

# Sweet child of wine

A lawyer, an IT entrepreneur and now a wine maker. Meet Ranjit Dhuru of Chateau D'Or

VISHAL GANGAWANE

**R**anjit Dhuru runs a winery. So what kind of a person would you expect to be a winemaker. Dhuru is as rare as they come. Dhuru is originally from Mumbai, but not just another Mumbaier. Dhuru is part of the original. A part of the landed gentry in a city of migrants; his ancestral house is over 200-years-old. A lawyer by education, a man who did a lot of sail plane flying in his college days, a keen bridge player and one who has a keen interest in astronomy. Plus, he founded an IT company. Dhuru now runs a winery in the Nashik region, announces himself as a passion entrepreneur when it comes to wine and prides himself on the quality of wine he produces.

Here's Ranjit Dhuru, unplugged...

**Q: You have already said, in many fora, you are a passion entrepreneur, a very rare breed in our country, but why wine? Where does the fascination for wine come from?**

**A:** No business can be successful if the entrepreneur is not passionate about his business. One dreams and sets goals and then goes about achieving them. It needs more passion to drive a business in wines as here profits take a fairly long time to come. In an agro-based industry one has to deal with nature and strive to build a product, the success of which will largely depend on the customers' taste and preference.

I have been developing the vineyards for the last eight years, and the winery was set only last year. If passion was not there, one would give up along the way, and this is what I mean by being passionate about one's business. The larger company I set up deals in IT. To relieve the stress from this business, I started going to the countryside on weekends. Again, wine is the favourite topic at the dinner table while entertaining clients. My personal desire to know more about wines nurtured the desire to develop a world class vineyard and winery, and eventually, it led me to set them up.

**Q: Can you tell us a little bit about Aftek? It was your first business and your baby in a lot of ways. Tell us the human side to the story of Aftek.**

**A:** Aftek was started by me and four other colleagues in 1986. Aftek is in the high spectrum of software development — in the field of communications. As technology intensive manpower is essential here, quality manpower is Aftek's USP. Therefore, a close bonding with personnel is absolutely necessary. Human resource management has to be at its best. Creativity and passion along with strong team work only can make one excel in such an environment.

**Q: Can you elaborate on how it feels when you don't have control over Aftek? You still talk with a lot of pride about Aftek and not without being a little hurt.**

**A:** As the Chairman and CEO of Aftek, the management team and I have complete control over its op-

## WEEKEND LOOSE TALK

erations. As founders we are proud of Aftek and always will be. What we have not been able to achieve is having majority shareholding. That is the price one has to pay when one is a new entrepreneur.

**Q: The story of any winery makes for great reading and so would the story of d'Or. Can you tell us how it all worked out? How did you conceive the project?**

**A:** Once the passion is ignited and a goal is set, they drive you no matter how busy your schedule is to achieve the goal set out. The vineyard is about 200 km from Mumbai at Nashik. For the last eight years or more whenever I am in India, every weekend, without fail, I am at the vineyard.

A lot had to be sacrificed while creating Chateau d'Or. This was a greenfield project. I built this vineyard and winery from ground zero. It was a very exciting journey full of challenges as I had to learn a totally new business.

**Q: Did you struggle to raise money for a wine project which takes a lot of time to breakeven? How much did you invest? Who are the other equity partners?**

**A:** Raising of money was the least of my

problems as the investments were done over the last one decade with the help of close family and friends. The winery is largely funded by banks. The total investment in the vineyard and winery is around 40 crores.

**Q: You have been called a 'Bordeaux snob,' whatever that means. But do you want to defend that, if it's worth a defence that is?**

**A:** Chateau d'Or's entire thinking is based on Bordeaux style wines. Bordeaux has a major influence on wines from California, Australia, Chile, and almost on every major wine growing countries. The popular grape varieties like Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot and Sauvignon Blanc have their origins in Bordeaux. Bordeaux wines are the only wines traded in the futures market. In other word, Bordeaux wines are highly valued and keep on appreciating in value as time goes by.

Bordeaux, incidentally, is the largest fine wine producing regions in the entire world. So being called a Bordeaux snob is a complement in a way. All wineries in India too follow Bordeaux style, but they don't get direct knowledge from Bordeaux. Therefore, I am least bothered when somebody calls me Bordeaux snob.

**Q: Tell us a little bit about your background.**

**A:** I come from a family of lawyers in Mumbai. We are one of the original residents of Mumbai. We were the landed gentry there. The family house is over two centuries old. In my college days, I use to do lot of gliding (flying sail plane). I am a keen bridge player and have interest in astronomy.

**Q: You have very strong views on other winemakers in the country and you are known to be a stickler for quality. Please comment on the wine scenario in the country.**

**A:** Any business and, particularly, business that deals with consumer palette needs highest standard of quality to succeed. To be a global player, quality is essential. Quality can be taken for granted if your processes and systems are built on sound principles. In wine-making business, the character of the wine is dependent on the winemaker and the terrain.

If Indian wineries have to put their wines on the global wine map, then you have to learn from the best source. Experienced and well known wine maker would be a good starting point. To save on the basics is compromising your product, in this case your wine. So my views are based on the above.

**Q: Which are the other wineries do you look upon as competitors?**

**A:** None in India.

**Q: Also, can you tell us, what's next for Ranjit Dhuru, the man, the entrepreneur, the wine lover.**

**A:** To early to decide as I am still finding my feet in this business.



Ranjit Dhuru,  
Chairman and MD, Chateau D'Or