



FROM THE CELLAR



PHOTOGRAPHS COURTESY: FROM FAR LEFT: PERNOD-RICARD INDIA; SULA VINEYARDS; CHATEAU D'ORI AND AMFORA WINE

India's wine scene has plenty of feisty challengers today who are harvesting their grapes, filling their bottles and readying for a tough fight. An industry report by Rabo Bank and Agri Review last year reckoned that India has over 60 wineries with estimated investments of around \$60 million.

Almost all the new producers have established wineries in and around Maharashtra's Nashik Valley (largely because of tax breaks offered by the state). It is difficult producing wine in India because of the climatic conditions. Nevertheless, India produces fairly good wine. It even has native grapes: Arkavati, a seedless white grape used to make sparkling wine and Arkashyam and



Baramati, red grapes used to make inexpensive red wine and fortified wine.

India's top three producers — Indage Vintners, Sula Vineyards and Grover Vineyards — have built their reputation both at home and abroad over the last decade. The first two are based in Maharashtra while Grover Vineyards is in Karnataka's Nandi Hills. Indage and Sula also have a very strong international presence and they sell in many European countries, the UK and the US.

Grover Vineyards puts the name of Michel

Rolland, an internationally renowned wine-making consultant, on their label. Rolland visits India once a year, stays for a few days of press meetings and then flies out. His actual input in the wine-making is something we need to ask the owners of Grover.

The quality of Indage's and Grover's wines seems to have waned slightly in recent times and perhaps it's because of the emergence of the new players, that they've perked up and are now attempting to improve their offerings.

Tiger Hill, Indage's 'offshoot' winery is producing some pretty good, world-class wines and has an impressive Sauvignon Blanc. And Grover Vineyards

like a Viognier should — fleshy with aromas of apricots and honeysuckle; and the Riesling was a real head-turner: it was crisp and slightly oily with good citrus and even some floral notes.

What should you be drinking from the new crop of wines? Here are my picks of the three top new wineries that have emerged in the last five years. All of them are from the Nashik Valley and for me, represent the next wave of Indian wines.

### Nine Hills

Wine and spirits giant Pernod Ricard owns Jacob's Creek, Montana and champagnes Mumm and Perrier-Jouet. They

Rosé to their existing stable of Sauvignon Blanc (dry, medium-bodied and fruity), Chenin Blanc (off-dry and very fruity), Cabernet Sauvignon and Shiraz. Certainly Nine Hills is a brand to look out for as it is taking the correct strides into the future. Its wines currently sell for under Rs 700 per bottle.

### Château D'Ori

This is one of the newest players on the block, whose first harvest was in February 2007 and it has only made one vintage of their wines because it did not feel that the subsequent grape quality was good enough. This is a good philosophy but an expensive one. I hope the owner's IT company is able to sustain this expensive venture.

The company's winemaker — Athanase Fakorellis — is a consultant from Bordeaux who seems to have the right ideas about vineyard management and wine quality. It's early days yet, but from what I tasted — the 2007 Cabernet Merlot ticked many of the right boxes. The wine had sweet plum and blackcurrant fruit, a hint of acidity and firm tannins. This seems to be the wine to give the big boys a run for their money. Wines will sell for under Rs 700 per bottle.

### Reveilo

Despite the awkward name this wine has seen success since its launch in 2006 in Mumbai and Bangalore where it is currently available. The Patil family which owns it is in the process of making it available throughout India's other main cities. The winemaker is an Italian. Reveilo has a premium range that retails for over Rs 1,000, which is pretty ambitious, but their standard wines — Chenin Blanc, Syrah, Chardonnay (the only Indian winery producing Chardonnay seriously) and Cabernet Sauvignon — have won critical acclaim in India and are worth trying. The standard range of wines sells for between Rs 500 and Rs 900. ♦

# Homegrown heroes

Three Nasik players top the list in the new age Indian wine business, says **Harshal Shah**

now has a highly qualified chemical engineer with years of wine-making experience at a large Burgundy wine house as their on-the-ground consultant.

Sula continues to innovate, having developed two new wines in the last year — a Viognier from Dindori and a Riesling. Both are still only available in Mumbai, but a recent tasting certainly brought a smile to my face. Here is a winery that's trying to come up with wines that are palatable to novice wine drinkers in India but are still true to their provenance.

Both the Viognier and the Riesling were fruity, perhaps a tad off-dry (sweet) but varietally sound: the Viognier tasted

also own Nine Hills, in Nashik Valley. The wines are made by Jean-Manuel Jacquinet, a consultant winemaker from a champagne-producing family, who now consults globally. Pernod Ricard understands brand-building and its strategy with Nine Hills is clear and very focused. They stick to their customers' needs and are not overly ambitious or unrealistic in their growth expectations. Their idea is to make a consistent wine that their consumer is happy to drink time after time. Their 2006 Cabernet Sauvignon was selected as the top wine in a blind tasting of Indian wines in Delhi last year. They have added a Shiraz