

Another year of gains

The Wine Club



ALOK
CHANDRA

Rating wines is always a contentious process: Those successful in getting a medal or citation trumpet the feat to all concerned while those left empty-handed grumble about judging standards with dark hints about a flawed process and selector bias.

That's the reason perhaps why Robert Joseph made the Indian Wine Challenge 2008 as objective as possible: two rounds of tasting — in London and Delhi — by two different panels of international (and Indian) wine experts, all wines tasted blind, each bottle "bagged" to conceal the shape, only the grape and vintage known to the

panelists and all silver and gold medal wines double-tasted to verify their standing.

Of course, all wines tasted were from samples submitted by the entrants. There was no way of knowing whether any of a company's samples were superior to the stuff actually in the market.

The best Indian red wine this year was the Chateau D'Ori Cabernet Merlot 2007, which got silver — no mean achievement as this is from the new winery's very first vintage.

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IT honcho Ranjit Dhuru, who set up the stunning vineyard and winery in the Dindori area near Nasik, and winemaker Athanase Fakorellis (a Greek, living in Bordeaux) have excelled in crafting what I think are possibly the best Indian wines today.

Grover's Cabernet Shiraz 2007 got a bronze medal, as did the new Indus Vineyard Cabernet Sauvignon 2007. Good to see that Grover's quality is getting back on track, particularly the La Reserve, after some patchy consumer feedback the past year and the emergence of some nice wines from newbie Indus.

Nine Hills Shiraz Rose 2008 from Pernod Ricard India and Sula's Blush Zinfandel 2007 were both awarded a bronze. Rose wines are little understood by most wine consumers but are probably most suited for Indian cuisine and deserve a far greater clientele than they get at present.

Chateau Indage's Marquise de Pompadour garnered silver and it's Ivy Brut, a bronze medal. The company has received much flak from consumer groups regarding quality in the past and this seems to be a fitting recognition that they are still capable of surprising us.



Last (but not least) on the medal roster was the Sula Late Harvest Chenin Blanc 2008 with

a silver — a phenomenal achievement when one considers that the competition was from international ice wines and dessert wines. This is another category that deserves far more consumer interest than it receives at present.

No Indian white wine was considered worthy of a medal — somewhat surprising — as the tasting panel had earlier opined that Indian Chenin Blancs were "world class", and that, in general, the whites were better than our reds.

So, are Indian wines world class? As I've said elsewhere: "You've come a long way, baby." Some can hold their own against similarly-priced wines from anywhere, but the majority need to improve in terms of expressiveness, balance and complexity. Growers need to improve grape quality and guard against phenolic unripeness. Winemakers must improve winery hygiene and winemaking techniques to avoid infection and oxidation.

Cheers to looking forward to better wines, year after year. ■

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