



Drams & Dreams

Nikhil Agarwal on the fine wines, cognacs and whiskies he'll happily give an arm and a leg for

Now this is exactly the kind of stuff I like to write about. Some people buy diamonds, others buy clothes; I spend my tosh on food and drink. Not that you need to necessarily spend a huge amount of money to enjoy some fine wine and spirits, but since this article is about splurging, let's pick some beauties that are just so good that you will happily give away an arm and a leg for them.

Fine wines are those that take around seven to ten years to start showing their mettle, and improve with age. I love Masseto by Tenuta dell'Ornellaia, a relatively new entrant to the world of Super Tuscans. On a recent trip to Geneva, I discovered Grattamacco, which blew my mind. These folks in a bar in Geneva were washing it down like it was nothing.

Indulge in a case or two of L'Ermite from the Rhone Valley pro-

duced by the legendary M. Chapoutier and made from 100 per cent Shiraz grapes. From Bordeaux I'm going to go beyond the first growths and suggest Chateau Palmer from Margaux, a beautiful wine that is firm and feminine all at once. I also like Chateau Montrose, and in many a blind tasting, I have discovered that people prefer this one over the more renowned and desired first growths.

Since we are in France at the moment, it would be prudent not to skip Champagne. I absolutely love Ruinart! Everything, from the shape of



the bottle to the quality of the sparkling wine inside is simply luxurious. Try the Blanc de Blancs—absolutely crisp and complex.

South of the border is Spain, where you can explore wines by Dominio de Pingus from Ribera del Duero. From Rioja, Spain's most famous wine region, get your hands on a Gran Reserva from Bodegas Muga. A region not too well known among Indians and one that commands some of the highest prices of wine in Spain is the Priorat region, not too far from Barcelona. Here, the Grenache grape variety produces astonishingly seductive wines. Alvaro Palacios, in particular, produces outstanding wine in his vineyards spread on some of the steepest slopes I have seen.

From my beloved Australia, don't miss a visit to Rockford to see a quaint, ancient looking winery that seems to be stuck in





time, and Henschke's Hill of Grace. You've got to try Penfolds Grange, of course, and the other Bin 389, Bin 707 and the like that this iconic producer makes.

If there is one thing I love as much as I love wine, it is cognac. Fine cognac is just as expressive and provides the same hedonistic pleasure and complexity as wine, especially when aged for decades. You cannot write an article about cognac and not talk about Louis XIII, a truly luxurious blend of eaux de vie, some of which are over a hundred years old. You should also get yourself a bottle or two of the indulgent Martell XO that I discovered in greater depths just recently. Delamain, a producer of top end cognac, can't be overlooked. Tres Venerables from this house is one of my personal favourites, and so is the younger Vesper. Oh, and don't get me started on Richard Hennessy. I've had the pleasure of having it just twice or thrice during my time with LVMH over a decade ago, and I still remember every sip.

Finally, let's get down to the whiskies. You guys suddenly sat up a little straighter, didn't you, you whisky maniacs! Hibiki 17YO from Japan is excellent. Hakushu 12YO

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is phenomenal, if you like fruity and flowery whiskies that offer layers of complexity, without being smoky or peaty. Of late, I've been focusing my attention on The Balvenie, probably my favourite distillery of all time; I think it would be fitting to end the article with a suggestion for you to try their Cask 4570, which has been aged for 50 years. I haven't had this one yet, but I'm hoping that all this sound advice will warrant an invite from someone out there who will happily fund and share this spirit with me.

