has no mention of Sula, which gives it a distinct identity of its own with a charming illustration of The Source resort. The label was inspired by Napa Valley wine producers such as Robert Mondavi who depicted images of their wineries on the label.

**S**peaking about the design of the label, Rajeev traced his love for winemaking to the time of his visit to the pioneering winemaker in Napa Valley in the late 1980s.

Robert Mondavi and several other winemakers in Napa considered their terroir as unique and they thought they could compete with the great wines of Bordeaux. Mondavi has a beautiful estate. His original label was based on the gateway to that iconic estate, Rajeev recalled. "I said to myself, we are building a beautiful resort here in Nashik so why should our label not reflect our resort and tie it all together?"

That is how the idea of a unique front label came about. And the concept of the new design, new name, new style and a higher price point than the regular Sula wines, created a premium wine that appealed to customers. "The Source

Grenache Rosé was an instant hit,” Rajeev asserted. “It is the number one premium rosé in India and outsells any imported rosé in the above Rs1000 price point.”

With the success of The Source Grenache Rosé, work started on the next wine in the category, the Sauvignon Blanc Reserve. Sauvignon Blanc was the winery’s first crush launched in 2000 as a fresh fruit-forward California-style wine with no oak, it was popular with wine drinkers.

However, as Rajeev put it, he was also aware of high-end Sauvignon Blancs from the great Bordeaux châteaux, such as Château Margaux and Château Mouton Rothschild, which were produced in a very luxurious style with a lot of time spent ageing in oak barrels. It had been 20 years since the company released its first Sauvignon Blanc and Rajeev felt India was ready for something different. The Source Sauvignon Blanc Reserve, the second wine in The Source collection, was launched in 2018 and was very well received. It has also been Rajeev’s favourite white wine for several years.

**T**he Source Cabernet Sauvignon, which Rajeev called, ‘an inspired choice’ was launched two years later in 2020. “Cabernet Sauvignon is not the easiest grape to grow in India, but we have been getting better at it. The grapes were sourced from south Maharashtra where Cabernet grows much better than in the north and we succeeded in creating a wonderful, more classical age-worthy Rasa Cabernet Sauvignon, which was full bodied with more structure, and could therefore be priced much higher.”

However, the need of the hour was The Source Cabernet Sauvignon, an affordable, smooth and fruity wine that does not spend as much time in expensive oak barrels, and is therefore appreciably lower in price than the Rasa Cabernet Sauvignon.

Sula’s two sparkling wines, Brut and Tropicale, made in the Champenoise method

**The Source Sauvignon Blanc Reserve, the second wine in The Source collection, was launched in 2018 and was very well received**

with secondary fermentation in the bottle were moved in 2018 to the Charmat method, where the secondary fermentation takes place in sealed tanks, in collaboration with their Italian wine consultants, from Prosecco. Considering the climate in Nashik, the Italians said there was no reason why Sula should not be growing the Moscato Bianco grape, used in Italy to produce Moscato d’Asti sparkling wine, a huge seller across the world.

So Sula planted India’s first Moscato grapes. The Moscato harvest was good, and the winery decided to produce a Moscato sparkling wine to round off The Source range. The Source Moscato is not a dry wine as Rajeev pointed out. “When you come down to it, people like to drink sweet wines and Moscato is by

definition a sweet wine.”

With The Source range doing so well, the winery was ready to try a different version of Chenin Blanc than the popular style first produced in 2000. Rajeev was impressed by the dry, barrel-aged Chenin Blanc from South Africa and the Loire Valley. So a small batch of Chenin Blanc was made with hand-picked, ripe grapes from Sula’s Dindori estate for the Source range, allowing the wine to spend some time in barrels. The Source Chenin Blanc Reserve was launched in 2022.

Sula’s regular Chenin Blanc is pure fruit, fermented in stainless steel tanks, in and out in a month. The Source Chenin Blanc Reserve spends six months in French oak barrels and is released much later.

The Source range offers a more luxurious experience at an affordable price



“We add about 10% Chardonnay to give it a little more mouth-feel and help with oak integration,” Rajeev said. “The Source Chenin Blanc Reserve has improved with each vintage and right now, it’s among my favourites.”

**T**he latest addition to The Source portfolio is Pinot Noir, launched in 2023.

“Pinot Noir, is one of the great reds and was a glaring gap in our stable. When Pinot cuttings planted for another winery that changed its mind became available we snapped them up immediately. We are producing an oak-aged Pinot Noir and to my mind it is like a Burgundy Pinot. I see a great future for it in Nashik as it grows well here. Ten years ago, the view was that it was not possible to grow Pinot Noir in India. With our Pinot Noir being spot on, we have realized that we no longer need to limit ourselves. This is the varietal that we are now going to be expanding.”

Over the last six years, Sula and The Source have emerged as two distinct categories, with the former offering wines that are fresh and fruit forward to be drunk young, and the latter producing premium wines from select grapes with more expensive winemaking techniques.

“Consumers appreciate the differentiation, because they know exactly what they should expect from each category. They know they pay a bit more for The Source wines to get a more luxurious experience at an affordable price. The three wines in the high-end Rasa label are even more expensive. We are really happy to have achieved these stand-alone brands in India in the premium segment.”

“These are very exciting times,” Rajeev said. “Sula is leading the way by producing wines of distinction and higher quality in India. The Source has shown us that the sky is the limit! The great thing about The Source is that it has brought a lot of wine drinkers back to drinking Indian wines after they had moved towards imported wines. That is real success and I am very proud of it.” ♦

TALKINGPOINT

# “Brown Gins?!” Seriously?

Well, why not? **Gagan Sharma** talks us through an audacious product innovation by Indian gin makers



Stranger & Sons Gin is matured in ex-Oloroso and Amontillado sherry barrels

The science of distillation is India's gift to the world. We enlightened the world with the study of botanicals, spices, citrus and their application as medicines, saving precious lives around the globe. Ayurveda literally means 'the knowledge of life'. Ergo, we were bound to be proficient at making gins. Since the first Indian craft gin landed on our shelves, just five years ago, we now have approximately four dozen expressions. And, having gained confidence from creating and expanding this space, surviving the pandemic and altering the habits of the drinking classes, these craft elixirs are becoming experimental, even to the extent of changing colour. They are taking on the uber-attractive brown spirits market (rums, brandies and whiskies), of which we are champions too! I call them 'Brown Gins'. With several examples released, they've ignited conversations worth having, and raised a few questions: Is it just *bonne chance*? Is the brand-loyal, price-sensitive Indian public ready for this intruder into their drinks territory? Is there space on your shelves for these gems?

## OAK BARRELS

An oak barrel can add a great deal to an alcoholic beverage – nutty flavours, aromas of coconut and/or sweet spices, slow maturation, partial oxidation, character from previously used barrels and, of course, an alluring hue. However, barrels occupy space, need careful maintenance and put a dent in your bottom line, all of which are drawbacks for a gin producer.

Enter Oak Chips. They have the same effect on the liquid. Whichever type of oak you use, oak adds a captivating vivacity. Gin makers looking at keeping their market excited with new variants, collectibles and limited releases have more than one reason to deploy the benefits

of wood to their already tasteful liquids. Apart from the play of colour and flavours, oak allows them to open the door to the larger dark spirits market, in which India is already a presence among leading producers and consumers. There's barely any limitation to what a gin-maker can throw into gin's botanical mix. So why not oak as well?

## INDIAN BROWN GINS

Pumori introduced Ascent, Greater Than brought out Broken Bat, Nilgiris experimented with peated and unpeated cask-ageing for a few months, and now Stranger & Sons has contributed to the arsenal. While Pumori and Nilgiris mature their gins in barrels, and Greater Than infuse theirs with toasted Kashmiri willow shavings, Stranger & Sons is rising to new heights with their India Spirited Gin which is matured in ex-Oloroso and Amontillado sherry barrels. It is then brushed with wild honey and cascara influences, making it a unique proposition that India hasn't yet experienced.

So what do these gins taste like? Perhaps unsurprisingly, they all have different personalities. Nilgiris carries only a slight suggestion of oak, while Ascent is the true-to-style barrel-aged gin. Broken Bat is a different personification of gin with a toasty, grippy mouthfeel while the Stranger & Sons exploratory spirit is something of a departure from true gin. It's a curious mix: concentrated oak meets savouriness from the sherry influence, while husky cascara adds to the earthiness and honey provides a candied roundness to the palate – all this while maintaining the warmth and spiciness of the traditional gin. However, to call it a gin would be a tad tricky. It can be better described as a sloe-styled gin (a fruit-based gin steeped with sloe berries) done differently or a gin Old Fashioned with a twist. If the latter, this will be the second cocktail in a bottle by this producer.

## DO WE NEED INDIAN BROWN GINS

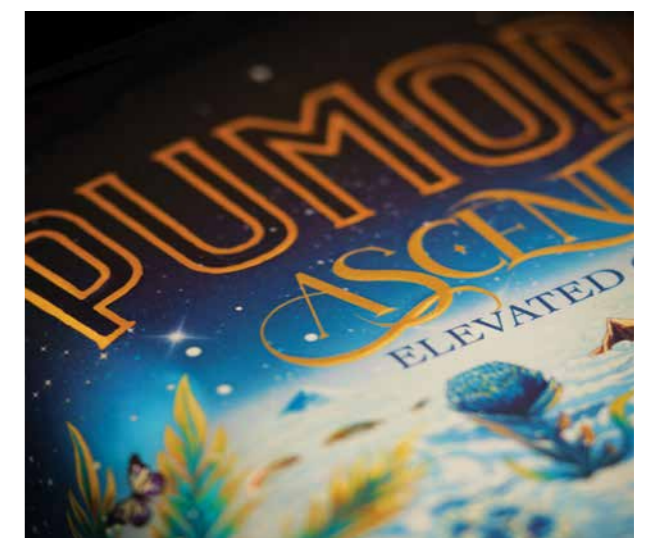
Arrange all these innovations in a tasting flight and they provide an interesting study of what India is capable of producing. Although the question arises: Is this the time for Brown Gin? Does India need it?

To answer this question, a dual approach is required taking into account the gin world's simple response as well as the argument presented by the darker world. The former will simply ask, why not do it? It adds to the bandwidth of Indian gin makers, displays their craftsmanship with courage to experiment, and offers excitement and variety to local



Broken Bat Gin from Greater Than is infused with toasted Kashmiri willow shavings

These craft elixirs are becoming experimental, even to the extent of changing colour. They are taking on the uber-attractive brown spirits market. I call them 'Brown Gins'



Ascent Gin from Pumori is a true-to-style barrel-aged gin



palates. There's more. India likes storytelling, and no one has done a better job of putting India in a bottle and charming palates better than Indian gins.

Nilgiris Gin has only a slight suggestion of oak

#### DARK SPIRITS ARGUMENT

From the other side of the argument come some simple observations. Firstly, dark spirit imbibers are rather strict about the definition of whiskies, rums, and brandies. Whisky imbibers don't solicit influences outside quintessential sweetness and oaky flavours. For brandies, added flavours are a strict no no. Rums do flirt with flavours; there are several flavoured white rums and RTDs, while their darker siblings ride solo or at most have a spice mix. Playing with flavours outside of this spectrum isn't really encouraged or appreciated. Add a mix of citrus, herbs, roots, barks, seeds, spices and juniper, although it might not fly, at least in theory.

#### THE OTHER CONUNDRUM

Then there's the other concern: how are they to be served? In a Bar, drinking G&T (gin and tonic) is close to ceremonial. So is vodka-soda or vodka and juices. Whisky goes with water, and/or soda, unless it's an Irish whiskey, which might attract ginger ale, or an American with, maybe, a cola. Rums are best with a splash of cola, water or neat. But brown gins have this puzzle which is still

**Dark spirit imbibers are strict about the definition of whiskies, rums, and brandies. They don't solicit influences outside quintessential sweetness and oaky flavours**

unsolved. Do we serve them neat? Ideally, yes. However, Indians are yet to fully catch on to this drinking style. The day they do, they'll know what they've been missing. Until then, we wait.

If we serve them in a Martini, a Negroni, or a Highball, known as the 'trio test' in tasting circles, they reveal very little of their original selves or the influences added to them. A Negroni easily overshadows the oak's subtlety, and definitely that of the gin's juniper spine. A Martini might show right, but it will only be the finer palates who can appreciate it this way and view the experiment as a new pursuit rather than as a loss. As for Highballs, they just don't gel with brown gins, because this experimentation takes away equally from the joy of drinking a Bushmill's Ginger or a Jim Beam Cola as it does from a crisp Gin and Tonic.

This would tend to mean that Brown Gins only work as collectibles or limited releases. And all the effort of figuring it all out, developing a palate and a liking for just a small-batch that's simply a passing fad on your palate journey, is pretty futile.

#### WHAT'S THE VERDICT, THEN?

Although we are yet to find a balance and define our relationships with brown gins, they do offer an eyebrow-raising curiosity, and a conversation worth an evening over a few gin tonics or young malts. I personally wouldn't mind an occasional Greater Than Broken Bat with ginger ale and lime, or a Stranger & Sons Barrel Aged Gin as a twist on an Old Fashioned or a Boulevardier, along with some adjustments on the amaro, vermouth and garnish.

These two are the ones available in the market now. And whenever they appear of an evening, they'll carry the promise of sparking a conversation that's sure to be enjoyable, even if it's left inconclusive as to whether India could befriend Brown Gins as a style and category unto itself. ♦



## A French Tale of Wine, Life and Naughtiness

Our tale begins with a naughty little fox named Adam Renard. Adam spent his childhood running around vineyards, learning winemaking from his father and travelling the world through his mother's songs. Now Adam makes his own wines that hail from some of the most iconic French regions, and travels across France and the world growing his range of wines and strengthening their impact!

We bring to you a new outlook on being brilliant but naughty, on wines and therefore a new outlook on life! We welcome you to sip on our unique wines, follow our Adam on his crazy adventures, and say "What The Fox!"

Know where to draw the line. Drink Responsibly.

WINETRAVELLER

# PORTO DOURO

## Heaven's Gate

Raymond Blake is in love with the Douro Valley for its vinous treasures and more



The Douro Valley, known for its ancient terraced slopes, never fails to impress and is well worth a visit

There is no place like the Douro Valley, no place at all. I have written that sentence, in various versions, on many occasions over the years and I am certain to write it again. If any wine region must be visited to be fully appreciated then it is the Douro with its ancient, terraced slopes that always set jaws dropping.

I first visited the Douro, and of course Porto, the city that gives the wine its name, in the latter years of the last century and my most recent visit was in May 2023. The passage of time has done nothing but enhance the visitor's welcome. Previously, it was a chore, a struggle with basic accommodation and humdrum food, made tolerable only by the marvellous wine. Today it ranks as a premier destination, to be put on all travellers' bucket lists, wine lovers' particularly.

Porto on the northern bank of the Douro River has been transformed: where once it was down-at-heel and dowdy, today it is vibrant and spruced-up. The greatest transformation, however, is seen across the river on the southern bank in what is the city of Vila Nova de Gaia. (Like many others I plead guilty to the lazy use of 'Porto' when referring to both cities).

This is the heart of the Port business, where most of the shippers have their 'lodges' – vast warehouses that are home to countless litres of maturing wine. They appear timeless yet huge change has been effected in recent years, most notably by Taylor's, who moved their storage facilities upriver to create space for World of Wine, a visitor centre like no other, with numerous museums, restaurants and bars. Among its myriad attractions, the most impressive is the museum that houses many hundreds of drinking vessels, some of which date back thousands of years. If you ever get to World of Wine (WOW) and time is short, eschew



Glass drinking vessels that date back thousands of years displayed at World of Wine museum

**Vila Nova de Gaia is the heart of the Port business, where most of the shippers have their 'lodges' – vast warehouses that are home to countless litres of maturing wine**

all the other attractions so as to take in as many of these displays as possible – making the 18th century glasses your first priority.

If Porto's entire visitor experience bears no relation to what was once on offer – the Douro Valley is far more welcoming than heretofore – what of the wine itself? There are no issues with Port's quality but there are many with image. It is barely possible to talk of Port without slipping into cliché, for it comes with a surfeit of excess baggage that does nothing to enhance its image. Port has long been caricatured as a fuddy-duddy drink.

I once wrote: "Port is often cast as the court-jester of the wine world... Mention vintage Port and watch the tired caricature of the Port drinker totter onstage... There's more to Port than that." There certainly is and I suggest a two-pronged approach to put the old-fogey image to bed, once and for all.

One. The world has fallen in love with cocktails, leaving Port producers well placed



Fresh and zesty 'Port-Tonic' is a variation of Gin & Tonic with the spirit replaced by Port

to cash in on this current craze, thanks to the fresh and zesty 'Port-Tonic'. I first encountered this delight while enjoying a languid boat trip on the Douro, hosted by George Sandeman. The Port in this case was, as expected, Sandeman, and as we moved away from the dock George filled two tall glasses with ice, added a generous measure of white Port and about twice that of tonic. Garnishing it with mint he handed it to me saying, "We call it a Sandeman Splash."

Essentially, it is a Gin & Tonic, with the spirit replaced by the Port, and it transforms the wine into something special. Serve this to your friends accompanied by an extravagant supply of toasted almonds and then watch as they revel in the salty tang of the almonds cut by the sharp cool of the cocktail. That's the first prong.

**For many years Tawny Port was the shippers' well-kept secret, a vinous delight that they were slow to tell the world about, so fond of it were they themselves**

The second is more serious and noteworthy: **Tawny Port**. For many years this was the shippers' well-kept secret, a vinous delight that they were slow to tell the world about, so fond of it were they themselves. In brief, Tawny Port is aged in barrel for an extended period (unlike vintage which is aged in bottle) and is released ready to drink – the ageing has been done for you. It is a marvellous drink, lighter than vintage, relying on finesse rather than richness to make an impression.

Just how good age-dated Tawny can be was brought home in the most pleasant fashion on my recent visit when I tasted across the Taylor's range after a tour in Vila Nova de Gaia. It was one of the highlights of the visit. 'Port-Tonic' may not be for you but whatever you do, do not ignore Tawny. ❖

## A Glorious Tawny Quintet

recommended by Raymond Blake: Taylor's 10- 20- 30- 40- & 50-Year-Old Tawny Ports

### 10-Year-Old

My liking for 10-Year-Old Tawny (not just Taylor's) is always tempered by the knowledge that greater delights lie up the quality ladder. 'Safe rather than spectacular,' is how I view them. The Taylor's version is no exception, a perfectly pleasant expression with a fruit 'n' nut nose and a palate of plump, ripe fruit leavened with a whisper of spice.

### 20-Year-Old

I have always felt that the biggest leap in quality between age-dated Tawnies, when tasting them in sequence, lies between the 10- and 20-Year-Old, which is hardly surprising given that the average age of the latter is twice that of the former. Thereafter the quality improves by increments rather than leaps. Here, the plump fruit has mellowed, leaving room for the aromas and flavours of spice and nuts to have their say on nose and palate. Gorgeous succulence and pleasant richness resolve into an echoing finish. Well worth the extra money.

### 30-Year-Old

At this age we are into rare territory, a wine style that is seldom encountered and the enjoyment of which is an occasion in itself. This one showed flashes of gold in its deep amber colour. The nose could be sniffed ad infinitum. Scents and aromas of concentrated fruit and rich spices jostled for the nostrils' attention. On the palate it was succulent and sumptuous yet light on its feet, with an intriguing dryness at its core to hold the more opulent elements in check. Not in any way 'shouty' or 'obvious'. Long and lingering. A delight.

### 40-Year-Old

"Thirty-year-old is the apogee," I once wrote. "By 40 the bones are beginning to show, not unpleasantly, but these oldsters can flex on the palate in a way the others don't."

Those words had to be eaten when I tasted the complexity of this satin-smooth beauty. It was the texture that made the first impression – a gentle caress that beguiled the palate – and then the flavour came on in ever more pleasant waves. Concentrated and intense but never overbearing, the flavour was a complex amalgam of dried fruit, nutmeg and cinnamon spices, essences of coffee and tobacco, herbs and toffee, all present in harmonious measure, before resolving into a glowing finish that seemed everlasting.

### 50-Year-Old

Labelled 'Golden Age' to mark its half-century of maturation, this is an exceptional wine. If you have a 50th birthday or anniversary coming up, it's the wine you should mark the occasion with.

The colour was remarkable, a bright, lissom, copper-amber shade that called to mind autumn leaves and which almost gave off light. The nose was delicate, replete with whiffs of prunes, figs and dates. Caramelised orange peel was the first impression on the palate, soon joined by a cornucopia of supporting actors: nuts, herbs, spices... but it was not the individual components that made the most impression, it was the overall effect of them in seamless combination.

After scribbling a few notes I put down my pen to concentrate fully on the wine, revelling in its magnificent depth, length and myriad nuances of flavour. The spittoon went unused.

NB: When serving Tawny Port there is one piece of advice that should be considered a dictat: Serve the wine cool – not chilled, just cool. I suggest 12°C, remembering that the wine will warm by a couple of degrees as soon as it is poured. This will greatly enhance your drinking pleasure.





# WILLAMETTE VALLEY

## The holy grail for Pinot lovers

Oregon's Willamette Valley attracts noted Burgundy domaines and Indian vintners, Rajat Parr and Dr Madaiah Revana, reports [Mira Advani Honeycutt](#)

**F**or passionate Pinot-philosophers, Willamette Valley is the holy grail. Located in the northwestern state of Oregon in the US, the wine region has drawn esteemed Burgundy vintners, the likes of Robert Drouhin, head of the Burgundy négociant Maison Joseph Drouhin.

Drouhin's arrival was not accidental. In 1979 David Lett, Oregon's pioneering winemaker submitted his Eyrie Vineyards 1975 South Block Reserve Pinot Noir to a blind tasting at the Gault-Millau Wine Olympiad in Paris. It placed third. Drouhin was intrigued. He restaged the blind tasting the following year, but this time replaced the Burgundy entries with wines from his domaine. Eyrie finished second by a single vote. By 1987 Drouhin was the first Burgundian to acquire land in Willamette Valley's Dundee Hills AVA to plant vineyards and establish Domaine Drouhin. The wine world was shocked: A Burgundian domaine acquired land for a winery in America! "Burgundians did not

usually buy land outside of Burgundy – they didn't need to," said David Millman, president and CEO of Domaine Drouhin, on my recent trip to Drouhin's expansive estate in Dundee Hills. Pointing to the now pristine vineyards in front of us, he said, "They also had nothing here at the time, no equipment. Just dirt."

Soon after Maison Louis Jadot followed with Résonance vineyards, and others like Domaine Divio and Lingua Franca to name a few. Later, wine writers started to visit, including Robert M Parker Jr, America's influential wine critic who would go on to establish a partnership with his brother-in-law Michael Etzel and a French-Canadian investor, for an Oregon vineyard called Beaux Frères (French for Brothers-in-Law).

Is it any wonder then that passionate vintners like Rajat Parr and Dr Madaiah Revana with multiple vineyard estates in California would branch out and acquire vineyards in Willamette Valley?



Rajat Parr pictured at a tank of fermenting wine in his winery in Cambria, California

**Rajat Parr, Evening Land Vineyards, Willamette Valley** "I love Oregon Pinot, but more, it was the love for Seven Springs Vineyards; it's a historic vineyard," remarked Parr when I met him on a crisp fall morning at his newly acquired Stolo estate in Cambria on California's Central Coast. The Seven Springs Vineyard was planted in 1982 in Willamette Valley's Eola-Amity Hills sub-appellation. The vineyard has long had a great reputation as the source for some of the finest winemakers in Willamette and that's what drew Parr to branch out in Oregon.

"I had tasted older vintages of Seven Springs and when opportunity came I wanted to be a part of it," he said. That opportunity presented itself in 2014 when Parr and his co-winemaker and business partner Sashi Moorman, acquired the Evening Land Vineyards winery (ELV) and its esteemed Seven Springs Vineyards.

Bottles of Seven Springs and Evening Land wine from the historic vineyard



"What's special is the soil, older vines, and an east facing vineyard. It's one of the few vineyards that are east facing, it's magical," Parr commented about the 80-acre vineyard, which was partially impacted by phylloxera, and had to be replanted. "We slowly replaced it, and now we're back to 80 acres."

A selection of Pinot Noir, Chardonnay, Gamay, Chenin Blanc and Pinot Gris are under vine, producing 8,000 cases annually of ELV. "We continue to sell the grapes," Parr explained, of the prized vineyard.

**C**ommenting on Willamette Pinots, Parr reflected: "It's much warmer in summer so the skins are thicker, wines have more tannins and you have to control the extraction, a little bit more." Although there are vintage variables, Oregon Pinots express more black fruits like plum and blackberry.

"The tannins are slightly more chewy and sinewy, it's got little more grip, and acidity levels could be higher in many vintages. Nowadays there's a string of warm vintages, but still acidity is slightly higher."

On my recent visit to Willamette I visited the ELV tasting lounge where our wine educator guided us through current 2021 vintages of Pinots and Chardonnays. Among

the three Pinots, the typical flavours of black fruit, tea and mushrooms came through, as did Willamette's signature *sous bois* (forest floor) on the nose. The Seven Springs was aromatic with rose petals; La Source rocking with wild blackberries and the textural Summum, effusive of violet notes.

Among the Chardonnays, we savoured the fruit-forward La Source, expressing a zippy minerality; the Seven Springs showing hints of baking spice;

and Summum, a heady carousel of stone fruits on the palate. Paying homage to blended wines of Burgundy was the cherry-laced 2019 Passetoutgrain, a co-fermented blend of Pinot Noir and Gamay.

As in all his vineyards, Parr adheres to organic and biodynamic farming at ELV which also holds the Low Impact Viticulture Enology (LIVE) certification, focused on the well-being of Oregon's aquatic life and food system by banning the use of copper in vineyards.

In addition to ELV in Willamette, Parr's portfolio of vineyard estates stretches along California's Central Coast with Sandhi and Domaine de la Côte in Santa Barbara County's Sta. Rita Hills appellation, renowned for Burgundian varieties; and in the cool coastal town of Cambria (midway between Los Angeles and San Francisco) where he produces

**As in all his vineyards, Parr adheres to organic and biodynamic farming at ELV which also holds the Low Impact Viticulture Enology (LIVE) certification**

his Phelan Farm Wines of the Pacific and the recently acquired Stolo wine brand.

It might seem bit of a stretch for Parr to manage vineyard estates in various locations. "I'm involved [in the wineries] but not on a daily basis," he says. "During harvest, I do the picks and taste the tanks." And he's trained his team well.

With climate change looming Parr, based in Cambria, has carved out a niche for planting vineyards and acquiring estates in cool-climate appellations. "We are planting new vineyards here with no irrigation; it's a unique planting," he commented about Stolo vineyards. "We have to think about the future when planting vineyards."

To that extent he is committed to conscientious farming, and to incorporating regenerative farming practices to secure vineyard health in the long run.



Madaiah Revana pictured with a glass of wine in his hand. Revana owns two wine estates in two different regions in the US and one in Argentina

Courtesy: Alexana Winery

Rajat Parr's Seven Springs Vineyard in Willamette Valley



**Dr. Madaiah Revana, Alexana Winery**

Houston-based cardiologist Dr. Madaiah Revana has all bases covered: Bordeaux-style Revana wines in California's Napa Valley, Burgundy-style Alexana in Oregon's Willamette Valley and the Corazon del Sol Rhône programme in Argentina's Uco Valley. He is the first Indian vintner in the US to own three vineyard estates, and wineries in three distinctive regions.

**W**hy Oregon I asked? "I always enjoyed Burgundy," answered Revana in our phone conversation from his base in Houston, Texas, "and I had heard of Willamette's similarity with Burgundy." Serendipitously, he met Lynn Penner-Ash, co-founder of Willamette's renowned Penner-Ash Winery, who encouraged him. "This property became available and I jumped at it," he said of the Dundee Hills location, a prime sub-appellation in the heart of Willamette.

Revana acquired the 80-acre property in 2005. "It was a forest, there was nothing there. We started from scratch, cleared the land, planted

**While there is Chardonnay and Pinot Gris produced at Alexana, its Pinot Noir is the star of the portfolio with seven different bottlings, three of which are soil-specific**

vineyards, then built the winery," he said. Fifty-five acres were planted to 11 clones of Pinot Noir, two of Chardonnay and one of Pinot Gris. "First harvest, we sold the fruit."

What makes the estate special is the 18 different types of soil ranging from Dundee's signature red soils to marine sedimentary soil, as winemaker Tres Burnes informed me when I met him on my recent visit to Willamette. On a cool summer morning, we were seated on the terrace, taking in the expansive 180-degree panorama of the vineyards stretched over rolling hills and rugged terrain. Burns pointed at the hodge-podge of 18 soils in the middle block, a result of landslides over thousands of years. This geological diversity is what gives the wines its structure, complexity and age-ability.

While there is Chardonnay and Pinot Gris produced at Alexana, its Pinot Noir is the star of the portfolio with seven different bottlings, three of which are soil-specific, while others are clone-designate (as reported on the label).

We began our tasting with a 2022 Pinot Gris

expressing brilliant acidity and moved on to the flagship Estate Pinot Noir, the ethereal and spicy 2019 and a savoury 2021, both expressing the classic Willamette *sous bois* and barnyard on the nose. We visited older vintages, the 2011 Block 8 and 2014 Block 6, both pale-hued in an Old World style, yet showing bright fruit on the palate and supple tannins.

Willamette wines continue to score top ratings in US wine publications. Alexana's Estate Pinot Noir both 2010 and 2018 made *Wine Spectator Magazine's* Top 100 and ELV's 2012 La Source ranked number three with a score of 98 points in the 2015 issue of *Wine Spectator* Top 100 wines in the world. (ELV's Isabelle Meunier was the winemaker of the 2012 vintage with Parr and

Aerial view of Revana's Willamette estate, Alexana

Moorman selecting the final blend.)

Oregon's production output contributes a mere 1.5% to US total wine production with California contributing 90%. Yet, Oregon wines are responsible for 20% of the scores of 90 points or higher.

"So we're in this little pocket," Burns commented. Small production but high quality is what brings in high scores. "So it's an outsized ratio of quality to production, we have quality but a higher price point than other regions."

Revana is bullish on the Willamette region and in 2019 acquired 65 acres across from Alexana, naming it Kinney. "Like children, I love them all," he commented of his three wineries. "But Napa, where I started, will always be my favourite." ♦



Revana's Willamette wines continue to score top ratings in US wine publications

## BOX – Willamette Valley Facts

Fifty miles from the Pacific Ocean, Oregon's Willamette Valley is today the heart of the state's wine industry. Twenty to 40 miles wide and 120 miles long, the valley is a long, level, alluvial plain with scattered groups of low basalt hills. Oregon's largest AVA, from the Columbia River in the north to the city of Eugene in the south, Willamette was established in December 1983. At that time Willamette was still an old farming community with some 50 wineries. That family camaraderie vibe still continues, but the region has expanded to some 700 wineries spread throughout the 11 nested AVAs: Chehalem Mountains, Dundee Hills, Eola-Amity Hills, McMinnville, Yamhill-Carlton, Ribbon Ridge and Van Duzer Corridor are among the key appellations.

Pinot Noir is the king of this region, followed by Pinot Gris. In recent years, Chardonnay and Riesling have been gaining traction. In 2021, the EU granted it the coveted Protected Geographical Indication (PGI) status, the second American wine region after Napa to receive this recognition. The PGI system protects iconic names of agricultural products, spirit drinks and wines that have links to their geographical origins.

## IF YOU GO...

### Where to dine

#### DUNDEE

**Red Hills Market** Popular local hangout for breakfast, lunch and early dinner. Wood-fired pizzas, salads and baked goods. Outdoor casual seating provides a friendly local vibe.

**The Dundee Bistro** Popular with local vintners, comfort food at its best, Italian pasta dishes and grilled meats.

**Tina's** White table cloth, fine dining menu ranging from truffled mushrooms to wild salmon *troisgros*.

#### MCMINNVILLE

**OKTA** Chef Matthew Lightner's 10-course menu focused on local seasonal food and sustainability.

**Humble Spirit** Down-to-earth, farm-to-table, featuring local wine country bounty.

**Pizza Capo** Neapolitan-style wood-fire pizza in a casual lively setting.

#### NEWBERG

**The Painted Lady** Locally inspired menu served in a romantic Victorian-style cottage.

**Rosmarino Osteria** Pure Italian cuisine, a local hangout.

**SubTerra** Menu crafted with ingredients from local farms and purveyors.

### Where to stay

**Atticus Hotel** Luxury lifestyle hotel in historic downtown McMinnville

**The Tributary Hotel** 100-year-old historic building restored to eight luxury suites in downtown McMinnville.

**The Allison Inn & Spa** 77-room resort on spacious grounds in Newberg.

**The Black Walnut Inn & Vineyard** Nine-room villa set above a 100-acre vineyard in Dundee.

**The Dundee Hotel** All suites appointed with eye-popping art in the heart of Dundee.



Caroline Frey owner and winemaker of Domaines Paul Jaboulet Aîné in the Rhône Valley, Chateau Corton C in Burgundy and a private vineyard in Valais, Switzerland

# Of birds, bees, and butterflies

Caroline Frey, winemaker of four estates in Bordeaux, the Rhône, Burgundy and Valais, speaks to **Nimmi Malhotra** about her wine philosophy

**F**rey cares about birds. And bees, and bugs, and butterflies. For a winemaker, birds can potentially pose a problem. In some vineyards, the vines are covered with nets to prevent the birds from noshing on the ripening fruit. But Frey won't have it. She has rescued one too many distressed birds caught in the net's webbing. It's too dangerous for them, she says.

This 45-year-old is the owner, oenologist, and winemaker of not one, but three prestigious properties across France: the Third Growth left bank Château La Lagune in Bordeaux, Paul Jaboulet Aîné in North Rhône, and Château Corton C. in Burgundy. She also owns a small two-hectare vineyard in Valais, Switzerland.

Birds take on a different meaning in Frey's pursuit of pure, lithe wines. She believes in biodiversity in the vineyard, enabling ecosystems where living things are in balance with each other and the environment. Birds, along with bees and different species of animals, are indicative of natural balance. "Biodiversity sustains life," she says, "In organic farming and biodynamic areas, it is a question of considering the vine as a whole, as a living organism. Our role is, therefore, to strengthen and preserve the biodiversity around our vines." All her vineyards are certified organic and practise biodynamic viticulture with cover crops in mid rows to cultivate soil diversity and good health. In a symbiotic ecosystem, one species looks after the other. Birds are insectivorous and act as natural pest managers.

Over the last two decades, Frey has created two biodiversity refuges in partnership with the League for the Protection of Birds (LPO): the Jalles du Ludon and Clos Gounon. One is a 34-hectare marshland near her estate in Bordeaux and is designed to foster reproduction, shelter and migration. The other, a seven-hectare reserve, is located in the heart of Crozes-Hermitage vineyards of Domaine de Thalabert, fostering ecological habitats. The success of these endeavours is counted in intangible and tangible ways, one of them being the return of different species of birds. For instance, at Clos Gounon, there are 35 species, as compared to 22 before the installation.



Above: Le Chevalier de Sterimberg, now marketed under the new Domaine de la Chapelle. Above, right: Horses are used in the vineyard to plough the land



Frey heads the historic house of Paul Jaboulet Aîné spread across 120 hectares of vineyards in various appellations



**For Frey, quality started with the soil. Her aim is to nourish and strengthen soils and vines in order to develop their natural resistance to disease and climate change**

“It’s a natural balance that we want to preserve,” Frey elaborates, “When there are too many of one species, it’s because the overall balance is not good. The results we have had in our vineyards and our wines in recent years only reinforce my conviction that all these interactions of the living beings around the vine are essential for developing great wines.”

**It started with the soil**

Frey’s oenological journey started with La Lagune, the third growth estate in Haut Medoc. The Bordeaux property was acquired by her father, Jean Jacques Frey, in 2004. A real estate investor with holdings in Champagne, Bordeaux and Burgundy, Frey senior is known to turn failing estates around with tailored

management and investment in the vineyard and cellar. Hence, the winemaking equipment was duly modernized, staff increased, and yields decreased. The focus has always been quality.

For Frey, quality started with the soil. Her aim is to nourish and strengthen soils and vines in order to develop their natural resistance to disease and climate change. The recipe to achieve this requires no chemical intervention, mechanical cultivation or harmful chemical sprays against disease or pests. The nourishment comes in the form of biodynamic practices of cow manure and tonics like chamomile, yarrow, and dandelion tea infusions to improve the humus content in soils.

In the winery, the winemaking is gentler, and the maturation process is less reliant on

oak. The oenology team is experimenting with concrete eggs and glass wine globes to develop the potential to make a great wine, which completely showcases its ‘terroir’ and is successful in preserving the purity and freshness of the wines. Following sustainable and environmentally friendly practices, the winery uses recyclable materials for the wine cartons, vegetable inks for printing, and lightweight bottles.

The latest vintage wines ranging from the Cabernet Sauvignon-led La Lagune and the Syrah-centric Paul Jaboulet Aîné to Pinot Noir and Chardonnay in Burgundy show a glistening purity of fruit. Not only that, but her cleaner approach to viticulture also preserves the terroirs, she says, and helps to cope with

Above: The hallowed hill of Hermitage: Hermitage is considered the birthplace of Syrah

climatic conditions.

Frey is future proofing with newly-approved INAO (National Institute of Origin and Quality) varieties like Castets, which have roots in the region (Gironde). Castet is among the six new varieties allowed to be planted in Bordeaux, with a view to combat climate change with their ability to handle hydric stress in warmer temperatures and shorter growing cycles. At the same time, a part of the vineyard on clay soils is marked for white grapes – Semillon and Sauvignon Blanc. The first Bordeaux blancs from La Lagune are due to be released in the near future.

Her singular focus on terroir and conscious practices have earned Frey the Chevalier de l’Ordre Nationale du Merite from the French



La Chapelle is listed on the Place de Bordeaux alongside the world's greatest wines

government and the Amorim Biodiversity Prize at The Drinks Business Green Awards 2021.

#### Diversity in the Rhône Valley

A similar philosophy extends to the Rhône Valley, where Frey heads the historic house of Paul Jaboulet Aîné. Over 120 hectares of vineyards are spread over various appellations of the north and south – Condrieu, Cornas, St Joseph, Crozes-Hermitage, Côte Rotie and more. Then there are the exceptional vineyards on the hallowed granitic hill of Hermitage, which deliver the flagship red and white wines: La Chapelle and Le Chevalier de Sterimberg (now marketed under the new Domaine de la Chapelle).

Hermitage is considered the birthplace of Syrah and is broken into a series of *lieux-dits* (small geographical areas bearing a traditional vineyard name). La Chapelle, a pure Syrah, is sourced from three select sections: les Bessards, Les Rocoules and le Méal, each with a different microclimate and granitic soil makeup. The wine is capable of ageing for decades and is considered one of the premier wines of the



Caroline Frey in the vineyard tasting grapes of different varieties to assess maturity. Below: Harvested grapes ready for the winery

entire Hermitage region.

This year, both the Hermitage wines were listed on La Place de Bordeaux. Only the top-tier Bordeaux and 100 most prestigious wines of the world have cracked a place on the Place's shelves. Frey's wines are the first two to be listed from the Rhône Valley. Frey announced at the time, "It is a great pride for La Chapelle to join the Place de Bordeaux alongside the world's greatest wines." The wines will be marketed under a new entity, Domaine de la Chapelle, with its own winery. Renowned Danish architect Bjarke Ingels, known for projects like the Audemars Piguet Manufacture, and Noma restaurant, has been commissioned for this ambitious project.

#### Of white grapes and Valais

Working across four terroirs and a myriad grapes, I wondered if Frey had a preferred



**Petit Arvine, a relatively unknown late-ripening varietal is indigenous to the Valais region in Switzerland, home to Frey's smallest estate, her private vineyard, Mon Jardin Secret**

varietal. When pressed, she evaded the question. "It's very interesting to have the experience of such a large panel of grapes. Usually, I like late-ripening grapes. They have more length and balance than the early ripening ones."

One such grape is Petit Arvine, introduced to Frey by her late professor and mentor, Denis Dubourdieu, who instilled a love for white winemaking in her. This relatively unknown late-ripening varietal was one of his favoured grapes and is indigenous to the Valais region in Switzerland, home to Frey's smallest estate, her private vineyard, Mon Jardin Secret.

The vineyard is located in Fully, in the western part of Valais, on granitic soils, 700 metres above sea level, surrounded by mountains. Some slopes are covered with green outcropping, while others, naked, rocky, and majestic, hover over the glistening valley.

"I came to the area with Denis Dubourdieu, and I discovered this vineyard during a mountain trek," she says, as she uncorks bottles of Petit Arvine 2019 and 2020 in the small chalet attached to her vineyard. The white wines in Bordeaux and Fully are a tribute to Denis Dubourdieu.

These are, for me, rare sips and a rarer visit. For starters, not many can visit this private vineyard, especially one called a secret garden, nor sample the minuscule production that comes out of her home winery. The Chasselas and Johannisberg Silvaner are blended in Les Grains Blanc, a fresh, textured wine with stone fruit notes. Petit Arvine, a dry, mineral-driven wine, is bottled unfiltered as a varietal.

Petit Arvine's plantings reach across the mountains into Italy's Valle d'Aosta, as do Frey's roots. She discovered that one of her ancestors was a vigneron in the region. Could Italy be the next frontier for Frey?

"Yes, that could be a project for the future," she said, laughing. "The idea would probably be to replant vines at the same place as my great-great-grandfather did. It is a place well known for good Nebbiolo." ♦

# Unveiling the Premier Crus of Chablis

## A journey through diversity and evolution

Elizabeth Gabay shines a spotlight on the diversity of the Chablis region and the wines' gastronomic flexibility



The soils and exposition of Chablis vineyards create distinct Premier Crus wines

Chablis, the white wine of Burgundy is highly appreciated, but what is not so well known is the great diversity present amongst the Premier (1er) Crus. The wines of 1er cru Chablis reveal not just the quality of the wines but also how the soils and exposition of each vineyard can create a range of wines from traditional linear and vibrantly mineral wines to round, rich Chardonnays with typical Chablis freshness.

Before climate change, the wines of Chablis were steely, acidic and austere in cool years, and powerfully acidic with charming fruit in riper years. Their clean fresh taste made them a popular accompaniment to seafood. Malolactic fermentation was mastered, contributing creamier richness. Their clear marketing image of a single variety from one region – the increasingly fashionable Chardonnay – made them competitive in the 1980s market, where Australia, New Zealand and California had introduced consumers to the idea of varietal wine.

It was around this time that Chablis hit a crossroads. Historically, like all wine, the wines had been fermented and aged in large, old barrels. The modern style was in tank, giving them their characteristic freshness. But yet again, the influence from the New World was felt. Big oaked Chardonnays from the New World were all the rage. Some producers, started to use new oak. This led to 'war' amongst producers with fierce debates over what was traditional for Chablis. Peace was eventually made, and today oak is usually only seen in some Grand or Premier cru wines.

For the next 30 years, the region prospered and grew, growing from 500 ha in the 1950s to 4000 ha in the early 2000s. From the 1990s and into the 21st century, increasingly warmer summers giving more consistent good quality vintages – and a range of styles, oaked and un-oaked – supplied a market looking for high quality white wine.

### Understanding 1er Cru Chablis

The Chablis appellation was created in 1938 with a junior appellation, Petit Chablis, created in 1944. The appellation has a pyramid structure of quality based on the terroir. At the top are seven Grand Cru sites which are clustered around Chablis town on the best sites, on the warmest south-facing slopes, producing the most intense and rich Chablis.

Second in quality are the Premier Cru vineyards covering some 750 ha. In 1986, 79 lieux dits (named places) were listed. These have since been re-organised to create 17 1er

cru sites, stretching along both sides of the river Serein. Many of the crus have subsidiary climats which can use their name or the name of the main cru, but the label will always indicate if they are 1er cru. Next is the generic AOC Chablis which, at 2860 ha makes up the largest part of the appellation. Petit Chablis covers around 600 ha in the surrounding area.

Scattered on the slopes of the hills radiating around the town of Chablis itself, the 1er Cru Chablis offer both high quality and enormous diversity, focusing on expressing the terroir with minimal winemaking influence. Chablis is dominated by Kimmeridgian marl-limestone with a high percentage of fossilised oyster shells. Wine geeks can focus on the minute differences between each site while keen drinkers may focus on the more famous crus Fourchaume, Montée de Tonnerre, Montmains and Vaillons.

The focus is all on the terroir, with Chardonnay being the neutral vehicle to carry the taste of Chablis. The appellation has successfully avoided going down the big oaked Chardonnay path and have, instead, incorporated small percentages of old barrels and long ageing.

The Serein river runs through the appellation travelling from the southeast to northwest. On the Right (eastern) Bank, close to the village, the different 1er crus share a similar terroir. The Right Bank vineyards are steeper with south and southeast orientation. The wines have a peachy, crunchy green apple character, more powerful with extra minerality and acidity.

On the Left Bank many steep-sided vineyards oriented southwest-northeast with east-facing slopes have varying ratios of limestone and clay. The sun arrives in the morning, the soil is cool and stony, and the wines are more floral and less powerful showing a limestone-driven character with finesse, excellent ageability and briny/salty notes. Vaugros is the only left bank cru which looks west.

The future holds different problems as producers will need to reconsider whether the previously colder sites will bring greater acidic balance and whether they will have to stop malolactic fermentation and thus reduce the creamier character found in some of the wines. Recent vintages have also suffered from severe frost and hail, reducing volume, but for now, there are some delicious 1er cru wines coming out of Chablis.

What better way to illustrate the variety of 1er cru Chablis than with a few of my favourites from different crus! ♦

## Premier Crus Chablis

### Montée de Tonnerre Right Bank

Almost Grand Cru status. The wines have great longevity, layered and complex, with tightly wound citrus and stone fruit notes when young.

#### Montée de Tonnerre 2021, Samuel Billaud

20% in barrel for 18 months. Soft gentle herbal floral and sweet wild fennel aromas. On the palate there is amazing length, elegant, long salted citrus acidity. The fruit is weighty with soft round ripe white stone fruit, white nuts, spice, intensely honeyed, silky texture with powerful salted lime giving a long linear energy. Electric acidity, zippy citrus notes with perfumed notes, vibrant minerality and high acidity. Absolute benchmark. 93 points

### Les Beauregards Left Bank

#### Les Beauregards 2022, Domaine Fillon et Fils

Noticeably floral and fragrant aromas. On the palate the texture is creamy and silky, with perfumed Sorrento lemons and a touch of delicate white blossom. Giving appealing charm up front but then the weight and power of this wine kicks in. Mineral salinity, long powerful edginess with pithy white lemons and crunchy green apples, a Margarita style lemon and salt vibrancy and a phenolic finish signing off the concentration. Exactly what I want in a Chablis. 92 points

### Beauroy Left Bank

Notably different in exposition and soil. This windy site faces southeast, with thin, pebbly limestone soil and some blue clay. The sunny aspect produces wines with a generosity on the palate, more fruit-driven than floral, and very attractive in their youth.

#### Beauroy – Troësmes

##### Troësmes 2020, Isabelle et Denis Pommier

30% fermented in barrel, malolactic fermentation, and 18 months ageing in barrel gives this rich wine. Rich sweet toffee aromatics. The rich creamy toffee continues on the palate balanced by aromatic lemon, long floral acidity, sweet oakiness with creamy lees richness and structural phenolics. Grapefruit pith sour freshness, green apples, fresh grassiness and amazing power with citrus energy and richness giving a stellar finish. 92 points

### Fourchaume Right Bank

Notable for power, concentration and orchard fruit flavours, and saline character and balanced acidity. Exposition is south and west, giving ripe fruit.

#### Fourchaume - L'Homme Mort

L'homme mort 2019, Domaine d'Henri

Old vines, 70% in tank, 30% in a mix of barrel and terracotta amphora giving classic Fourchaume character. Restrained aromas of sugared almonds, scented flowers with a hint of sweet smoke. On the palate the fruit is rich and perfumed, with elegant notes of white pears and a touch of orange. Beautifully harmonious with long linear, mineral salinity, fresh austerity and classically Chablisien. 91 points

### Montmains Left Bank

Warm, generous and open premier cru where individual producer style is influenced by the presence of clay. Many Montmains have apple and stone-fruit notes, with crisp citric acidity and a nutty finish.

#### Montmains 2019, J Moreau et Fils

20% fermented in barrel, malolactic fermentation and six months ageing on the lees, not in barrel. Aromas reveal oak and a hint of oxidative winemaking along with buttered sweetcorn. On the palate the fruit is salty butter, jasmine



tea, soft floral charm and balanced by lovely long minty fresh acidity. Big, bold oak flavours very well integrated, supported by the alcohol and acidity. Very individual, rich, and really quite charming. Lovely for drinking now with enough acidity to age. 93 points

### Mont de Mileu Right Bank

Many of the best characteristics of Montée de Tonnerre. Well-known, it is undoubtedly high-quality, although not the most identifiably distinctive

#### Mont de Milleu 2021, Samuel Billaud

Old vines, 20% in oak, aged for 18 months. Intense lime fruit aromas with extra notes of herbs and chamomile flowers. On the palate it is rich and buttery, the silky texture carrying the zesty juicy lime and salt fruit. The long acidity is linear and stony finishing with hints of dark blue flowers. The intense richness contrasts with the structural minerality and well-integrated acidity and energy. 92 points

### Vaillons Right Bank

Easy-drinking, fresh style which is usually generous and attractive early on. Vaillons is orientated eastwards, which gives the wines freshness, typically more acidity and minerality.

#### Vaillons-Séchet

Séchet vieilles vignes 2021, Samuel Billaud

Only in tank, aged for 18 months. Fresh leafy, green almonds and white flower aromas. On the palate, the wine is full-bodied with rich round ripeness. Intense lime cordial, white citrus, delicate minerality, white flowers, long length, high acidity and powerful ripe fruit almost oily fruit. Exactly what I would look for in a Chablis. Fine elegance, power and finesse. Exceptional intensity, weight. Brilliant acidity. 93 points

### Vau de Vey Left Bank

Cool plot with rocky soils, mineral aromas, concentrated and lively with high acidity with later ripening.

#### Vau de Vey 2020, Domaine Alain Mathias

From very steep vineyards the wine is aged for 10 months 30% in clay jars and 70% in oak. The oak is very evident on the nose with some fresh leafy, crunchy apple notes. On the palate the oak is well integrated with some nice mouthwatering acidity, good weight and intensity and some gentle tannins on the finish and very nicely balanced. 90 points

### Côte de Léchet Left Bank

Highly regarded, individual climat producing wine with ageing potential. Profile is mineral, stone fruit and exotic fruit.

#### Côte de Léchet 2021, Domaine Bernard Defaix

No oak. Complex aromas of honeyed ginger, menthol, aniseed and dried grass. On the palate there is some creamy roundness with some intense ripeness balanced by long zesty citrus acidity, fresh pulpy citrus juice. 90 points

### Les Vaucopains Right Bank

Stony soils impart a much more chiselled, pithy, grapefruit style. Light and floral typical flavours of wet stone, flint and a saline finish.

#### Les Vaucopains 2019, Albert Bichot

Aged for 10 months, 15% in used oak. Mineral stony aromas with hints of savoury smoke and sweet exotic flowers. On the palate there is rich, round creamy fruit with exotic flowers, exotic fruit, fresh white melon and nashi pears and a hint of ginger, perfumed Sorrento lemon and herbal complexity. Lovely balance of creamy honey ripeness with elegant chiselled precision. 91 points





FIRSTPERSON

# Up to my neck in it

Carol Wright recently had a bath in red wine. She describes the experience here in some detail, in case you'd like to try it



Head massages are given while soaking in the wine bath, lit only by candles

I went seriously into the red recently; happily not the financial, but the wine sort of red. I experienced a bath in wine at the London branch of Aire who are taking existing vineyard spa vinotherapy experiences into big city centres.

Aire started in Seville in southern Spain in 2001 and offer wine baths at their properties, including those in New York, Chicago, Copenhagen, Barcelona, London and soon in Toronto. Palatial mansions and old factory buildings provide the space for the company's reinvention of the Roman idea of relaxing and spending time bathing and cleansing in waters hot to cold.

The London Aire opened in 2021 not far from the Indian High Commission in Aldwych. The property in Robert street, a quiet cul de sac off the Strand, is a magnificent 18th century town house that once belonged to J M Barrie and was where he wrote Peter Pan.

Stepping inside the Georgian front door I was ushered into the Library; a high-ceilinged room lined with leather-bound books. Huge lanterns with fragranced candles aided relaxation along with cups of jasmine tea. Next, I was escorted down stone-flagged stairs to the changing rooms. The only thing one is asked to bring is a swimsuit. My locker contained a Merlot-hued hooded bathrobe and towels to match. This marked me out as a bather in wine; everyone else had white robes and towels.

Dressed like a medieval monk in my long robe, I descended further down into the earth to a vast cellar space where once wine was stored. The high, arched ceilings and raw brick walls were lit only by candles. The company reckons that in 2018 alone they used 183,000 candles in their properties.

The red wine bath experience is described as a three-hour ritual, and I was encouraged to start by trying the various big pools. I began with the bath of a 1,000 jets that pummelled

**Palatial mansions provide the space for the reinvention of the Roman idea of relaxing and spending time bathing and cleansing in waters hot to cold**



Red wine flows into a marble bath, converted from a 17th century Venetian well

my back, moved on to the gentler Flotarium that aped the buoyant properties of the Dead Sea, splashed about in the warm Calderium, but avoided the Frigidarium of cold-water options (ranging from cold to very, very, cold) and instead sweated gently in the Vaporium steam bath before an hour-long, totally relaxing full body massage using grape seed oil which has a high concentration of Vitamin E to hydrate and nourish the skin.

Finally, I was ushered into the Vinorium, the candlelit wine bath room, where shards of blue light seeped in through walls made of 1,400 empty wine bottles. A gnarled vine clung to one rough brick wall near a wine barrel marked Matarromera, the winery in Spain's Duero valley with which Aire works on its wine products, from massage oils to bath water. (In 2021, Matarromera's Crianza

**I sat nervously on a ledge at one side of the bath. Suddenly a thick pipe, arched over the bath, and spewed out the wine, slightly pink and frothy at the edges**

was listed among the world's best 100 wines by the American publication *Wine Spectator*).

**I**n the centre of the room was a large creamy, clover-shaped, marble bath which I was told was a 17th century Venetian well, big enough for a couple to enjoy. It was empty and I sat nervously on a ledge at one side of the bath. Suddenly a thick pipe, arched over the bath, and spewed out the wine, slightly pink and frothy at the edges, some what akin to Lambrusco. The wine, chambered to around 35°C, was creeping up my legs and quickly enveloping my body. I cautiously licked a finger, and tasted nothing. There was no bouquet at all. The flow stopped just below my neck. A light at the base of the bath highlighted the blood-like colour, glinting in the candlelight.

I was immediately legless – without tasting a drop. The wine was remarkably buoyant and my legs flailed inelegantly till the masseuse told me to brace my feet against the end of the bath and lay my head back on the burgundy shaded towels draped over the edge, while she massaged it and rubbed a honey-based nutrient through my hair before leaving me to enjoy my bath. Which meant wallowing in a concentrate of Tempranillo grapes with warm water that purifies, hydrates and tones the skin.

As an aside, the ancients of Sparta would test the strength of new-born babies by putting them in a wine bath. If their skins did not shrivel, but remained smooth, they were considered fit enough to be allowed to live.

It took Aire, working with the Matarromera winery, 18 months to develop their exclusive bathwater so that it retains wine's beneficial antioxidants which help prevent ageing, while purifying and toning the skin, making it smooth and soft by eliminating wine's high alcohol content, which can dehydrate and irritate the skin. The bathwater includes a patented polyphenol extract found in the Tempranillo grape, the main one grown at Matarromera, where the grape, in order to combat climate extremes, has developed higher concentrates of polyphenols. Water that maintains the correct pH balance is added to prevent drying of the skin.

After about 10 minutes of solo soaking, an attendant appeared with a board of snacks paired to a flask of Matarromera's Tempranillo red wine (I was given an option of white but preferred to match my bath) borne in by a waiter who poured me a glass. The frosted flask and goblet were both of plastic, suited to the slippery setting.

I was left alone in the bath to enjoy sipping the wine and nibbling at the cheese, grapes, salted almonds and rich, dark chocolate truffles. Each item aroused the palate



A self-indulgent soak in a bath of red wine with a glass of wine in hand

**My palate was aroused between sips of wine while the bath wine kept me warm and smoothed externally. I glowed from within and without**

between sips of the wine while the bath wine kept me warm and smoothed externally. I glowed from within and without.

If the idea of bathing in wine seems a sacrilege, then one can try different Aire baths. The London one, fine for teetotalers, is to bathe in tea: Earl Grey to be exact. The ritual is similar, the massage uses tea-based oils, and while in the bath, there is a tasting of different teas accompanied by specially chosen chocolates. In Copenhagen, where Aire is set in Carlsberg's former factory dating back to 1881, a foaming beer bath is the speciality.

After about 35 minutes of totally indulgent vinotherapy, I was led back to the changing rooms to shower away the Tempranillo, dress and return to the real world, feeling refreshed both inside and outside. ❖

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## Exploring Wine with WSET From Basics to Diplomas



Everything you need to know about the world's most popular wine qualifications by Sunil Iyer, who teaches Wine & Spirit Education Trust courses at all levels

For those wanting to learn more about wine, or those in the trade looking to acquire formal qualifications, there are many options available. The Wine & Spirit Education Trust (WSET) is one of the most popular, if not the most popular, option at the moment and its global footprint is growing significantly each year.

It is a body founded and headquartered in the UK, where it was established in 1969. Its initial remit was to assist the training of professionals in the UK wine trade, particularly those in import, distribution and retail. However, it has grown significantly beyond that early objective. Today, WSET training programmes are offered in over 70 countries (and in 15 languages) with 75% of students located outside the UK. WSET is also attracting many enthusiasts (particularly for the entry-level qualifications) who simply want to learn more about wine, not necessarily because they need it as part of their jobs.

I teach all WSET levels in Northern California. The US is currently WSET's largest market and is witnessing double-digit growth each year. In Asia, the fastest-growing markets are Singapore,

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Taiwan and South Korea. However, there is an expectation that the courses will gain greater popularity in India. While WSET also offers courses in spirits and sake, the most popular courses are those for wine.

#### **What are the WSET qualifications?**

There are 4 levels, from the introductory Level 1 to the 2-year Diploma programme (Level 4), each of which has an exam or set of exams at the end.

Level 1 assumes no knowledge of wine and is taught over the course of a single day. While the course covers both basic knowledge and an introduction to the WSET method of tasting, the exam is a relatively straightforward multiple-choice paper (usually taken at the end of the course).

Level 2 expands the set of regions and grapes considerably, and a typical course is done over the duration of a few days, with much more time devoted to learning how to taste wine. However, the final exam is still a theory-based, multiple-choice test paper.

Level 3 is when the difficulty level starts to ramp up. Students are expected to have significantly deeper knowledge than demanded by the prior levels, and there is both an essay-based theory section, as well as a (relatively straightforward for most students) blind tasting exam with two wines. Course options vary from intensive 5-day courses to evening classes spread over the course of several months.

Level 4 (Diploma) is the pinnacle of the WSET qualifications. It takes, on an average, two years and comprises six different papers, covering areas from the Business of Wine to Sparkling Wines. The largest and most challenging paper is the one on the Still Wines of the World. Papers are examined differently, with some focusing on just theory and others with a large blind-tasting component. It's very tough to pass these exams without significant study time and tasting practice. In practice, depending on their wine knowledge and other qualifications, most students start at either Level 1, 2 or 3 (Level 3 is a pre-requisite to be eligible for the Diploma Course).

#### **Who is a typical candidate?**

In my experience, both as a teacher and as a student, I've seen a very wide variety of people take these courses. The early levels (1 & 2) tend to attract non-professionals, who are either simply interested in learning about wine (often attending with friends) or are considering a potential career switch. The Diploma Course, however, tends to attract a far higher proportion of those in the industry, supplemented by a number of passionate or dedicated enthusiasts.

In the US, historically, the more conventional route for people working in restaurants or service was to take one of the Sommelier qualifications. However, over the last couple of years, there has been a noticeable shift in this demographic towards WSET, perhaps because of the broader set of skills and knowledge gained from the WSET courses.

#### **What are the key benefits of taking the qualifications?**

There are numerous benefits for both professionals and enthusiasts. Regardless

of one's level of knowledge, there are always new regions and grapes to discover. In my experience, most students, even those with considerable experience, haven't explored all global regions. Speaking about a region in class, or tasting a new wine, can be a launchpad to delve deeper into a region or find something different from the standard wines one might buy or order in a restaurant. Often the less-famous regions can offer great value!

There is often also an enjoyable social element to taking the classes; they can be a fantastic way to meet fellow wine enthusiasts in the area, often at a similar stage to you in their wine journey. Students often form tasting groups, where they can pool together resources to buy wines to practice for the exams, and these have led to long-lasting friendships. If you love wine and are new to a particular area, attending a WSET course is a great networking opportunity.

For those who are looking to get into any aspect of the wine trade, be it retail, distribution or restaurants, WSET is often a pre-requisite or advantage from the employer's perspective, regardless of the level of qualification that you have taken. Employers often sponsor students to start or further their qualifications owing to the broad wine knowledge that students get from the courses.

#### **What are the challenges?**

Most students are intimidated by the blind-tasting component of Level 3 and the Diploma. However, this nervousness is usually unfounded, and students are often surprised when they come to find that the pass rates for the tasting papers are higher (sometimes considerably higher) than the pass rates for the theory papers. The Level 3 tasting consists only of a white wine and a red wine, and students are required only to describe the components of the wine (for eg the acid level or the flavours), but not asked to identify the grape or region of origin. Tasting at the Diploma level is considerably more challenging and requires the identification of many wines. However, even if students are unable to do this correctly, they can still do very well if they can accurately describe the wine and assess its quality. Like most things in the world of wine, it's all about practice!

Where students struggle the most is with the theory exams in Level 3 and Diploma. These are not designed to be memorisation exams, and usually require an essay or written answer, where candidates are expected to display their understanding of the subject (for eg, how the climate of a region influences the style of a wine, or how decisions in the winery might influence the style and quality of the wine). Many students come into the more advanced qualifications expecting that if they can memorise a textbook and be able to name the Crus of a particular region, then they will pass, but this is not always the case. The best students allocate a significant part of their revision plan to practising essay writing.

Overall, the WSET qualifications are great fun and students are always motivated and interested to learn more about wine, regardless of the level they're at. Even though some of the exams (particularly the more advanced ones) can seem gruelling and time-consuming, I haven't met many people who have regretted their WSET adventure! ♦

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# MORE THAN JUST A SALAD DRESSING

Rosemary George on real balsamic vinegar produced in Emilia Romagna in Italy. In conversation with balsamic producer Andrea Bezzececchi

Andrea Bezzececchi is a man with a cause, and he is passionate and articulate about his cause. He is one of the few producers of real balsamic vinegar, balsamic that is labelled *tradizionale*, in order to distinguish it from a multitude of inferior balsamic vinegars. Andrea was doing his military service back in 1994, when his father died suddenly, leaving him with a hundred small casks of ageing balsamic vinegar. His father had been equally passionate about balsamic but had only produced it for family and friends. After finishing his legal studies, Andrea turned to vinegar and set up the Acetaio San Giacomo in the village of Novellara, near the historic town of Modena.

We are in the region of Emilia Romagna, in northern Italy, in the fertile Po valley. This is a region that is known for its food. The city of Bologna is one of the gastronomic capitals of Italy. Parma ham and Parmigiano cheese, both boasting their own appellation or Protected Designation of Origin (PDO) for a number of years, are produced close by.

The authorities agreed that balsamic vinegar should have some connection with Modena in Emilia Romagna, as the true home of balsamic vinegar, but decided that the product should merely be blended in Modena, and aged for a minimum of 60 days. In other words, a travesty of the real thing. The IGP Aceto Balsamico di Modena was created in 2009. As the raw material can come from anywhere, the principal producers are in Naples and Piedmont in Italy, Britain, Spain and France. The largest producers can turn out 25 million litres per year.

Balsamic vinegar has a long history. There are written references going back to the 11th century. Barrels of balsamic were considered valuable possessions. Until the mid 1960s, it was deemed a medicinal elixir and something very special. Nobody thought of it as an ingredient in a salad dressing. Sadly the reputation and quality of balsamic vinegar has been seriously damaged in recent years, with large industrial producers taking short cuts over the production method, so that it became a blend of wine vinegar and concentrated wine must, with an addition of caramel and colouring matter.



Far superior than just an ingredient in salads, real balsamic vinegar has many uses and is greatly valued



Andrea Bezececechi in his cellar



A selection of vinegars produced by Andrea Bezececechi

**T** rue balsamic vinegar depends on what Andrea termed three pillars, namely Origin, Ageing and Method. It must come from the province of Modena or the adjoining province of Reggio Emilia. The production process entails a long ageing, of a minimum 12 years, and sometimes as long as 25 years or even longer.

Andrea has some vineyards of his own and also buys organically farmed grapes from a couple of local farmers. He presses the grapes and chills the juice to avoid fermentation and then cooks the juice slowly, 1000 litres at a time, after which the cooked juice ferments, prompted by the yeast naturally present in the air. As the fermentation slows down, the acetic bacteria take over, creating the acetic acid essential in vinegar. And then the vinegar is aged, first in quite large barrels of French or Slavonic oak and then in much smaller barrels.

Andrea has an ageing attic rather than a cellar, as it is on the first floor but it is as venerable as any fine wine cellar. He explained that a *batteria* has a minimum of five barrels, with different woods, oak, cherry, chestnut, mulberry, juniper and acacia. Each wood has its own character and aroma and gives something of itself to the vinegar. The ageing process is like the solera system used in Jerez for fine sherry. Nothing is taken from the *batteria* for 12 years; the first barrels are simply topped up to replace any evaporation. And after 12 years you can draw off some balsamic from the final barrel in the *batteria* or solera.

Andrea talked about the essential elements for ageing and quality. You have to consider the number of barrels in a *batteria*; the more barrels the longer the ageing process. And you have to decide when to start taking out the balsamic. A minimum of 12 years is mandatory. Evaporation is another factor; the more evaporation, the greater the impact of the younger product that you are adding to the first barrel in the battery. Younger balsamic is more pungent, while older balsamic is more

restrained, with viscosity developing in time.

The evolution is not constant; there are highs and lows, but the longer the balsamic spends in barrel, the better it is. And the final decision is how much to take from the final barrel. In Reggio Emilia, which includes Andrea's village, Novellara, you are allowed to withdraw just 15%, whereas in adjoining Modena it is as much as 30%. Andrea has a total of 18,000 litres ageing in a multitude of different sizes of tiny barrels. The bottles a mere 1600 litres a year, in other words less than 1% of his stock.

A tasting panel controls the quality of the traditional balsamic, awarding a quality distinguisher of red, silver or gold, which determines the price of the tiny 100 ml bottle. A 12-year-old red label will retail in Italy at €53; the Silver at €73 and the Gold at €120. Modena and Reggio Emilia use differently shaped bottles, and easy to differentiate. However, it is a stark economic fact that one cannot live on traditional balsamic vinegar alone

Andrea produces a range of other products, and his best seller is Essenza, which he ages for a minimum of nine months or for as long as seven years. It is rich and smooth, but of course does not have the intensity of the longer-aged traditional balsamic vinegars. It is sad that the authorities have allowed a highly-prized artisanal traditional product to be compromised in this way by mass production. Some of the more expensive balsamic vinegars from Modena are very acceptable, but others do the traditional product a gross disservice.

If you would like a wine comparison for real balsamic vinegar, compare a mature, classed-growth Claret with a cheap Cabernet Sauvignon from the New World, and remember which is the most enjoyable and rewarding! ❖

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### Balsamic vinegar

**B**esides being a popular ingredient in salad dressings and marinades, balsamic vinegar has many uses. It makes meat sizzle, fruit sparkle and garden veggies quite irresistible! Some studies suggest that balsamic vinegar has additional health benefits, ranging from improving a person's skin to lowering cholesterol, promoting healthy digestion and aiding weight loss. However, more research is needed to authentic these benefits.



Strawberries with Balsamic Vinegar

#### INGREDIENTS

- 1 qt or 4 cups strawberries
- 1/4 cup sugar
- 1 teaspoon quality balsamic vinegar
- 1/8 teaspoon freshly ground black pepper

#### METHOD

- Toss sliced strawberries with the sugar and keep for 10 minutes. Do not refrigerate.
- Add vinegar, toss gently, taste and add more sugar or vinegar if required. Sprinkle with pepper, toss again & serve with ice cream.

# The Calcutta of the Cotswolds

Nostalgia for the Raj era runs high in Cheltenham, a former spa town, with memories of India on its tastebuds. *Carol Wright* reports

Cheltenham earned its nickname, 'the Calcutta of the Cotswolds' in the 19th century when merchants, civil servants, army officers and widows arrived in England from India, at first on leave to take the town's all-curative spa waters popularised by George III and later to retire, finding the climate similar to Indian hill stations. Their children were educated at Cheltenham's schools. They built villas with verandahs, porticos and big gardens to imitate what they had left behind in India. They met like-minded friends in clubs to reminisce over curry and 'brandy pawnee'. A Cheltenham gentleman's club in the 1800's had the reputation of serving the best curry outside India.

Architectural echos of Calcutta can be seen on the Curry and Colonels walking tour (thecheltenhampromenaders.co.uk) guided by Phil Colhead through Montpellier's gardens and the elegant tree lined Promenade where once it was said if you shot a gun down its length you could not fail to hit a retired Indian army officer!

Cheltenham's elegant Promenade. The Curry and Colonels tour ends on the corner of the Promenade at the Memsahib's Lounge



Those colonels' love of spicy food coupled with that of their memsahibs and widows, who learnt from their Indian cooks, has left its culinary mark on Cheltenham. There are around 350 restaurants for a population of 50,000 and Indian inspired eateries form an impressive section. Prithvi is acclaimed as the town's top restaurant with The Curry Corner ranked No 1 Best Food Restaurant and many are award winners. Those covered in this feature show how both tradition and innovation combine.

The Curry and Colonels tour ends on the corner of the Promenade at the **Memsahib's Lounge** (memsahibslounge.com) for afternoon tea with a difference. Director and co-founder, Litu Mohiuddin also set up the 'East Indian Café' on the Promenade where railway lamb curry, beef Karachi and guinea fowl *tikka masala* feature on the menu along with coconut rice pudding, made with coconut milk infused with lime leaf, and banana crumbs with ice cream.

The Memsahib's Lounge celebrates socially progressive women of the 19th century who lived in both India and Cheltenham. Their charcoal portraits line a wall over dining tables. Among them are Pandita Ramabai Sarasvati who came to England in 1883 and taught Sanskrit at Cheltenham Ladies College, wrote the first book published in English by an Indian woman and returned to India to found a charity helping destitute women.

Her friend, Comelia Sorabji, the first female graduate of Bombay University, came to England to read law at Oxford, returned to India helping women and orphans, and in 1924, when women



Exterior of The Curry Corner, ranked No 1 best food restaurant, in Cheltenham

were allowed to practice law, became Calcutta's first female advocate, eventually retiring to London.

Begum Frances Johnson's second husband was a Calcutta clergyman who consecrated St John's Church designed by a Cheltenham architect where she was buried in 1812 beneath the epitaph; 'the oldest British resident in Bengal, universally beloved, respected and revered'.

When setting up his restaurant, Litu read many old cookbooks written by

**Litu read many old cookbooks written by and for the memsahibs living in India in the 1820's and 30's, telling them how to prepare Indian dishes**

and for the memsahibs living in India in the 1820's and 30's, telling them how to prepare Indian dishes or more mundane housekeeping problems like curing hangovers and hiding a gun in the house. Though inspired by the past, Litu's aim is to create a sustainable kitchen with zero waste.

The Memsahib's Lounge food is 'nose to tail' using every part of the animal or fish; parts that Litu says the West too often discards. At his supper club meetings that become culinary masterclasses, he will serve fish head broth and ask his diners to tell him what it tastes of; challenging their palate perceptions.

Zero waste policy involves using herbs left over from the bar to make chutney with olive oil, turmeric and chilli. Tea bags, also left over from cocktail making, are re-infused with



Afternoon tea with a difference: Sea Bass parcels and bite-size samosas are served with masala chai at the Memsahib's Lounge. Left: Shamsul and Monrusha, father-daughter chefs, at The Curry Corner



**Winning 'Restaurant of the Year' in 2016 and a three-month reservation waiting list, Prithvi is the flagship of a restaurant group that includes Bhoomi in Cheltenham**



Charcoal portraits of 19th century women who lived in India and Cheltenham hang on the wall of the Memsahib's Lounge

herbs and fruit to make colourful ice cubes. These cool some of the many house crafted gins, rums and vodkas. Masala *chaat* martinis and cocktails served in tea pots appear in the unique afternoon tea served from noon till 4.00pm, a twist on the memsahibs' Indian picnics.

After palate cleansing turmeric matcha sorbet with mango chutney and puffed rice, comes the centrepiece snacks tray which includes samosas, chicken tikka peri-peri, tuna and fish finger *chaat*, *parathas* and garlic *naan* as well as *gulab jamun* cheese cake with coriander biscuit, accompanied by pots of golden Bengal masala *chai*.

Litu goes for an 'experience' rather than the usual 'tasting' menu. Starting with Haleem, a beef leg and lentil broth, then mixing British Indian cuisine in a small bite of vegetable *samosa* and hash brown *chaat*, the meal continues to a signature course of slow-cooked lamb curry paired with Australian Shiraz and ends with poached pear and apple *kheer* with pistachio *kulfi*, paired with *masala chai* martini teapot. Other wine pairings are suggested and the Lounge's wine list now features Sula wines.

**Prithvi** ([prithvirestaurant.com](http://prithvirestaurant.com)) has an elegant town house setting in the former home of Cheltenham-born Rolling Stone, Brian Jones. Winning Restaurant of the Year in 2016 and a three-month reservation waiting list,

Prithvi is the flagship of a restaurant group that includes Bhoomi in Cheltenham and a sister in Oxford (see feature in *Sommelier India* Autumn 2022). Group director Jay Rathnam says the cuisine blends Indian inspired spicing with modern techniques backed by an extensive wine list including

vintages from Hungary, Georgia, Cyprus, Greece, Lebanon and Japan. To solve the problem of what to drink with desserts and cheeses after the main course wine is finished, Prithvi offers wine flight choices of small glasses of sherries, ports and three intensities of sweet wines.

Head chef Tom Law is English working with an all-Indian brigade. Menu snacks showcase the kitchen techniques that blend local ingredients with Indian flavours. For example, crab and scallop ravioli with Avruga herring roe has a classic French *beurre blanc* sauce but spiced with curry. Curried Cauliflower Velouté, lightly whipped, comes with black garlic, tamarind and puffed potato for texture. Among seasonal main courses is dry aged Cotswold venison loin with duck liver *keema*, masala fig, blue cheese and alliums. Cornish cod comes with jaggery, wild rice and lime pickle.

A blueprint for many of the newer Indian restaurants in Cheltenham is pioneer, **The Curry Corner** ([thecurrycorner.com](http://thecurrycorner.com)) which opened in 1977 in the home of the Krori family. In the corner house of a residential terrace, it stands out with its whitewashed exterior and lush green creepers and banana plants. Shamsul and his daughter Monrusha cook authentic Bangladeshi food based on family recipes handed down over generations with one or two twists that they have added. No alcohol is served and dishes are not westernised in any way.

Their dedication to authenticity has earned them many awards and the praise of leading chefs like Gordon

Ramsay ('exquisite flavours better than in India') and Rick Stein, while Michael Palin said father and daughter are 'the best curry people from pole to pole'.

Every day spices from India are stone-ground to be used with local ingredients; only cold pressed coconut oil and quality pure ghee from buffalo milk are used. A signature dish is slow-cooked Cotswold lamb shank, a rich cardamom and cinnamon curry with a side of Bengal potato mash. A home-style curry is also made from local chicken simmered in cardamom and chilli masala to pair with sesame-seed-and-ghee *naan*, while duck is marinated in mustard seeds and cooked in a sweet and spicy tamarind and citrus curry.

Recipes from 1977 still feature on the menu: homemade *samosas* filled with braised shredded lamb or seasonal Bangladeshi vegetables; freshwater king prawn in spicy garlic and tomato curry on Bengali puffed bread.

The Curry Corner is strong on street stall snacks such as *pakor*as, *aloo chaat* and earthy curried chickpeas, crispy fried lentil mix and potato; tandoor smoked chicken breast with a mustard, garlic, yoghurt marinade or a chargrilled lamb with garlic, onion and chilli wrapped in a Bangladeshi style fresh egg omelette with cherry tomato and red onion.

The long dead colonels and their memsahibs would have relished the chance to sample these Indian restaurants of today savouring the way Indian spices are used in different ways. There is a nod to heritage, with railway curries and street food recipes brought together into memorable dining experiences. ♦



# glossary

**AMARONE** The most famous dried grape wine in Italy produced from the same grapes and in the same zones as Valpolicella. High quality grape bunches are dried, often allowing Botrytis to form on the grapes. The grapes are then pressed and fermented, resulting in an intense, highly alcoholic wine with some oxidative qualities that vary depending on the presence of noble rot.

**APPELLATION D'ORIGINE CONTRÔLÉE (AOC)** This is the French appellation system that controls and designates wines, spirits, cheeses, and other foods of distinct geographic regions in France. Pessac-Léognan is an important wine appellation created in 1987 in Northern Graves, Bordeaux, renowned for red wines with longevity.

**ARNEIS** (ar-nez) is a white Italian grape variety originating from Piedmont. Arneis (little rascal, in Piemontese) is a difficult grape to grow. A crisp, floral varietal, the wines tend to be dry and full bodied with notes of pears and apricots.

**ASSEMBLAGE** The blending of base wines to create a final cuveé, or blend. This is a crucial part of the champagne vinification process.

**ASTRINGENCY** A sensation of puckering or drying of the mouth's tissues. Puckering is a tactile response to compounds such as tannins.

**AUSLESE** A classification in the German QmP system that means "selected". These wines are sweeter than Spätlese.



**BALANCE** A reference to the harmonious relationship between the acids, alcohol, tannins and other compounds in wine.

**AVA** An AVA is an American Viticultural Area that has been recognized by the federal government for a distinctive combination of soil, climate, and identifiable regional wine character. AVAs are often referred to as appellations or districts. The word appellation (and the AVA concept) comes

from the French Appellation d'Origine Cntrle laws, which are meant to ensure quality within specific regions of France.

**BARRIQUE** French word for barrel. Used worldwide to describe any small oak cask.

**BEERENAUSELE** The fourth level of the German QmP system. Wines of this classification are made from grapes that are harvested later and have some noble rot. They tend to be rich and sweet.

**BENTONITE** A type of clay that is used in the process of fining. Clay is mixed into wine to clarify it. As the clay settles to the bottom, it absorbs and carries with it suspended particles.

**BIODYNAMIC** A way of farming without the use of chemical or synthetic sprays or fertilisers, vinified with natural yeast, and minimal use of filtration, sulphur, and chaptalisation. Biodynamic grape growers also base their planting and harvesting schedule by astrological events and cycles.

**BLANC DE BLANCS** A term literally meaning, "white of whites," referring to wine that is made from white grapes. For example, champagne produced with only chardonnay grapes.

**BLANC DE NOIRS** Literally, "white of blacks", describing a white wine made from black grapes, usually pinot noir in champagne.

**BODY** The impression of weight or fullness on the palate; usually the result of a combination of glycerin, alcohol and sugar.

**BOTRYTIS CINEREA** A beneficial form of Botrytis bunch rot commonly referred to as "noble rot" that produces flavours that harmonise with the grape flavours. One of the most famous is the sweet wine, Sauternes.

**BRUT** A general term used to designate a relatively dry (low sugar content) champagne or sparkling wine.

**CHARMAT** Method of producing sparkling wines, aka, Metodo Italiano or Martinotti-Charmat with the second fermentation in stainless steel tanks instead of the bottle as in the traditional mthode champenoise.

**COULURE** (pronounced coo-LYUR) is triggered by periods of cold, cloudy, rainy weather or very high out-of-season temperatures that causes a failure of grapes to develop after flowering. Flowers stay closed and are not fertilized. It also occurs in vines that have little sugar content in their tissue.

**CUVEE** A blend or special lot of wine.

**DECANT** Pouring wine out of the bottle to aerate and remove sediment.

**DISGORGING (DGORGEMENT)** Disgorging in sparkling wines involves the freezing and ejection of yeasty sediment that settles in the neck of a bottle after the second fermentation.

**DIURNAL RANGE** The difference between day and night temperatures. Cool nights help slow the loss of aromas and acidity in the grapes during ripening. Warm nights accelerate ripening.

**DOSAGE** In bottle-fermented sparkling wines, a small amount of (usually sweet) wine is added back to the bottle after the yeast sediment that collects in the neck of the bottle is disgorged.

**DRY WINE** A wine which has no sugar levels or has levels that are so low that they cannot be detected by the tongue.

**EN PRIMEUR** is commonly associated with Bordeaux wine where the previous year's harvest is available for tasting and contract sales several months before the wine will be bottled and released.



**FERMENTATION** The process of converting sugar into alcohol and carbon dioxide affected by the oxygen free metabolism of yeast.

**FILTRATION** Straining solid particles in wine with various types of filters. An alternative to natural settling, it speeds up the winemaking process, allowing better control. It is sometimes argued that filtration strips a fine wine of some of its complexity and capacity for aging.

**FINING** The process of clarification and stabilisation by adding a clarifying agent to coagulate or absorb the colloids in a wine for efficient precipitation. Commonly used fining agents include egg whites, fish bladders (isinglass) and bentonite.

**FORTIFIED** Denotes a wine whose alcohol content has been increased by the addition of brandy or other neutral spirits.

**GRAND CRU** A wine of the highest rank or reputation within its appellation.

**GREEN HARVEST** Trimming unripe grapes to decrease crop yields, thereby increasing the concentration of flavours in the remaining bunches.

**HALBTROCKEN** Means "half dry" in German and in wine.

**JEROBOAM** An oversized bottle holding the equivalent of six bottles. In Champagne, a jeroboam holds four bottles.

**KABINETT** The first level of the German QmP rating system, indicating wine made from ripe berries that are not purposefully harvested late. This is the driest of the designations.

**LATE HARVEST** On labels, indicates that a wine was made from grapes picked later than normal and at a higher sugar level than normal. Often associated with botrytized and dessert-style wines.

**LEES** Spent yeasty sediment remaining in a barrel or tank during and after fermentation.

**LEGS** Droplets of wine that slide down the glass after swirling it. This is a good indicator of the wine's alcohol content.

**LIQUEUR D'EXPDITION A** mount of sugar that is added to top up the wine in the bottle after disgorging to balance high levels of acidity.

**METHUSELAH** An extra large bottle holding six litres; the equivalent of eight standard bottles.

**MOUSSE** Effervescence or frothiness in the mouth from

a sparkling wine. A 'creamy' mousse is a lively sparkle on the palate without being too frothy.

**MOUTHFEEL** The tasting term used particularly for red wines to describe the texture of a wine within the mouth. This relates to attributes such as smoothness or grittiness. Among the factors that influence a wine's mouthfeel are tannin, acidity, body and bitterness.

**MUST** The unfermented juice of grapes extracted by crushing or pressing. Also grape juice in the cask or vat before it is converted into wine.

**NEBUCHADNEZZAR** A giant wine bottle holding 15 litres; the equivalent of 20 standard bottles.

**NOUVEAU** A style of light, fruity, youthful red wine bottled and sold as soon as possible. Applies mostly to Beaujolais.

**NON-VINTAGE** Blended from more than one vintage. This allows the vintner to maintain a house style from year to year. Many champagnes and sparkling wines, ports and sheries are non-vintage.

**OXIDISED** Wine that has been exposed too long to oxygen and taken on a brownish colour, losing its freshness. Oxidised wines are also called maderised or sherrified.

**PHENOLICS** Phenolics in wine that mostly come from the pulp, skin, seeds and stems of grapes are molecules that help preserve wine by absorbing oxygen. They are also responsible for structure, colour and ageing potential in red wines. Two key phenolics found in wine are tannin and anthocyanin.

**PHYLLOXERA** Tiny aphids (root lice) that attack vitis vinifera roots. The disease was widespread in both Europe and California during the late 19th century, and returned to California in the 1980s. There is no known cure at this time. Vitis vines are instead grafted on to native American rootstocks.

**QMP – QUALITÄTSWEIN MIT PRÄDIKAT** German for a 'quality wine with distinction', a classification based on the level of ripeness of the grapes. The grapes must be picked as specified by law and the wines cannot have any added sugar. The six levels of QmP wines, starting with the driest and harvested earliest, are Kabinett, Spätlese, Auslese, Beerenauslese, Eiswein and Trockenbeerenauslese.

**QUALITÄTSWEIN** German for "quality wine." A broad category encompassing the majority of German wine. It includes QmP and QbA wines. In Austria, it is the category between Landwein and Prädikatswein.

**RACKING** The practice of moving wine by hose from one container to another, leaving sediment behind, for the purpose of aeration or clarification.

**REMUAGE** In sparkling wine production, a tedious process where each individual bottle is rotated and tilted very slightly over time so that the yeast is loosened and settles into the neck of the bottle.

**RIBOLLA GIALLA** (ree-bohl-lah jah-lah) Ancient white variety from northern Italy, bordering



Slovenia. Rarely seen elsewhere, wines are typically light in body and offer fruity, floral aromas, as well as bright acidity.

**RIPASSO** A traditional style in Italy's Veneto region, where fresh, young Valpolicella wine is placed in contact with the used lees and unpressed skins of Amarone wines after their fermentation, activating a second fermentation, which imparts a sweet, raisiny character into the young wine while increasing alcohol content.

**RISERVA** Specific to Italian wine regions, this term acknowledges wines with both higher alcohol levels and longer ageing than the minimums stipulated by the appellation laws.

**SAIGNÉE** Meaning "bleeding" in French, involves making rosé as a by-product of red wine fermentation, where a portion of the pink juice from the grape must is removed at an early stage, and fermented separately to produce rosé.

**SALMANAZAR** An oversized bottle holding nine litres, the equivalent of 12 regular bottles.

**STRUCTURE** The interaction of elements such as acid, tannin, glycerin, alcohol and body as it relates to a wine's texture and mouthfeel. Usually preceded by a modifier, as in "firm structure" or "lacking in structure".

**SUR LIE** (French for "on the lees") Wines aged sur lie are kept in contact with the dead yeast cells and are not racked or otherwise filtered. This is mainly done for whites, to enrich them (it is a normal part of fermenting red wine, and so is not noted).

**TANNINS** Compounds that contribute to a wine's structure, mouthfeel, and astringency. Tannins in wine are derived from grape skins, seeds, and stems. The more contact the juice has with these elements, the more tannic the wine.

**TERROIR** The overall environment within which a

given grape variety grows. Derived from the French word for Earth, "terre".

**TROCKEN** The German word for "dry" and indicates dry wine.

**TROCKEN BEERENAUSSLESE** Wines made from grapes picked after they are fully infected with noble rot. The water has dried leaving behind more concentration. The wine produced is golden and honeyed, high in alcohol and lusciously sweet. The best quality is balanced by acidity and thus avoids being cloyingly sweet.

**UNION DES GRANDS CRUS DE BORDEAUX** An organisation comprising 134 estates located in exalted Bordeaux appellations of the Gironde like Barsac, Graves, Médoc, Pessac-Léognan, Pomerol, Sauternes and Saint Emilion.

**VARIETAL** A varietal is a wine named for the dominant grape variety although other grape varieties may also be present in the wine.

**VINTAGE** The year the grapes were grown and harvested

**VITIS VINIFERA** Classic European winemaking species of grape. Examples include cabernet sauvignon and chardonnay. There are many other species of grapes such as Vitis Labrusca, a North American grape species.

**VOLATILE ACIDITY** Describes an excessive and undesirable amount of acidity, which gives a wine a slightly sour, vinegary edge. At very low levels (0.1%), it is largely undetectable. At higher levels it is considered a major defect.

**YEAST** Micro-organisms that produce the enzymes which convert sugar to alcohol. Yeast is necessary for the fermentation of grape juice into wine.

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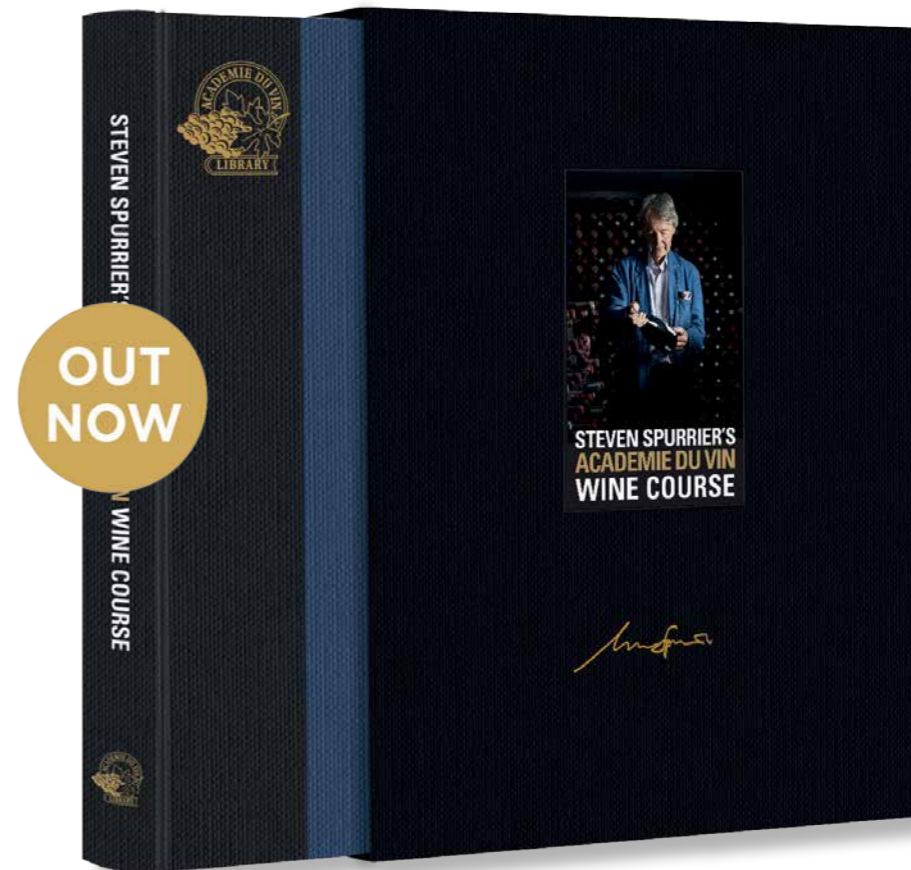
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