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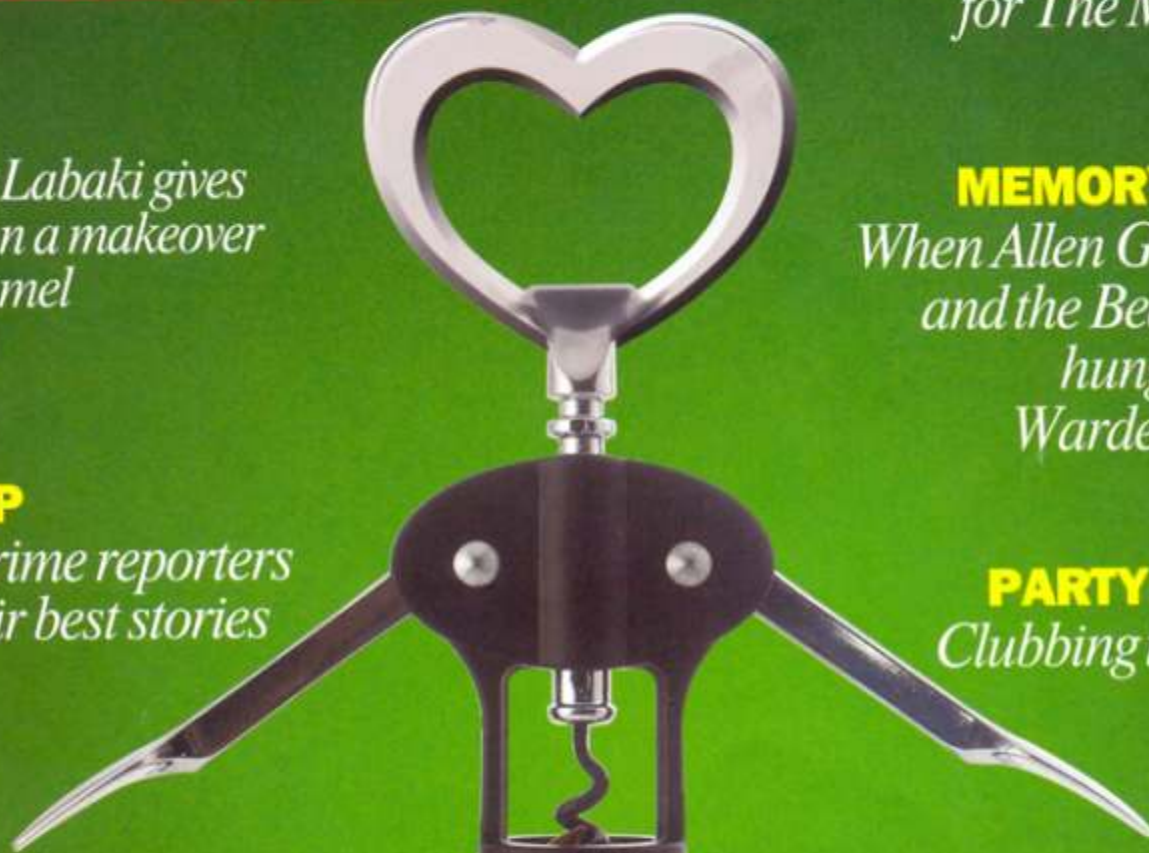
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The new wine revolution

INSIDE Sa tyadev Dubey's new play + Delhi band Advaita's urban fusion

Brave new world

Food & Drink

A new generation of wine producers is raising the bar on taste and quality, cheers **Antoine Lewis.**

Effervescent and sparkling, the wine market in India is flush with a stream of new products. As anyone who's attended a banquet, restaurant launch or the opening of an art exhibition will have noticed, there's plenty of red, white and bubbly getting drunk all over.

Many of the new wines come from old wineries, while some are imports. But it is the steady entry of new Indian wineries that is attracting the most attention. While Château Indage, Grover's and Sula, the Big Three from the first generation of wine producers, still account for nearly 90 per cent of local wine sold in India, the market is in a swirl. Seven new wineries were launched last year and another 40 are expected to open over the next two or three years.

From this new generation of wine producers, three already stand out for the exceptionally high quality of their products. Reveilo, Indus Wines and Château d'Ori, none of whom have been on the market for more than three years, are being acclaimed as the rising stars of Indian wine.

In this new environment, quality is of paramount importance, something the new producers are especially aware of. "Wine drinkers are a lot more knowledgeable as a huge amount of interest from groups like clubs and societies and even the media has developed around wine since the last five years," said Ranjit Dhuru, chairman of Château d'Ori, whose products appeared on the shelves earlier this year. "People are therefore simply demanding better wine." While consumers may not be able to explain what they like or dislike in the right terminology, they can definitely spot differences between two types of wine made from the same varietal, points out Yatin Patil, the director of Reveilo, which began to sell its products in 2006. "And this

is as true of farmers in Nasik as it is of consumers in big cities," he said.

To ensure that Château d'Ori's Bordeaux-style wines were of the best quality, Dhuru imported all the vines for his red wines from

the prestigious First Growth vineyards in Bordeaux, which produce the highest-quality wine. Despite having superior vines, he waited for almost eight years till the vines were sufficiently mature and he was satisfied with the

quality of the grapes before producing his first wines.

Like Château d'Ori, Reveilo and Indus Wines also believe that you cannot make a good wine, no matter how much you try to rectify the shortcomings in the



Toast masters Abhijit Kabir, Yatin Patil and Ranjit Dhuru are the new gods of the spirit world

LOCATION COURTESY CHINA HOUSE, GRAND HYATT MUMBAI. PHOTOGRAPHY VIKAS MUNIPALLE

winery, unless you have the best raw materials. However, this does not mean that the production facilities are not important, which is why Reveilo has a state-of-the-art winery and bottling facility, said Patil. "Not only is our winery temperature-controlled but so is our warehouse," he said. "We are also the first in the industry to own temperature-controlled trucks," he said. More importantly, Patil added that while many other wineries follow protocols from winemakers sitting abroad, his winemaker Andreas Valentiniuzzi comes down from Italy every two months and is present during most of the critical stages.

Reveilo makes the most expensive wines in India. None of its products sell for less than Rs 500, while its exclusive Reserve range is priced between Rs 1,000 and Rs 1,200. That's because Reveilo is a boutique winery that makes only a small quantity of wine but of the best quality, Patil said. "When our stocks of wine get over, we don't buy grapes and just make any wine because there is a demand," he said.

Though it would appear that this new tide of high-quality winemakers from India's second-generation of producers, they're actually the third wave, said Abhijit Kabir, Partner-Director of Indus Wines. Fifty wineries were set up after the Maharashtra government passed the Grape Processing Industry Policy in 2001, approximately 35 of which were owned by farmers. Though they produced good wines, they lacked any marketing skills and the wines simply disappeared off the market.

Today, many of these farmers continue to grow wine grapes on contract for larger wineries but not all are willing to maintain the strict standards

that are necessary to produce wines of a high quality. With wine grapes fetching nearly Rs 40 a kg compared to Rs 5 per kg for table grapes, farmers try to maximise yields, refusing to prune their vines. As a result, the flavours are not concentrated in the grape and the wines produced from them are watery. Though Kabir's wine is produced from grapes grown by contract farmers, he has maintained rigorous control over their vineyards. As a result, his crisp sauvignon blanc has received much acclaim and is compared favourably to reputable international sauvignon blancs. His gravity flow winery in Igatpuri Hills, built over several levels so that grapes fall naturally into the fermenting tanks and wine moves gently from fermenters to aging barrels, is the only one of its kind in India and possibly Asia. The gravity flow process ensures a more delicate pressing and avoids the use of pumps that could damage the wine.

Kabir chose the pilot and co-pilot of his venture as carefully as he chose his equipment. "Australian viticulturist Richard Smart is among the best in the world and is considered one of the 15 most influential people in the

Expert pick

The Reveilo Syrah (Rs 655) is a value-for-money wine, which has been made in classic style and is as good as most New World red wines. Vijayan Gangadharan, Hyatt Regency.

Down the hatch

Importer Vishal Kadakia, who runs Wine Park, discusses the path of India's wine boom.



JANAK SHAH

What role have wine imports played in the Indian wine boom?

It's been a collective effort of local wine makers, importers and hotels. At this point, the wine industry is more like a community. Importers definitely brought in marquee brands and also gave wine-making countries more conviction to promote themselves. This has led to a regular calendar of tasting events. Importers have struck a good balance between marketing and education to push their wine portfolio and it's worked well so far. It remains important though that importers constantly review local consumer trends rather than international ones when they consider which wine to import.

What drew you into the wine import business?

I've always been passionate about tasting a variety of wines and this grew even more while working in the R&D department of a plastic company in Boston for eight years. In 2005 I returned to join my family's plastic manufacturing business. However after struggling to find many of my favourite wines and discovering a general interest in wine, I decided to start importing wines in 2006. So while my core business is plastic manufacturing, my wine import business, born out of the need to drink the wines I loved, has grown quite substantially.

What are these trends that you refer to?

Surprisingly, Indians are drinking more red wine than white, perhaps because red wine is the stereotype. Red wine, however, has tannins which can overwhelm new drinkers. White wines, by comparison, are easier to drink. Rose wines, at least imported ones, have not sold that much. On a more positive note, wine has gone from being the butt of jokes to a drink to which even traditional whisky drinkers are switching. Another important trend is that Indians are beginning to drink more wine at home and not just in hotels and restaurants. *Bhisham Mansukhani*

wine industry," he said. "My wine maker John Worontschak is a globally renowned wine maker."

Mumbai has in no small measure contributed to providing fertile conditions for new wineries and new wines.

Mumbai not only consumes 35 to 40 per cent of all wine in India but is also the country's second highest-growing market, after Pune.

While wine drinking is rising at 25 per cent a year across the country, Mumbai is drinking 40 per cent more wine each year (Punekars are glugging down 52 per cent more wine each year, said Dhuru). In Mumbai, as in other Indian cities, the consumers pushing the growth are largely youngsters, suggests Vijayan Gangadharan, the food and beverage director at the Hyatt Regency. "In my experience, customers in the 20-30 age group

are the ones who are most interested in wine," he said. "These are the guys who are travelling, want to try wine and learn as much as they can."

As a result, standalone restaurants across the spectrum are also increasingly serving wine. But they could be doing a lot more to promote the drink. Instead, many enter into Coke-Pepsi-style exclusive deals with one of the larger producers in exchange for wines at severely discounted prices, limiting the choices available to consumers.

Nonetheless, the wine industry is expected to expand in a predictable boom-and-bust dotcom arc, with a lot more wine from a larger number of wineries in the near future. The acreage under wine grape cultivation in Maharashtra alone has been doubling every year since 2006 and new wineries are being set up in Karnataka, MP and even Delhi. Last financial year, the wine industry grew by 32.8 per cent in Maharashtra alone.



Label for three New offerings from Indus, Reveilo and Chateau d'Or

Shop for a drop



Rack to the future *Globus, inside Infinity Mall, stocks wines from around the globe*

Bhisham Mansukhani visits the city's new-look, temperature-controlled wine boutiques.

For many decades, tipplers had no choice but to pick up their wine from "wine shops" that sell and stock more spirits and beers than bottles of wine. Most of these stores stock wines in abysmal conditions, "cooking" the liquid because of constant exposure to heat and often sunlight. But much has changed over the last 18 months, now that supermarkets have been allowed to sell wine and beer, and licence fees for selling these products have been substantially reduced. Now we have a growing number of dedicated wine shops that offer a variety of Indian and international choices, stocking bottles of wine on their side, in temperature-controlled spaces and away from the sun. Some supermarkets have also set up dedicated wine sections, known in the trade as

"store-in-store" outlets.

Santé, one of the more recent chains of this sort, already has six outlets in Mumbai, four of which are standalone shops and two are store-in-store sections. The Walkeshwar Ridge Road outlet feels like a boutique store for art deco furniture. Wine racks, on which wines are placed horizontally and vertically, extend

across the central wall, segregated into international and Indian wine sections. Labels tacked to the racks contain information about the wine and tasting notes.

The shop manager is on hand for assistance should customers need help locating a particular label or suggestions. There's a lot to pick for the budget-conscious, starting with a mere Rs 100 for a 75 ml bottle of Sula. Santé's outlet in Big Bazaar is not as pretty, but they do offer a three per cent rebate on all bottles.

Globus Wines, another growing chain of "walk-in wine boutiques", has taken a pointedly different approach. Currently it has outlets

in Infinity Mall (Andheri) and Thakur Mall (Dahisar) with more store-in-store outlets opening at all Star Bazars. Globus displays its bottles horizontally (exactly like shoes in a shoe shop) as well as on conventional racks. The wines are arranged country-wise and the staff is reasonably well-informed. Their portfolio includes over 400 international wines, evenly divided between the New and Old World, with prices ranging from Rs 200 to Rs 20,000. The variety is staggering and at some point the assistant's help is needed, if only to locate a desired label or wine from a specific region.

Domestic wine maker Chateau Indage-owned IN on Annie Besant Road is a softly lit wine boutique in the same building as Ivy, the wine bar. Currently only Chateau Indage wines are available in its domestic section. Like Santé, its international selection also consciously addresses the price-sensitive drinker though you will find select premium labels like Pol Roger champagne.

Shoprite in Mulund has a range that is comprehensively representative and the storage standards are impressive, with almost all the wine stored on its side. "Having people buy alcohol

Expert pick

The Jacob's Creek Reserve Chardonnay (Rs 1,750) is a remarkably easy-drinking wine. It is very fragrant and fresh and suits the Mumbai weather. *Conan Desouza, Shoprite.*



Walled up *Sante has an interesting variety of varietals*

in supermarkets was a new trend but it caught on to an extent that in hindsight, it only seems obvious," said Conan Desouza, who handles Shoprite's Beers & Wines section. "Women go there regularly. Once they put wine on their grocery list, it gives wine a new context."

At Nature's Basket on Bhulabhai Desai Road, the store-in-store concept is taken to the luxurious extreme. The mid-sized gourmet store, which retails everything from fruit to Italian cheeses, has a basement cellar that resembles a private club. A reception desk doubles as a tasting spot. Still and sparkling wines are stocked separately and organised by colour and country. There's a plush couch into which prospective buyers can sink as the resident manager enlightens them about Chilean quaff and some vintage Bordeaux. Entry-level Indian wines aren't available as the manager said they did not make it past the selection panel. Starting at Rs 750, the international section, which includes mid-level wines, is more accommodating. Its champagne and sparkling wine section includes the famous Dom Perignon at Rs 16,000.

Where to get your bottle

Globus Wines Unit Number 209, Infiniti Mall, Second Floor Gate Number 3, Link Road, Andheri (W).

Also at Star Bazaar, Thakur Shopping Mall, near Dahisar Check Naka, Mira Bhayander Highway, Mira Road.

And at Haiko Supermarket, Hiranandani Gardens, Central Avenue, Powai. (Hotline for all the outlets 2632-9005).

Nature's Basket Shop No 30, World Trade Centre, Cuffe Parade (2215-2006).

Also at Tirupati Apartments, Shop No. 6, Bhulabhai Desai Road, opposite Mahalakshmi Temple (2352-6775).

IN Annie Beasant Road, Worli (6654-7939).

Santé 10, Ridge Road, next to Cafe Ridge, Malabar Hill (2368-4128).

Also at Shop No 1 Sahina Apartments, Pali Mala Road, Bandra (2640-2126).

And at Big Bazaar, Phoenix Mills Compound, Senpathi Bapat Marg, Lower Parel (6662-6713).

Shoprite Hyper Nirmal Lifestyle Mall, LBS Marg Mulund (W) (6649-0641).



The Prince's favourite fettuccine

If you are what you eat, then Chef Massimiliano Orlati is perhaps responsible for the success of half of Europe's beautiful people. Come partake of his truly inspired, wholly inspiring cuisine.



• Pali Hill Tourist Hotel, 14 Union Park, Khar (W), Mumbai 52. Tel: 2605 8228 • Mahalaxmi Race Course, Gate No. 8, K. Khadye Marg, Mumbai 34. Tel: 40859595/6 • www.olivebarandkitchen.com



PAUSE life can wait

Today Wines are everywhere...you see them at the fanciest stores, and you also see them at an evening friendly get together. Of course, we are not yet like the French where wine is an indispensable drink being cheaper than water! For Indians, it is fast gaining popularity and the increased production and sales vouching for it. (2007 saw a 37% growth and its expected to triple within the next three years) A leading winemaker on his recent visit to India said that India is one of the major emerging markets for all companies. This is primarily due to a range of converging trends - the increasingly wealthy middle class looking for a popular lifestyle choice, young adults seeking healthier and more socially acceptable drinking choices, a general trend towards more healthy living habits and of



course, the boom in easy availability. And the good news is that the momentum is coming from the locally produced wines and not imported wines. More and more people are drinking wine and its becoming the first choice beverage for women and young adults. A huge range of wines is available to the consumer today

at various price points. It is also becoming a style statement with a lot of film stars endorsing it. Media is also helping the cause whether it is for the Health conscious, the social net workers or the hip-n-trendy crowd. One such new offering is "Pause". 'Pause' wines have been uniquely blended by the expert winemakers at Pause. They have the largest variety in the market with Cabernet Sauvignon, Shiraz and Zinfandel in the Red wine category and Sauvignon Blanc, Chenin, Chardonnay in the White wine category. Moreover they have launched their own original wines- Indian Classic, Indian Pearl, Indian Nectar and Ruby Red - each of these have been specially blended to cater to Indian palates and to go with mild to spicy food. Pause wines also own their own vineyards in Nashik and have tied up with a local winery to guarantee quality. Currently the wines are promoted through their stylish flagship wine lounge and restaurant with the same name- 'Pause' at Hill Road, Bandra. Rajesh Patil, one of the key figures behind Pause says that there is another "Pause" wine lounge scheduled to open later in the year in South Mumbai. They are already planning to franchise the chain all over India soon and expect lounges to open in key cities by end of this year. To increase the reach of Pause wines and make them accessible to a wider consumer base, they also plan to launch "Pause-Express" - mini outlets the size of a coffee outlet selling their brands of wine and small eats. We do hope that this trend continues and more people start shifting from hard liquor to the much more healthier option of wine.

Pause Restaurant Pvt Ltd, 355, Hill Road, Bandra West 99875 20011.

Contact: Mr. Shaji Thomas 9987810000.

