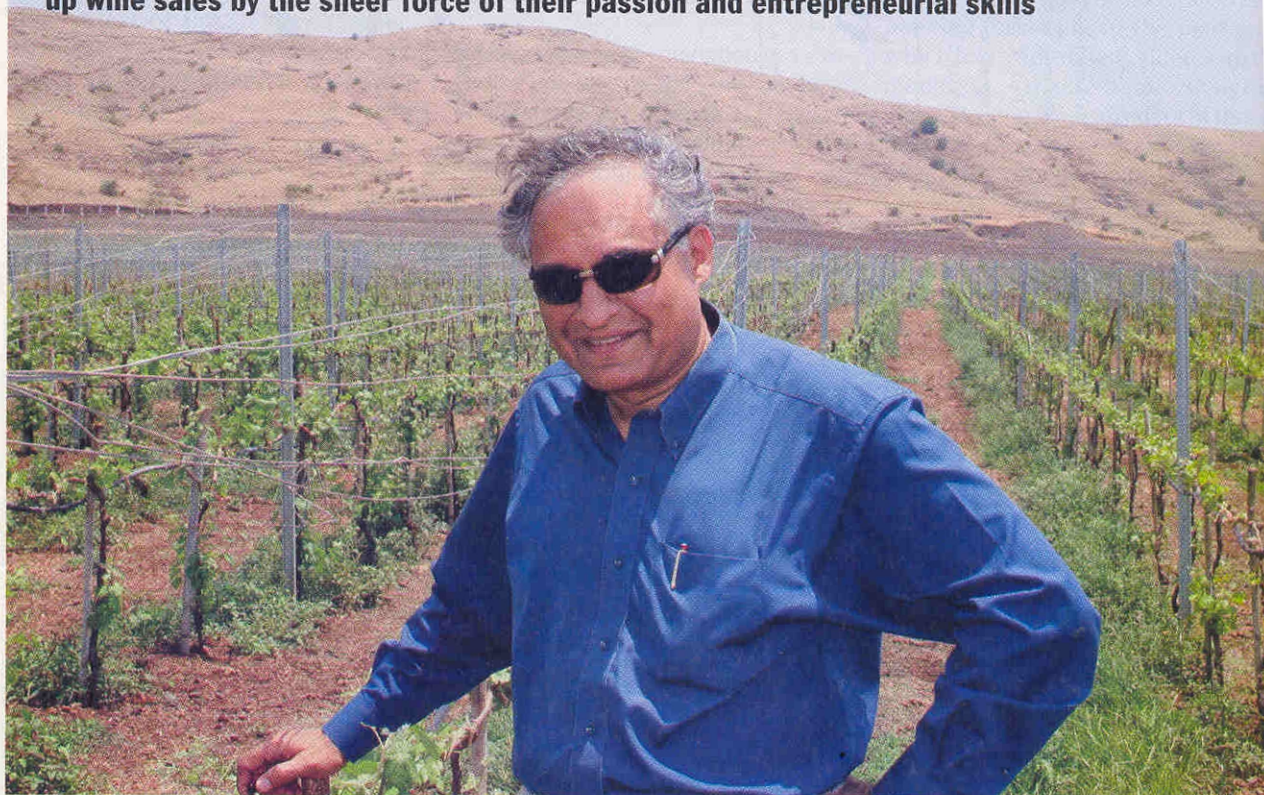


# GRAPEVINE BUZZ

A motley group of players are setting up vineyards in and around Nashik while driving up wine sales by the sheer force of their passion and entrepreneurial skills



■ By Nandini Vaish

**F**ifty-four-year-old Ranjit Dhuru divides his time between software and wine. One is his vocation, the other, his passion. Every Friday, the chairman and CEO of Mumbai-based Atek Infosys drives down 200 km to his 84-acre farm in Dindori near Nashik where he makes wine. His winery, Chateau d'Or is named after the Ori mountains, which form the backdrop to his estate.

Dhuru started cultivation of wine grapes in 2001 with an initial investment of Rs 3-4 crore and started supplying grapes to wine companies. In 2004, he decided to make his own brand and hired a viticulturist who along with Dhuru's nephew, was sent to train in a chateau in France. He also roped in Bordeaux-trained Greek wine maker Anthanese Fakorellies to visit his winery. Dhuru is importing wines

at present but hopes to have his first domestic crush by February 2007 and produce 1,50,000 bottles. Today his wine is sold in Mumbai's hip Indigo bar. "It's exhilarating", he says, "the opportunity is just too big."

Dhuru is not alone. Take the case of 36-year-old Abhijit Kabir, a graduate of J.J. School of Architecture. In 2004, Kabir, who was running a construction company, decided to diversify and got into the wine business with two of his friends—Sachin Khanulkar and Violet D'Souza. "It was a promising industry," he says. They set up their winery, Terroir India, in Ikatpuri, Nashik, with the help of UK-based John Worontschak of Four Corners, a global wine consultancy.

And so from Nashik to Sangli, wherever grapes grow, there are small wineries mushrooming. These are mostly run by professionals, who according to Subhash Arora, president

**RANJIT DHURU, MD, CHATEAU D'ORI**

Just looking out at the vast expanse of green is extremely therapeutic for this wine lover. He says it is the perfect way to recharge his batteries.

"It's exhilarating and the opportunity is just too big."

of the Delhi Wine Club, "are people with money and passion for wine". Some are hobbyists like Dhuru, some farmers like the father and son duo—Suresh and Yatin Patil of Reveilo Wine and others like technopreneur Jerr Rao, who prefers to invest in existing companies through private equity placement (although he declined to comment). Following them are liquor companies such as Seagram, Diageo and United Breweries (UB) and non-liquor companies such as Camellia, the UK parent of tea major Goodrick Group. Even the existing win