

# Festive season is merry for liquor labels as well

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**T**hey put the merry in Christmas and the happy in new year. And make no bones about it. The recent spate of new entrants in the Indian liquor market only attest the belief — it's the season the industry waits for all year. Or is it, really? As insiders contend, consumption patterns are not as they used to be.

"Over the last few years, sales have been seen as being consistently strong over a long period, from October till March in fact. Of

course, they peak during this season," says Ranjit Dhuru, chairman and managing director of d'Or

Winery. Perhaps

in keeping with his belief of the sales peak, the company chose to launch its entire range of six wines just before Christmas.

A general consensus seems to echo the thought that an upswing in consumption is associable more with the onset of winter — while the festive period may be likened to the crest of the wave. Reasons for the same are obvious. There's no spirit without spirits.



"Since Christmas in India is celebrated by even non-Christians, alcohol consumption is up in December. For us, champagne and sparkling wine sales are up this season and we have also seen a spurt in our rum and tequila sales from the northern, colder parts of the country," says Dharti Desai, CEO and partner of Finewinesmore, who have introduced a limited edition sparkling Spumante bubbly for the season.

But more specifically, what would the drink of choice for this season be? For all purposes, lager consumption may be kept aside, and with good reason. Chief among which is the fact that it is likely to remain strong under most circumstances. As far as spirits are concerned, there seems to be an emerging shift towards the soft and snooty.

"Let's face it, there is an aspirational element associated with wines and champagne. They make for a good talking point, especially for younger people who form an increasingly large proportion of our clientele," says Kiran Patil, director, Vintage Wines. She explains the concepts of pairing and appreciation have a certain upscale novelty factor that young consumers are readily taking to. "Our recently launched dessert wine, for example, would make for a good supplement with Christmas cake," she explains, driving home the novelty aspect.

"Earlier I would have had to say whisky," says Dhuru, "But with an influx of young professionals — especially from knowledge-based industries who tend to know more about different cultures — consumption patterns are changing."

But what goes up, must come down. And



higher they are, the harder they fall. It wouldn't be amiss to expect a significant drop in sales immediately after the new year.

In this case, however, the fall isn't nearly as hard as cliches suggest.

"We see a bigger drop after mid-February and not so much immediately after Christmas or the new year. Sixty-five per cent of our annual sales happen in the months of November, December and January," says Desai. And Patil agrees, explaining, "There are certain outlets that overstock during this period, and a lot of companies dump labels too. In general, only those who offer bulk purchases have a problem."

With cultural rather than economical forces at play, liquor consumption curves are flatter and more evenly dispersed over the year. Yet it cannot be discounted that the season remains the highlight of any sales curve, flatter as it may well be. Alcohol and the spirit of celebration go firmly hand in hand.

What is discernable, however, is particular patterns indicate consumers have evolved to be discerning in their choice of consumption.

As Dhuru says, "The appreciation of fine liquor in European countries is as a food supplement. Here, I'd say, it may be regarded a lifestyle supplement."



(Top left) Revello's Late Harvest Chenin Blanc label; (Left) The Chateau d'Or range; (Right) The sparkling Spumante bubbly