



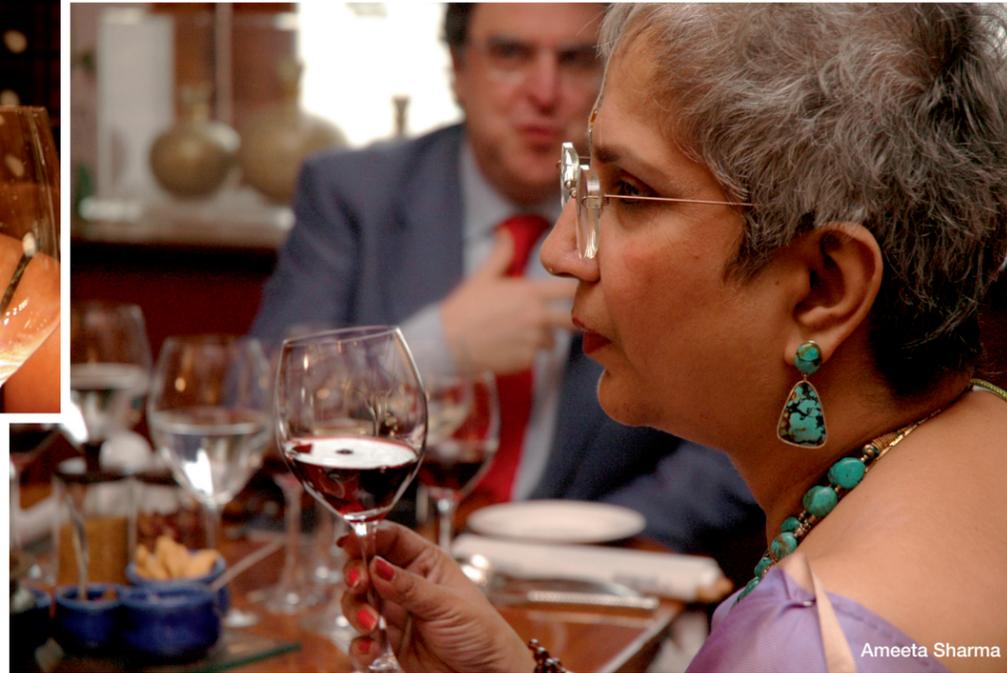
Alexandra Marnier-Lapostolle



Kavita Devi Faiella



Karishma Grover



Ameeta Sharma



Sula's Dindori Reserve Shiraz

# Of Wine and Women

Indian women are FALLING IN LOVE with wines for reasons that go BEYOND TASTE

Swirling a Primitivo in hand, 32-year-old Chhavi Sachdev is enthusiastically talking about how much she enjoys her wines. "I love the variants of the Zinfandel grape, of which Primitivo is a genetic equivalent," she says throwing around wine vocab with the same practiced ease with which she noses her glass, and takes a sip of her favourite red. The Mumbai-based entrepreneur who runs an audio production house obviously takes her wines seriously—she knows her Shiraz from her Cabernet Sauvignon and deems

several indigenous wines inferior. "I am always eager to know the grape, the varietal, the region where it is grown, and of course I pay keen attention to the taste," she adds. Starting out as a white wine drinker, over the past eight years Chhavi's palate has matured and she has progressed to red wines. Today, she frequents Chateau Indage's Café Ivy Bar & Bistro, popular for its wine list, and is an active participant in wine discussions on the internet. Going off on a wine tasting weekend has been on her must-do list for some time now.

While Chhavi may not be a yardstick, she is definitely an indicator of the growing oenophilia, the love of wine, amongst women. As more and more indigenous and international wines make their presence felt, exclusive wine clubs multiply and it becomes difficult to get tables at haute wine bars, women are finding themselves wanting to turn connoisseur. And it's not just about the taste. Wanting to learn and understand wines is the aim.

Kavita Devi Faiella, 26, sommelier and the young regional cellar master at Aman New Delhi, attributes it to the developing wine scene here. Still in its infancy in India, wine is an exciting subject to explore. "Wine has traditionally been a male bastion. However, given that it's still developing here, the playing field between men and women is levelled. Women here are not as inhibited as women in traditional wine drinking countries when it comes to wanting to learn about wines. Instead, I have women walking up to me all the time to enquire about wines," says Kavita. A direct result is Aman's Women's Wine Club that is to start mid-August. The group will see 12-15 women come together each month for tasting sessions and to discuss wines in an informal atmosphere. "We plan on drinking a country a month," says an enthusiastic Kavita.

Such wine groups are increasingly finding patronage. After consistent queries from several well-travelled women, wine writer Ameeta Sharma, who has been writing on wine for about six years now, held a wine awareness class for women in May. "Women wanted advice on everything from pairing the right wines with the right food, to selecting the right wine for an

occasion, to just wanting to understand wines better." The group consisted of homemakers and corporate executives, aged 27 to 45, some of who knew a lot about wines, some who had absolutely no knowledge. "I think this itself is an indicator of the rising popularity of wine amongst women. Constant and easy travel abroad, where women are exposed to various labels, has whet their appetite."

Exposure to international varieties has certainly got people asking for more. Dharti Desai of the Mumbai-based Finewinesmore has brought 160 international varietals into the country over the last two years. The company has the Sicilian Donnafugata label, literally meaning 'woman in flight', a wine that celebrates women everywhere. Neetu Sheth of The Wine Rack, also a Mumbai-based company that imports and distributes premium wines in India, is working on familiarising connoisseurs with South African wines. Nashik's Vallée de Vin that started in 2006 offers three varietals of Zampa, one of them a rosé made from Syrah grapes with notes of red berry and a hint of strawberry.

Karishma Grover of Grover Vineyards, a third generation vintner who recently stepped into the family-run wine business, agrees that the excitement about wine amongst women is palpable. "Drinks like whiskey aren't conventionally targeted at women. So wine becomes a socially acceptable choice as the image that it projects is one of not overstepping the boundaries."

The all-welcoming approach has other benefits as well. "You can't ignore the fact that holding a wine glass is a fashion statement, not to forget its much-publicised health aspects," says Sanjay Menon, oenophile and managing director of the K.B.R. School of Wine. "People are exposed to these trends today. So, why should women have apprehensions in holding a glass of wine?" K.B.R. School of Wine, which was initially started for the hospitality sector, today has more consumers seeking it out to learn about wines. The number of women enrolling equal that of men.

The idea at the end of the day, says Ameeta, is to aim to get more wine into the home. And this will happen as women get more comfortable with the drink. "Once women know exactly what they want, they'll probably not allow men to order for them anymore," she says. And almost all of them agree that as far as tastes are concerned, the stereotype that women enjoy sweeter wines is a myth. Which is probably one of the reasons why there aren't many wines targeted specifically at women. Says Alexandra Marnier-Lapostolle of Casa Lapostolle, the acclaimed Chilean winery, "If we make wines targeted specifically at women then that means we are differentiating in the tastes of men and women. And there is no difference." "If anything," adds Karishma, "the fact is that women have a greater sense of smell and taste. I believe they are more into the quality of the wine." Bacchus would be proud. ■

## Harper's Bazaar picks four wines from Sula Vineyards's bouquet that women are sure to love

- Sula Vineyards Blush Zinfandel 2008: A rosé with the sweet aromas of watermelon, grapefruit and honeysuckle, it has an off-dry palate and flavours of candied fruit. Served chilled, it's great for picnics and hot summer days. Rs 400 onwards.
- Sula Vineyards Dindori Reserve Shiraz 2007: This is a dark purple wine with intense aromas of pepper, dark fruits and spicy oak. Its perfect accompaniments are grilled meats and seafood, and spicy Mexican dishes. Rs 700 onwards.
- Sula Vineyards Late Harvest Chenin Blanc 2008: This is a pale lemon-coloured wine with complex aromas of lemon drops, pears, ripe pineapple and hints of rose petals. It's an ideal dessert wine. Rs 300 onwards.
- Sula Vineyards Riesling 2008: With the scent of flowers and green lemon, one can taste a hint of cloves on the palate. Served chilled, the wine is perfect for lightly grilled chicken/fish and Indian vegetarian starters. Rs 600 onwards.



Sula's Late Harvest Chenin Blanc, Riesling and Blush Zinfandel

By Preetika Mathew

FROM LEFT TO RIGHT: COURTESY MOET & CHANDON; COURTESY KARISHMA GROVER; COURTESY KAVITA DEVI FAIELLA

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: COURTESY AMEETA SHARMA; COURTESY SULA VINEYARDS