

LUXURY

JCB talks chakras and chardonnay



Anoothi Vishal

MARCH 09, 2018 14:46 IST

UPDATED: MARCH 09, 2018 16:39 IST



Flamboyant vintner Jean-Charles Boisset’s collaboration with Fratelli is all set to make Indian wine a luxury experience

Despite tales of his sparkly Tom Ford suits, Louboutins and self-designed gold brooches (on the day I meet him, he is wearing a design called “Gina’s lips” on his lapel, inspired ostensibly by wifely *bisous*), I am still not prepared for Jean-Charles Boisset’s flamboyance. When I meet him the evening after Holi, the festival of colours that marks Delhi’s spring, he has had quite a colourful celebration at the home of Kapil Sekhri, co-founder of Fratelli wines. He enthusiastically shows me pictures of the bash as we settle down for what I am

MORE-IN

The Hindu Weekend

assuming is going to be a serious interview on his business and wine.

Made in India

Boisset, 48, is one of the world’s best-known vintners, proprietor of Boisset Collection, France’s third-largest wine company, with an empire that stretches from Burgundy to California. He has flown down to launch three made-in-India wines – the result of a collaboration with Sekhri.

Fratelli, with the second-largest distribution in the country, had earlier tied up with him to retail some of his existing labels at hotels in India since last year. The new wines, however, are more personal – the result of Boisset tinkering around in the company’s cellars in Akhluj, tasting, blending and getting inspired by India. The collaboration is what I can only describe as Indian-French-Californian: wine made in French styles from Indian grapes, marketed in a decidedly splashy New World way.

To go under the label J’Noon – a French take on the Urdu word for ‘passion’ – these will be part of Boisset’s premium JCB collection, and are being launched not just in India but in the US and the UK as well. The idea is to market Indian wine as a luxury product globally, and with Boisset backing them, a lot of attention is to be expected. I have come prepared for a serious discussion on these lines, but I am in for a surprise.

When I tell him that I have prepped, he grins and says so has he – and knows all about my love life! I hastily correct the course of this conversation and ask him about the unusual choice of having only chardonnay in the made-in-Akhluj, sparkling JCB no 47, considering most Indian sparklings tend to be made with chenin blanc (a grape thought to do better in our warmer climes). And that’s when he takes me through a wine tasting via the yogic chakras.

The kundalini energy rises from the root, red chakra, allowing you to experience the terroir of the wine, and moves through the chakras synchronising with the wine’s “vitality, potential for pleasure, balance, emotional vision, resonance, symbolism and perception” to the crown chakra that lets us empathise with it. It is the most entertaining tasting I have ever done, far removed from usual rituals of swirl, sniff, mouth and spit. He clearly is smitten with India, and India may just be with him.

A nose for business

Despite his clowning, Boisset is known in the world of wine as a sharp businessman and ace marketer. The Boisset Collection includes 24 wineries in France, California and Canada, thanks to his acumen. For the last decade and a half he has been on a shopping spree, buying up vineyards and wineries in Napa, Sonoma and in France, where the purchase of rival giant Skalli was a feather in his metaphoric cap.

These acquisitions aside, it is also about Boisset's unconventional marketing ideas – putting jewellery on wine bottles, putting wine in tetrapacks (he was the first to do it in America), and naming his labels as numbers, quite like Chanel No 5. Not to forget coming up with decadent tasting lounges offering unique experiences to potential customers, including a wine bath with a blend marking his year of birth and “sensuality”, as he tells me (JCB 69).

We discuss the necessity for more engaging wine tourism in India as well. Though it may contribute less than five percent of revenues to a big company, cellar door sales are trendy, and he is firmly of the opinion that these are essential because the customers experience the entire culture around wine. “Wine is about emotions and feelings, and for oeno-tourism it is essential to engage with customers at that level,” he says. Unlike in the past when big wine companies in India had tended to focus on value, in the last few years, the accent has shifted to the upper end of the spectrum. These new wines will be the most expensive yet to emerge from the country (*see box*).

Desi terroir

- JCB and Kapil Sekhri co-own the brand of the new made-in-India luxe wines, J'Noon. This is only the third collaborative for the Boisset Collection, after ones in France and Canada. The limited edition (only 2,400 bottles of each variety are being produced) wines have to be pre-ordered.
- JCB 47
- 100% chardonnay, brut
- Named after the year of India's independence, this one is an unusual blanc de blanc sparkling, made from single-vineyard chardonnay from Motewadi. Despite a dosage of eight, the wine is dry, rich with tropical fruit and a toasty after taste. The wine was barrel fermented in French oak barrels before the secondary fermentation. ₹3,500

To draw attention to India as a maker of all things luxury and change the perception around Indian wine, Boisset plans to launch the three new wines in California in June, with Napa collectors, buyers, restaurateurs and the global wine media in attendance. “We need to think top-end when we think of Indian wine and by going global, people will start associating it with top quality,” adds Sekhri.

Boisset, meanwhile, is scribbling in my notebook. “J'nine (June 9) for J'Noon,” he writes, as the global launch date. Hopefully, it will be a significant one for Indian wine.

weekend@thehindu.co.in

- J'Noon White

- 60% Chardonnay, 40% Sauvignon Blanc
-

- In the style of Pouilly Fuisse and white wines of the northern Rhone Valley, this one is a barrel-aged chardonnay and sauvignon blanc blend with notes of green apple, white pepper and jasmine. ₹2,500
-

- J'Noon Red

- Cabernet Sauvignon 57.5%, Petit Verdot / Marcellan 38.5%, Sangiovese 4%
-

- An unusual blend, this spent 24 months in French oak barrels and stainless steel tanks. You can taste the structure of the cabernet sauvignon and the luscious flavours of black fruits of the petit verdot and sangiovese. Full bodied, dry, with a long finish. ₹4,000