

VIKRAM
ACHANTA

Passion Meets Inspiration

This new Indian wine could be a winner globally



I HAD THE GOOD FORTUNE MANY YEARS AGO, TO be associated with Girish Mhatre, an NRI entrepreneur who was driven by the idea that he would produce the most exquisite wines India had to offer and with a price to match, with Good Earth's Concerto Collection, priced at a then jaw-dropping Rs 1,000 and up. Girish's wines, thoughtfully blended by winemaker Rajesh Rasal at a 3rd party winery, were no doubt excellent, but his plans could not come to fruition.

It was déjà vu when a few nights ago, I was at the launch of another Indian wine with similar ambitions and eye-popping prices. The difference however being that this time around, it's chances of success appear to be markedly different, coming as it does from a collaboration between one of India's newest and most well-regarded wineries, Fratelli, and Jean Charles Boisset, the "James Bond" of the wine industry, whose

eponymous empire straddles from Napa to France, with Nashik now a part of it.

At the launch, Jean Charles mentioned that he was so taken with the wines at Fra-

telli's winery, that they spent eight hours blending, with such results that Kapil Sekhri, a Fratelli partner, chose to forsake his next morning's cup of coffee for a glass of wine. It was this, which made Jean Charles aware of the potential of producing a world-class wine from Indian terroir, and inspired the two partners to produce something special, which would also discover the luxury side of India. And what better name for the wine than J'NOON, because as their tag line reads, "When passion meets inspiration an obsession is born."

Kapil is part of one of the three sets of families (two Indian and one Italian), who give Fratelli their name (Fratelli is Italian for brothers) and it's therefore appropriate that J'NOON has three variants. The first wine we tasted that evening was JCB No 47, a 100 per cent Chardonnay Brut, a single vineyard sparkling wine named in honour of the year of India's independence. We reluctantly move on from a couple of flutes of the Brut to the J'NOON white, a seductive blend of Chardonnay and Sauvignon Blanc, finally ending with the J'NOON red, a wine which is "powerful and obsessional". The price you ask? ₹3,500 for the bubbly, ₹2,500 for the white and ₹4,000 for the red.

J'NOON'S three wines are being released in limited bottlings of 2,400 bottles each, and one senses that apart from adding cachet to Fratelli's portfolio, it's just the tip of the iceberg for the partnership. An opening gambit perhaps for JC Boisset to see what this sally might bring. And it wouldn't be surprising to see another range of wines from their collaboration take shape a few months down the line, at more modest prices, but riding of the cachet of this launch.

A good 30 per cent of the bottles have been reserved for the international markets. The first global test is going to be when, in keeping with its name, it is launched on June 9th in Napa valley, which will quickly be followed by launches in the UK and France.

Tasting Notes

- ❖ **JCB No 47** Prominent mineral notes with aromas of green apple, tropical fruit and brioche.
- ❖ **J'NOON White** Combines green apple, white pears and stone fruit flavours of Chardonnay with fresh, vibrant lime, lemongrass, white pepper, jasmine and herbaceous fruit flavours of Sauvignon Blanc.
- ❖ **J'NOON Red** Luscious flavours of black fruits with structured tannins, a full body and a long silky finish.

Vikram Achanta is co-founder and CEO of Tulleeho, a drinks training and consulting firm and Bar X, a bar products start-up