

THE SPIRIT OF WINE

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Fratelli Vineyards celebrate the 'Taste of the World' at Hyatt Regency, Delhi with a showcase of 29 international wines. *Devi Singh* speaks to the cynosure of the evening, Jean-Charles Boisset, who came to launch his label in India

Decked in his signatures — a crisp, clean-cut Tom Ford and a self-designed brooch sitting pretty on the lapel of his blazer, he holds your attention with his flamboyant demeanour and poetic charm. He tries having you at Bonjour! His words don't really run on an impulse, they are more

assessed. Sharp and targeted. A vintner from Burgundy, his passion for wine flows in his blood just like his desire to see his wine empire swell. Jean Charles Boisset is not just another vigneron, he's more of a savant, an artist, a maverick, an aesthete and a thinker more importantly.

A business partnership brings him to the country he feels attached and attracted to. He's mesmerised by India's history, exotica, ethos and opulence. "It's so rich and diverse, so full of possibilities. And you can't grasp this country in a single shot or visit, you have to come back again and again. India is like an exquisite wine for me, the more you drink, the more you understand it. It needs to be taken into your senses, into your thought process, slowly," says an impassioned Jean.

Partnering with Fratelli Vineyards is a great way to bring some of his best labels to India such as Cremant Brut No.21, Cremant Brut Rose No.69 expanding the former's ever-increasing international portfolio. A win-win for everyone! Initially he plans to introduce the French and Californian wines and see how it goes. "The wine-drinking pattern, has, of course, changed a lot in India. Wine has moved on from being an occasional to an everyday drink. Indians sure are getting to know their wines well now. They are travelling more, buying good wines abroad, developing finer tastes. The only important thing is how you pair it with food. I think Pinot Noir goes really well with it," says he.

A great foodie in love with Indian cuisine, he says he is impressed with what Indian chefs and restaurateurs have done with Indian food globally.

Coming from a family of viticulturists, literally having grown up smelling grapes, he lays utmost emphasis on the love for wine. "Wine is all about you. It's about how you are feeling at a certain point of time and what's going on in your head at that moment which will develop your taste for the wine you are sipping into. This is what makes wine-making interesting as it is constantly changing," shares he.

The Boisset house started by his father, Jean Claude Boisset in 1961 has only grown bigger and better and the credit surely goes to the dynamism of Jean Charles. "I love art, fashion, food, travel, beauty and aesthetics. Wine was something which covered all my passions. It allowed me to combine art, pair food and travel to the most exotic places in the world. So I stuck to it as I didn't have to look further. I'm a dreamer, a sensualist, I have this vivid imagination to constantly look for ways where I can experience something which I can only imagine. I want to make my imagination tangible. I should be able to touch and feel it, not just think about it. When I sip into a particular wine I want to feel the silk, velvet, all those fabrics caressing my mouth," he says.

Part of his success can be attributed to his peculiar ideas like introducing wine in Tetrapaks. "It was a simple innovation but one of the most amazing ones. The French and California Rabbit Tetrapacks were created to minimise the carbon footprint in the world, bringing in ecology, value and convenience. It provided 33 per cent more wine. It's convenient to carry wine on a road journey. You can take it anywhere you want. To a match, pool, backpacking. It brings down the white-table mannerism associated with wine without compromising on the taste. Your love for wine stays wherever you go," adds Jean. Agrees Kapil Sekhri of Fratelli Vineyards that it does taste amazing. "I tried it too sometime back in London and I must say it's a great offering."

Much has been talked and written about the baroque-styled Raymond Vineyards at Napa valley. Everybody indeed loves Raymond. There's an air of old-world rococo about it. It's dramatic, aureate, gloriously animalistic. "It will bring out your deep carnal feelings. I want to sell an experiential dream to my guests." There's an artist hidden inside him. And he has many channels for his creativity. Take for instance, his jewellery designs. He has even designed the brooch he's wearing when I meet him. "It's a queen bee," he laughingly tells me.

"There needs to be more than just tasting a wine. Wine gives an opportunity to associate finer things in life in the easiest of ways," is how Jean explains drama around him and his Raymond property. We certainly have to wait for such experiences here. On asking if he has India in his future endeavours prompt comes the reply, "I do actually. Although I still have to see a lot of it but you never know, I might just make some investments here. Not necessarily in the wine sector. I might just build a luxury retreat. You never know."

Never inhibited and up for anything he does mostly what he likes. Like when he married Gina (Gallo) people were holding their breaths for the greatest merger ever. But that didn't quite happen. "I stayed a bachelor for a long time. Never in my dreams had I thought I would marry someone from the wine industry. Maybe it was destined. Gina and I usually keep business out of our relationship and we have never planned to mix the two things. It's for our daughters to decide now. I leave it to them how they want to take the family business forward," he says

"Continue dreaming," is what he tells me as we draw closer to the end of our pre-event interaction. "The day I stop dreaming, I'll stop existing. I don't think I have achieved everything. There's always more. Life is all about evolution and exploration. And I don't like cracking everything in life. Let some mystery be."