

# NorCal Wine

ARTICLES, WINE REVIEWS & EVENTS BY FRED SWAN

## Indian Wine You'll Enjoy from J'Noon and JCB

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Two weeks ago, I had never seen, let alone tasted, an Indian wine. Now, I've tried three and enjoyed them all. Those wines—one sparkling, one white, and one red—are from J'Noon, a joint venture between [Boisset](#) and [Fratelli Vineyards](#) of India.

### J'Noon Indian Wine

J'Noon are boutique wines. The vines grew from cuttings carefully selected in France. Considerable effort and expense went into their cultivation. Simply getting water to the vineyard required construction of a 10-mile long pipeline. Jean-Charles Boisset himself oversaw wine production and blending. And just 200 cases of each were made.

Clearly, these wines aren't indicative of the current state of Indian wine production overall. However, J'Noon is a compelling and delicious glimpse at what is possible in some parts of India, with the right focus, knowledge, decision-making, and investment. India cannot be dismissed as wholly inhospitable to fine wine production.



## About Indian Wine

The first Indian wine was made thousands of years ago, when grapes and vinification were introduced by ancient Persians. Indian wine faces both climatic and social challenges though. Generally, only those latitudes between 30 and 50 degrees are favorable for fine wine production. Much of India is considerably more tropical. That can bring heat, humidity and rainfall well beyond levels which *vitis vinifera* vines enjoy. Indian vineyards also suffered from phylloxera along with the rest of the wine-growing world.

The popularity, and even legality, of drinking wine in India has varied substantially over the centuries. Both Buddhist and Islamic doctrine have discouraged alcohol consumption, though abstinence wasn't always maintained. Colonial occupiers, particularly the English and Dutch, generated demand and supplemented imported wines with domestic production. But, when India gained independence, its constitution mandated prohibition.

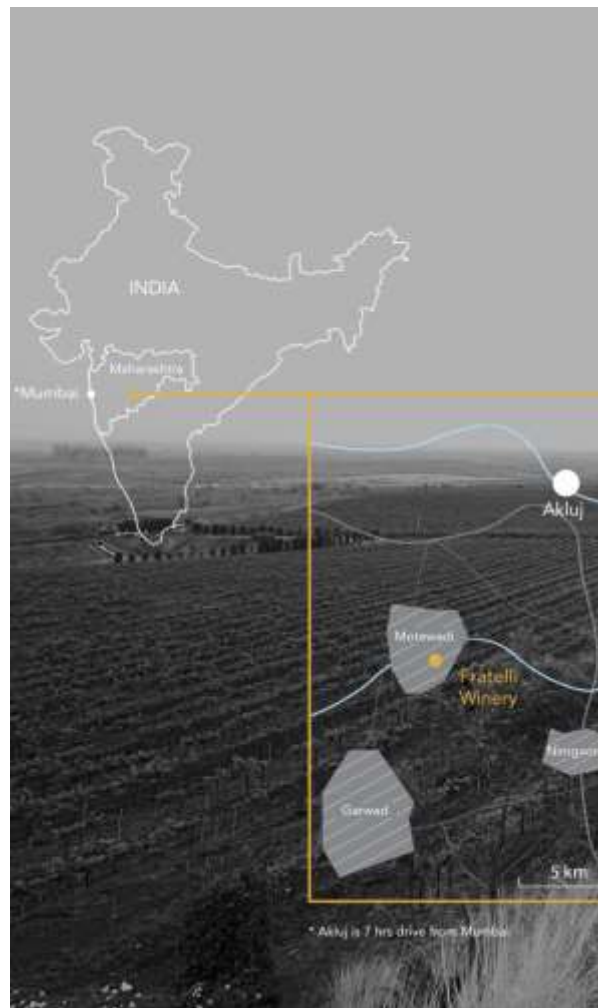
Beginning in the 1980s, as some Indians became both more prosperous and integrated with the Western business and culture, interest in wine increased. There are still many people in India who abstain entirely, but prohibition was repealed throughout the country as of 1998. Since then, Indian wine consumption has been increasing rapidly, including double-digit growth in recent years. There are roughly 70 producers in India today, but just five of those account for 90% of all Indian wine. The top vintner, Sula, represents about 25%. One study predicts total Indian wine production will exceed 2.3 million cases this year.

The vast majority of Indian wine is consumed domestically. Exports are growing though and about 10% of total production goes to other countries. The top markets for Indian wine are Malaysia, UAE, Bhutan, Germany, UK, Sri Lanka, Maldives and New Zealand.

## Fratelli Vineyards

Fratelli, which began as an importer of European wine, owns three vineyards in India. Its winery, located adjacent to one of their vineyards near the village of Motewadi, southeast of Mumbai, has a 600,000 liter capacity. They cultivate twelve grape varieties, all *vitis vinifera*, sourced from France and Italy. Fratelli makes several lines of wines, some under the guidance of Piero Masi. Stephen Spurrier contributes to one project as well.

The vineyards are located in a rain shadow created by the Western Ghats, a coastal mountain range. This drastically reduces rainfall and actually makes irrigation necessary. Daytime temperatures during the growing season average 90°. However, the vineyards reach 2,100' of altitude, resulting in a diurnal shift of 40° or more. So, despite being around 18° latitude, the area is hospitable to wine-growing.



I tasted the three J'Noon wines at a dinner party hosted by Jean-Charles Boisset and Gina Gallo at their home in Napa Valley. It was a launch party for the wine and a celebration of Indian food and high-quality farming. I was fortunate to sit next to Kapil Sekhri, the proprietor of Fratelli Vineyards. It was a perfect opportunity to learn about the wines and the first time they'd been tasted in the United States.

I liked each of the wines, but the environment wasn't appropriate for formal reviews, so my notes don't include scores.

### **JCB No. 47 Brut Sparkling Wine, \$50**

This is a single-vineyard wine made entirely from Chardonnay, using the traditional method. The base wine was fermented in French oak barrels, giving the final product a richer, more vinous character than many sparkling wines. The combination of barrel and bottle aging totaled 24 months.

JCB No. 47 is very juicy in the mouth with an attractive mousse and lengthy finish. Aromas and flavors are generous and include bruised yellow apple, dried lemongrass and white flowers, honey and toasted pistachio.

The name is a reference to 1947, the year India declared independence.

### **2016 J'Noon White Wine \$40**

This 60-40 blend of Chardonnay and Sauvignon Blanc aged for 12 months in a combination of French oak barrels and stainless steel tank. The palate is medium-bodied and gently mouthwatering. Flavors and aromas include uncut yellow apples, dry grass, fried lemon, and dry spices, especially turmeric. It will pair very well with mild dishes with exotic spice, such as chicken korma and vegetables or white fish lightly flavored with saffron.

### **2015 J'Noon Red Wine, \$60**

The blend is 57.5% Cabernet Sauvignon and 4% Sangiovese with the balance a mix of Petit Verdot and Marselan. [Marselan is a modern cross of Cabernet Sauvignon and Grenache Noir devised to thrive in the Languedoc.] The grapes came from Fratelli's Garwar vineyard which has sandy and rocky soils. The wine aged 24 months in a combination of French oak and stainless steel tank.

J'Noon Red is dark red in the glass and very aromatic with a beguiling melange of dark chocolate, earth spice, dried violets, coffee and cinnamon. Those same notes are rich on the palate as well. Body is medium-plus with plenty of fine-grained tannins well-balanced by acidity. The finish is long and delicious. It's worth every bit \$60 and then some.

Since only 200 cases of each wine were made, and only a fraction of that was delivered to the US, availability is very limited. Get it, while it lasts, from the JCB tasting room in Yountville.

Other Boisset-related wines were poured that evening. They included a new sparkling brut, **2015 DeLoach Le Royal**, made with fruit from the Charles Heintz Vineyard in Green Valley of Russian River Valley, the 2015 JCB No. 76 Chardonnay, and 2012 No. 3 Pinot Noir, which is a blend of Burgundian and Russian River wines. I wasn't able to take notes on the crisp and enjoyable brut.

### **2015 JCB No. 76 Chardonnay, Napa Valley, \$76**

This Chardonnay is based on fruit from several different vineyards in Napa Valley. Jean Charles' goal was to produce a wine that suggested the combination of richness and finesse common to Chardonnay from Meursault or Montrachet and I think he achieved that. The name is an homage to the famous Paris Tasting of 1976.

JCB No. 76 offers creamy yellow apple and pear with baking spice on the nose. It's very flavorful on the palate with sweet cream, vanilla, nutmeg, custard, poached pear and toast. The mouthfeel is lovely—soft and delicate, yet juicy and mouth-filling.

### **2012 JCB No. 3 Pinot Noir, \$123**

Just 257 cases of this wine were made. 53% of the fruit came from Burgundy and the balance from Russian River Valley. I've tried this wine before and always liked it, but its drinking especially well now—mouthwatering and very long on the palate with extremely fine, sophisticated tannins and flavors of baking spices, caramelized red cherry and dried orange peel.

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