



Five Years with NINE HILLS

Riding on the success of Nine Hills **Suneeta Sodhi Kanga** shares with readers the emerging Indian wine saga



IFIRST came across Nine Hills Wines five years ago when I visited their winery with a renowned group of international panelists who were in India for the final phase of the India Wine Challenge 2008 that had been organised by Robert Joseph, the noted oenologist and founder of the London International Wine Challenge, the world's biggest wine competition.

To many people in India, names like Sauvignon Blanc, Chenin Blanc, Riesling or Chardonnay were unknown back then. But wine, today, is establishing itself as the backbone of corporate and social entertaining in the country.

Right from a private dinner party for select clients to elaborate banquets; sparkling flutes of champagne and glistening glasses of ruby red wine seem to be flowing at most events, often becoming the centre of conversation as people compare and comment on the body, the texture, the vintage, etc.

Although it is growing at a fast pace, India's per capita wine consumption still adds up to but a teaspoon. Yet the drink causes more excitement in fashionable circles than anything else.

A recent report states that India currently has about 60 wineries with an estimated investment of about \$60 million.

India has had an ancient wine-making tradition. In the Rig Veda, homage is paid to Soma, the liquor that was highly appreciated by the gods. The ninth chapter of the Rig Veda devotes 114 verses in praise of Soma, the ambrosial liquor, considered to be the 'elixir of immortality'. Varied

sources from Vedic literature also suggest that this liquor was extracted from milkweed and was offered to the gods as libation during worship. After the Portuguese conquest of Goa in 1510, they planted grapevines to make wine and laid the foundation of wine-making in India.

Winemaking went off the radar with the onslaught of the phylloxera disease that wiped out entire French plantations in the late 19th century.

The Indian wine industry started from scratch in the 1980s with Chateau Indage producing sparkling wine from grapes that grew well in Maharashtra. The birth of Grover Vineyards took place in 1983 in Bangalore. Its first vintage was released in 1992.

Rajeev Samant set up Sula Vineyards which has made smart strides in the short time span of 10 years and has a major share of the market.

Some of the established wineries like Four Seasons, Vinsura, Vallonné, Grover Zampa, York, Reveilo, Good Earth and Chateau d'Oré are working hard to increase their market share.

Recently, companies like Diageo, United Breweries and Pernod Ricard have entered the Indian wine world.

Wine is a business of passion. Ashwini Deo, ex-MD of Moët Hennessy, decided to give it all up and set up his own wine label, aptly christened 'Turning Point'.

Fratelli is the new kid on the block, pumping a lot of investment and technology into the making of some good quality wines. Promising new wineries that have recently come up include Myra and Charosa.



Pernod Ricard is the second largest liquor company in the world. Its portfolio includes Glenlivet, Chivas Regal, Absolut, etc. Their Indian offering, Nine Hills, is located in the Sahyadri range in Nashik, and is headed by French master winemaker Jean-Manuel Jacquinot who has fused old-world traditions with innovative wine-making practices to yield a range of powerful wines



Pernod Ricard's Indian offering, Nine Hills, is headed by French master winemaker Jean-Manuel Jacquinot, who has fused old-world traditions with innovative viticulture and wine making practices.

The result is a range of powerful, yet balanced, wines with classic aromas, rich texture and lingering flavours.

Nine Hills Wines was awarded three gold medals at the 'Indian Wine Consumers' Choice Awards 2012' and is considered a contender for the second spot after Sula on the Indian wine scene.

The good news is that Jean Manuel Jacquinot still has many an ace up his sleeve. Word on the 'grapevine' is that he has now set his mind to seduce India with a sparkling wine next.

If he can do an encore with the fine grapes from the misty foothills of Nashik, all I can say is that I want to be there when he uncorks his new creation. Well done, guys! 🍷

