

Chill out time for Indians



Indian consumers are gradually opting for international wine brands and are in the mood to experiment, says Mini Ribeiro

Ripe red fruit aromas, with notes of cinnamon and peachy with a hint of apple. Some years ago, this might have sounded strange to people in India, but not anymore. It's been just about a decade that wine drinking in India has come of age, but Indians are beginning to understand and discuss wines. For centuries, wine has been the most celebrated drink, probably the prerogative of the privileged. But not any more. Wines have started gaining acceptance in India. Although the domestic wine market is still in its nascent stages, compared to international mature wine markets, the Indian consumers are gradually opting for international brands and are in the mood to experiment.

Some years ago, wine, just meant red and white wine. Only a few options by way of brands were available. Special occasions were the only time

when a bottle of wine was served, but of late, there has been a clear shift. Indian wine market is warming up to international labels. As more and more Indians travel overseas for business and pleasure, adopt new lifestyle patterns and yearn for the good things in life, domestic wine consumption too has correspondingly increased. People in cities still remain the major drinkers, prices notwithstanding. Wines made in India are priced between Rs450-700 and imported ones generally cost Rs2500 and above. There are so many wine brands now available in India, that consumers are confused. They prefer the known brands or go by price.

"The overall impression is that the consumption of wines so far this year has been up by about 15 per cent or so, with season now beginning this percentage is poised to go up," reveals Nikhil Agarwal, Sommelier & Director, All Things Nice. "The consumer taste for wine is evolving in

India. Today consumers are trying new regions, new grape varieties and new styles of wines. So, the range of wines that are moving well in market include a good mix of both new world as well as old world wines. Donnafugata, Gerard Bertrand and Nederburg are among them," opines Sumedh Singh Mandla, CEO, Core Brands, Aspri Spirits Pvt. Ltd.

It is difficult to arrive at a conclusion regarding the kind of wines that Indians enjoy. Vijayan Gangadharan, Director of Food and Beverage, Grand Hyatt, says, "It is different for different people and is difficult to classify since it is a very individual preference. However, since India is very new in wine drinking most inexperienced wine drinkers enjoy easy to drink wines. Some popular choices are New World Shiraz, Pinot Noir, Australian Chardonnay." Agarwal adds, "A large part of the wine drinking population prefers easy drinking fruit driven wines. Having said that they are a large number of people that have been drinking wine for sometime that have moved on to more complex wines. The quality of wine being consumed in India is getting better." Neethu Sheth, The Wine Rack concurs, "Indians prefer sweeter wines that are more fruity. Most also prefer reds."



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Sumedh Singh Mandla of Aspri Spirits further states, "As the taste is evolving there is a good segmentation and differentiation between matured and beginners. Most beginners seem to prefer medium bodied wines that are easy with fruitier nose and taste."

French wines are still traditional favourites of many, but of late, wines from Australia, South Africa, India and California are strong contenders. The popularity of these wines is owing to their unique fruity taste and comparatively affordable prices.

Champagne Indage has been the pioneer in making French style wine in India. Grover Vineyards and Sula Vineyards too have made their presence felt in a big way. Recently, in the Indian Made Foreign Liquor (IMFL) space, companies like Diageo, United Breweries and Seagrams too have ventured into making wine. The Government of Maharashtra is trying to support the wine industry. It has awarded wineries the status of food processing industry instead of alcoholic beverages and has also abolished excise duty on wines.

Around 85 per cent of India's wineries are located in Maharashtra—Nashik, Pune, Baramati and Sangli. Between them, the top five players (Château Indage, Sula, Grover, Vinsura and Revelo) produce about 1,700,000 cases. Other newcomers like Pernod Ricard, Mallya's United Spirits and Château d'Or contribute a further 480,000 cases.

With Christmas round the corner, naturally, the consumption of wine goes up. But it is important to pair wines with the right kind of



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F&B, Grand Hyatt**

Christmas fare. “Turkey is a delicate and mildly flavoured meat and would pair well with light-bodied white and red wines like sauvignon blanc and Beaujolais while with strongly flavoured side dishes or turkey with stuffings and cranberry sauce, an intensely flavoured white like gewürztraminer or a rich, fruity red like syrah or zinfandel would be preferable,” explains Gangadharan. Sheth adds, “A light red such as pinot noir or zinfandel would work best with Turkey. Otherwise a less acidic rich white such as a Riesling or Gewurztraminer.”

“At my in laws home Christmas lunch is a grand meal. It's usually a mix of Turkey, Egg nog, Ginger bread, Roast Suckling pig and Sorpotel. Egnog is fine just on its own. With sorpotel I think an acidic red like Chianti Classico would do well or perhaps a new world Sauvignon Blanc. With Turkey, Merlot or Pinot Noir. Roast Suckling pig is divine with a Rioja Reserva red or even a Bordeaux red. Christmas Pudding is great with an Indian late harvest Chenin Blanc or any other dessert wine from around the world,” elaborates Agarwal.

Mandla shares some great pairings. “Wines with Roast Turkey: Reds: Pinot Noir, Shiraz,

Zinfandel/ Whites: Sauvignon Blanc, Viognier, Riesling, Wines with Goose: reds: Zinfandel, Pinot Noir, Tempranillo/ Whites: Chardonnay, Sauvignon Blanc, Wines with prime Ribs: Reds: cabernet, Shiraz, Tempranillo, Wines with Dark/ Bitter Chocolate: Cabernet Sauvignon, Zinfandel, Amarone, Barolo, Ruby Port and Wines with Christmas Cakes/ puddings: Port, Sherry, Late Harvest and Sweet wines.”

Agarwal further predicts, “Sparkling wines will increase in sale because of the party season combined with the wedding season. Indian wines from quality conscious wineries are doing better and better. In general the consumption of red wine will increase during the cooler months.”

Gangadharan however feels, “From a vast choice of 260 labels it is difficult to pick 4 or 5 popular wines, however guests are more inclined towards new world wines with majorly wines from Australia, New Zealand and Chile. Amongst the old world wines Italian wines top our charts, Super Tuscan are very popular. Pinot Noirs and Pinot Grigios have gained popularity. Shiraz and Cabernet Sauvignon remain all time favourites.”

Wine consumption in India is likely to reach around 14.7 million litres (in volume terms) by the end of 2012 from around 4.6 million litres in 2008 registering a growth of 35 per cent during the course of past 4 years, says an analysis of the Associated Chambers of Commerce and Industry of India (ASSOCHAM).

According to the ASSOCHAM, the Indian wine market (in value terms) stood at Rs800 crore as in 2008 is likely to touch Rs2700 crore mark by the end of 2012, based on relevant information supplied to the chamber by various wine producers.

Of late, India has become a strong contender in the global wine business as wine made in India is vying with the best quality wine producers and consumers.

