

People willing to spend for new wine experiences

Nikhil Agarwal

The Indian wine consumer is no longer always from high society. He/she can be almost anyone. You have men and women of all ages, from all walks of life, of different beliefs, at different income brackets and from Tier I and Tier II-III cities getting into wine. Fifteen years ago, you would not have been able to say this, as then wine drinking was limited to people who had higher income brackets and were exposed to wine in their travels.

But in the recent past, we have seen tremendous growth not only in terms of wine consumption in India but also internationally. In the last 10 years, the number of wine producers has increased substantially, giving consumers in India a wider choice and pushing quality levels higher.

When I started my career with Sula many moons ago, the consumer did not know much about wine. However, today there is great awareness about wine and it is impossible to have any wedding, gathering, inaugural event, party, or get-together without serving wine. We at All Things Nice advise a lot of people on what to serve and it is amazing to see how much people want to cover different styles of wine to ensure that everyone is happy. Now going beyond red and white wines, sparkling wines are being offered at a lot of gatherings.

Even if you don't travel and witness wine and food culture

internationally, you would be living under a rock to not see wine at various food and lifestyle shows. A lot of future growth is expected from Tier II and Tier III cities where people have started consuming wine in a big way.

MOVEMENT IN TERMS OF PALATE

Every new wine drinking society sees a movement in terms of palate and it is happening in India as well. The effect of the changing palate is reflected in the styles of wines producers are making. For example, earlier most or all Chenin Blancs would be incredibly fruity and a little off dry to being medium sweet. Now wineries are producing barrel-aged Chenin Blancs that are dry and offer more complexity. I think wineries see that consumers are moving away from sweeter style wines.

More and more wineries in their bid to seek customer attention are constantly innovating and introducing new styles of wine, blends and grape varieties. For example, in the last few years, we have seen the introduction of Tempranillo with which we are able to produce incredible wines or interesting blends like Vitae Tre by Fratelli, which is a blend of Chenin Blanc, Muller Thargau and Gewürztraminer. Today India is producing sparkling wines (a range of styles within this category), reds, whites and dessert wines.

About Nikhil Agarwal

Nikhil Agarwal is an internationally acclaimed wine sommelier and Director of 'All Things Nice'. Currently, he is A+ educator of Wine Australia in India. He has rich experience of working with great industry names like Diageo, Moët, Hennessy and Sula Vineyards. He has launched the import division of Sula as well as Myra Vineyards. He now plays the role of chief advisor and sommelier to the winery.

Nikhil has single-handedly set up Fine Wine Investment Services for HNIs in India in partnership with UK's Amphora Portfolio Management, a first of its kind initiative in the country.



GROWING DESIRE FOR UNUSUAL WINES

Wine tasting events are now held more frequently than in the past but not as many events as should be to popularize wine culture in India. Six years ago when we started, we used to do one in a month. Now we do 20 in a month and this is possible thanks to people's real interest in wine and wine and food pairing. I think people want to try unusual pairings or wines and are willing to spend money on having those experiences. At All Things Nice, we push Indian food and wine pairing as much as possible simply because so many people think it can't be done. Also private truly top-end wine dinners and tastings seem to be becoming more frequent.

Birth of new wine clubs is also a testimony of growing wine popularity. Bombay, Delhi and Bangalore always had their wine clubs but in recent years places like Chandigarh, Nagpur and Kolkata also have seen birth of clubs. This is extremely exciting. Wine clubs and festivals celebrating wine are coming up throughout the country and they are a huge reason why wine culture is growing in India.

I don't think any hotel worth its salt or bar and restaurant that wants to offer a great dining experience can do without a serious wine programme now. The programme should not only allow a menu offering a range of wines but also arrange a proper service and storage of wines. Large hotel chains are investing a lot of money in getting their wine programme right, and stand-alone restaurants offer more choice today than their past wine menu.

LABEL REGISTRATION A HUGE BURDEN

Still many challenges restrict the growth of wine. I think the biggest problems faced are current laws, licensing issues and inter-state rules. For example, to register a domestic wine label in Delhi one has to pay over Rs 1,00,000 per year per label. For small or new wineries who want to launch 6 to 8 wines in the important Delhi market, this label registration fee is a huge cost. Regarding imported wines also, the number of choices has shrunk due to FSSAI issues which is not good for the healthy growth of the Indian wine industry.

By Heer Kothari

TORRES



A CROWNING ACHIEVEMENT

Vintage 2010: 90 points, *Guía Peñín* 2013
 Vintage 2009: Gold Medal, *Berlin Wine Trophy* 2013
 Vintage 2008: Gold Medal, *AWC International Wine Challenge* 2012
 #1 Wine Consumer Reports: *Joongang Daily Newspaper*, South Korea



Torres workers moving and arranging aging barrels at our winery

