



Desi wines on fleek

Decoding India's wine scene and its key players

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When you think of popular wine regions, the top two countries that come to mind are France and Italy. However, as surprising as it may seem, the world is now cycling India firmly as an upcoming and promising wine producer. As per the India Wine Market Outlook, 2023 report, the wine industry in India has witnessed a surge with a Compound Annual Growth Rate (CAGR) of more than 25 per cent from 2011-12 to 2016-18. Vishal Kadalia, proprietor of Wine Park, an importer and distributor of imported wines in India and Maldives says, "Wines

are getting more popular by the minute. The awareness drive by Indian producers as well as importers is making a huge difference. Wine clubs, consumer wine festivals, wine dinners organised by various companies as well as wine influencers, all are adding up to making it popular."

This is further accelerated by wine's newly found identity of being an experience associated with a destination or simply a Friday night and not just a drink. Master of Wine Soral Holland explains, "People want to stay at a wine resort, drink wine next to a vineyard, understand how it's made, its nuances and overall get a more holistic view of it. People want to pair food with wine too. So basically, wine is experiential."

MILLENNIALS RULING

The concept of wine as an experience resonates majorely among the millennials, who make for more than half of India's wine drinking population today. In fact, this generation is keen on understanding the individuality of the wine consumed and is therefore willing to spend more on an immersion that goes beyond just sipping a drink.

Vivek Chandramohan, chief executive officer, Grover Zampa Vineyards believes millennials are transforming the industry with their constant need for experimentation. "This insight has led to the emergence of wine bars/lounges and state-of-the-art vineyards, due to which, the younger

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generation is now warming up to the idea of socialising over wine. This trend has changed the consumption of wine to an elaborate, experiential affair. In addition, this form of education has also initiated the much-needed efforts to demystify the beverage and curb apprehensions, which often hindered consumers from indulging in or discussing the drink," he says.

WOMEN AND WINE

Another segment that contributes tremendously towards wine's popularity in India is that of women. One may notice that women usually tend to go for viniculture their

ABOVE: Grover Zampa Vineyards



Wine is the only category where women equal men drinkers

choice of drink in a social setting. Holland adds, "As you know, Indian women are traditionally not encouraged to consume alcohol. In most cities or parts of India, even today when women consume hard liquor like vodka or gin or whiskey, they have to camouflage their drinks. However, wine has a relatively low alcohol content, so it is perceived as a more acceptable drink for women. In a survey that we conducted, it was found that women did not have any social inhibitions while consuming wine."

Therefore, wine is the only category where women equal men drinkers. But, the downside of this, as explained by Chandramohan, is that men often don't find the drink 'manly' enough which is a misconception that needs to be addressed through strategic communications and interactions.

GLOBAL MARKET POSITION

Alike consumption, the production aspect of wine in India is also flourishing. Homegrown labels like Grover Zampa Vineyards and Sula Vineyards have not just made their mark domestically, but are also carving a niche for themselves on the global ground — Grover Zampa Vineyards is doing so via its strong exports team who travel internationally and

LEFT: Wine drinkers in a park

educate trade partners and consumers on the quality of their wine and the techniques utilised to achieve it. In addition to this, they participate in international trade fairs and competitions like Decanter Asia Wine Awards (DAWA), Hong Kong International Wine and Spirits Competition, Wine and Spirits Wholesalers of America and Sakura Women's Wine Awards among others to showcase their product.

Similarly, Sula along with its sustainable practices and wine tourism, now exports to over 30 countries including major wine producing regions like France, Germany and USA. Chaitanya Rath, chief operating officer, Sula Vineyards says, "Over the years we have enhanced our production facilities and use every part of the grape from seed to skin. We are proud to be one of the most sustainable wineries in the world and are doing more every day."

On the other hand, Kadakia thinks that there is still a long way to go for Indian wines globally. "There is an interest in export markets primarily by Indian restaurants overseas. Indian wines are winning awards in wine competitions which is improving their image globally," he explains further.

Similarly, Holland states that internationally, Indian wine is still a novelty factor as it surprises people to know that India makes wine; and she adds that the best way to educate tourists is by making them try Indian wine when they visit India.

CHALLENGES FACED

Along with battling several myths, the alcohol industry in India is plagued with issues such as heavy regulation, high pricing and limited availability.

Elaborating the challenges, sommelier Nikhil Agarwal, director and chief executive officer, *All Things Nive*, a luxury wine and spirits consulting and marketing agency says, "Each state has its own excise rules, and wines from one state are considered an import in another, and are taxed at a higher rate. Secondly, storage conditions in 99 per

cent of retail outlets, restaurants and hotels are poor. Next, education on wine while becoming more prevalent is still a niche. Moreover, we cannot advertise alcohol thereby making it difficult to communicate new and exciting brands. Lastly, label registration with excise takes very long and Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) rules make it difficult for small wineries to change their labels to suit India's requirements."

To tackle the logistical issues, Chandramohan says, "Some wineries are already making strides to better the quality of their yield by investing in high-end technologies and supply chain systems to ensure that the wines are transported at the right ambient temperature to ensure consumer satisfaction."



OUR PICKS OF INDIAN WINERIES

GROVER ZAMPA VINEYARDS

Grover Zampa's wine offerings suit the palates of premium, occasional and frequent wine drinkers. In order to make the guest's experience more enhanced, Grover Zampa winery in Bengaluru is now home to a newly launched visitor centre, Lounge de La Réserve - their first restaurant; Cave de La Réserve - a tasting room specifically designed to conduct tastings and masterclasses in the right environment and Boutique de La Réserve - for cellar door sales of the wines. groverzampa.in

SULA VINEYARDS

The trend of wine tourism is synonymous with Sula. This brand has curated tours, elaborate dining and high-end stays at its vineyards which complement wine tasting

sessions. They conduct numerous wine tastings and trainings across India for consumers and hospitality professionals who serve wines on a daily basis. They also own and operate Beyond by Sula which is the luxury version of its resort with a handful of villas alongside an infinity pool. sula.wines.com

YORK WINERY

Located in the wine capital of India, Nashik, Maharashtra, the winery is spread across an expanse of nine acres with lush surroundings. Their premium wines include chenin blanc, sauvignon blanc, cabernet sauvignon, shiraz, cabernet merlot, late harvest and shiraz vignier. Guided wine tasting tours are one of their highlights. Adjacent to the York Tasting Room at the edge of vineyards, is their popular restaurant called

Cellar Door, serving the best of Indian cuisine. yorkwinery.com

MYRA VINEYARDS

Headquartered in Bengaluru, Myra Vineyards' portfolio currently includes sauvignon blanc, chenin blanc, cabernet sauvignon and shiraz among others. Must have is their Mistle Cabernet shiraz that is accentuated by rich berries, spice flavours and delicate oak aroma. myravineyards.com

FRATELLI VINEYARDS

A six-hour drive from Mumbai, Fratelli lies in the Sholapur region of Maharashtra. The brand boasts having India's largest privately-owned wine estate of 240 acres. A range of sparkling, white, red and international wine varieties are available here. The Fratelli collection includes shiraz rose, chardonnay and classic shiraz. fratellivineyards.in