



CHÂTEAU D'ORI

The making of India's finest vineyard – the story of Chateau D'ori

Wine today is seen as a sunshine industry in India. Over 60 wineries have mushroomed in India during the past three to four years. Most of these are situated in the district of Nashik making it the wine capital of India. The 'Grape Processing Industrial Policy' of the state government announced in 2001, was the catalyst that Maharashtra needed to transform its position as the country's largest producer of grapes to the largest producer of wine. Today it has over 50 wineries with six-million litre production capacity.

Chateau d'Ori is the creation of an unusual entrepreneur and wine lover, Mr. Ranjit Dhuru, founder & CEO Aftak Ltd. On the one hand Mr. Dhuru runs a successful, Rs.400 crore multinational IT enterprise. On the other hand, his passion for wines has led him to set up India's first state-of-the-art winery incorporating features like gravity flow and a fully automated bottling plant. Mr. Dhuru says his love affair with wines began a decade ago as he took his software to California in the US and to Europe. *"Conversation over business dinners inevitably focused on wine. I visited the Napa Valley and was fascinated with the vineyard and the art of making wine. I soon started visiting the Bordeaux region – home to the finest wines in the world and was a regular at various international wine tasting sessions such as 'Bordeaux Grand Cru Classe Tasting'. What started as a hobby soon became a passion and has now transformed itself into a business."*

With a hereditary bungalow in Nashik, Mr. Dhuru was no stranger to the Grape Capital of India. A regular visitor to Nashik since his childhood he also frequented the local Gliding Club in his youth. He was familiar with the grape growing regions of Dindori and neighboring areas.

With the decision to replicate in Nashik a Bordeaux type vineyard and winery, he began an intense search to locate a large enough tract of land with the right 'terrior'. The present site measuring about 100 acres on the slopes of the twin hill of Nehra-Ori was acquired. In about six years of hard work with a dedicated team of workers, this tract of wasteland has been transformed into a prime estate with lush vineyards dotted with three artificial lakes, changing the ecology of the area for better. Chateau d'Ori is now undertaking the development of another 300 acres of vineyard to ensure that every bottle of wine produced by it will continued to be marked 'Estate Bottled' in the years to come.

Bordeaux region is the oldest wine destination in Europe. It is the single largest fine wine-producing region in the world. Having benchmarked itself with the best in the world, the viticulture practices of Bordeaux were adopted at Chateau d'Ori. From selection of the right strains of different grapes to the plantation method of single cordon to the design of the winery itself, were of the Bordeaux style. It naturally followed that the enterprise was named in the Bordeaux style too. The wine making process and the cultivation of the vineyard is overseen by the renowned oenologist from Bordeaux, M. Athanase Fakorellis. A man with over 25 years of experience in wine-making, he is a consultant to over 65 wineries in the



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Bordeaux, Burgandy and Cahors regions of France. Chateau D'Ori has thriving vines of *Cabernet Sauvignon*, *Merlot*, *Shiraz*, *Sauvignon Blanc*, *Chenin Blanc* and *Chardonnay*. The *Merlot* plantation is possibly the largest in India.

The quality principles that Chateau d'Ori works on are the same that were imbibed in Aftek Ltd. -**higher quality at affordable prices.** Towards this end Mr. Dhuru has ensured that the best international practices and latest trends in oenology were incorporated in viticulture practices and in the design and construction of the winery. Mr. Dhuru says, "*Quality is the basis behind every method that we employ at Chateau d'Ori. The size of vats, the sorting conveyer belts, the stainless fermentation tanks, the fully automatic bottling plant, everything is ruled by the best practices in the business.*"

Even as Chateau d'Ori vineyard and winery were taking shape, Mr. Dhuru imported and marketed in India eight Appellation d'Origine Controlee (AOC) wines. These wines included a Bordeaux Superior, a Medoc, a Graves wine, and three St, Emillion including a Grand Cru. These wines have, in the past four years, carved out a niche market for themselves. It has been the aim at Chateau d'Ori to produce equally good wines at less than half the price.

"People desire to graduate to a better lifestyle and wine is a symbol of the 'good life'. Both the Indian wine market and the indigenous wine industry are in their nascent stages, but growing at a phenomenal average of 25 -30%, yet it is way behind the major wine drinking countries in per capita consumption. Though at present, per capita consumption of wine in India is miniscule compared to countries like France, Italy and US. But the potential exists in India with its fasted growing middle class, which in time will demand quality and will be willing to pay for it" says Mr. Dhuru.

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