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WHINE ABOUT WINE?


By Lopa Patel (29 August 2003).



Hummph ...so Peter May in his article '[Wine for Curry](#)' (22 July 2003) finds it hard to "visualise beer drinkers I know foregoing pint mugs of amber nectar for stemmed glasses of sparkling wine. I am also doubtful that people who already choose wine will be tempted by ones served ice cold that have less flavour". Well pardon me for referring to this matter but the words "beer drinkers" and "choice of wine" can hardly sit in the same paragraph as far as curry houses are

concerned. Add in the word "laydeez" and suddenly a new picture presents itself.

OK, let me make this simple. Hands up all you ladies who drink beer?

MYSTERY OBJECT
 What's this? [Next Clue](#). [Answer](#).

Frankly I can't stand the stuff - curry or no curry, beer is not on my drinking list. In the average curry house in the UK, this leaves the choice of a spirit, like gin and tonic, fruit juice, lassi or water. One can hardly spend any time perusing the wine list simply because either there isn't one, or it's a toss up between chardonnay or chardonnay.

CAN'T COOK?
["...Give us this day our daily bread"](#)? Not likely if you can't cook! But help is at hand to learn the art of making [rotis](#).

Up to now it has been assumed that Asian ladies are too shy to consume wine in public or that there aren't any suitable wines for curry. Well I am happy to report that both these assumptions are wrong. The primary reason so little wine is consumed in curry houses is simply because there isn't a decent enough choice.

FEATURED RECIPE
 Impress your friends with this simple, yet delicious [fish starter](#) dish.

It was refreshing, therefore to come across 'Wines for Spice', a new venture by financial services consultant Warren Edwardes. An Anglo-India of Goan descent, Warren and his Spanish-born wife have a small vineyard in the Figueres area of Spain, north of Barcelona in the Catalonia region.

FEATURED PRODUCT
 If you can't live without a cup of masala chai, then spice up your life in an instant with these [Spiced Tea Bags](#).

"I normally drink a cold beer or sparkling water with curries.", says Warren Edwardes. The idea for 'wines for spice' came to him whilst he was sipping a spritzer - a glass of white wine mixed with sparkling water - and trying to come up with a solution to a finance problem. "It occurred to me that a naturally fermented semi-sparkling or spritzzy young wine with not as much fizz as Champagne and Cava would add a zing and bring out the flavours of Asian food. But not aerated wines as the gas soon fizzes out or those sickly drinks that taste like fizzy



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BREADS

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[Parathas \(plain\)](#)
[Parathas \(methi\)](#)
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sweetened grape juice".

CURRY & WINE

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I have to agree. A fully aerated 'Freixenet' or cava ruins the taste of food and Champagne, apart from being hideously expensive, gives me a headache! Trying to order a genuine spritzer in a restaurant is also like playing Russian roulette with your taste buds. And don't even get me started on the gut rot that is often called "house" wine.

With an open mind, Edwardes tasted an extensive range of such wines including Northern Portuguese Vinho Verdes, Italian Frizzantes and Lambruscos, German Spritzigs and French Cremant, Pétillant and Perlant wines. In Northern Spain, Edwardes found Vino de Aguja, literally "needle" wines with a prickly sparkle, just tingling and fresh on the tongue.

He decided that these natural "semi-sparkling" wines (according to European Union regulations), produced without the addition of carbon dioxide, were the basis of what he was looking for with the appropriate balance of quality, sparkle, acidity, alcohol and sugar content.

The "semi-sparkling" category also has an impact on the tax levied and determines the final price the consumer will pay - naturally sparkling being cheaper than sparkling. This point, of course, brings to mind another whine about wine - the cost. Why do restaurants in the UK charge such ridiculous sums of money for wine? A £4.99 bottle in the Supermarket is often charged at £15 in a restaurant.

Perhaps learning from our continental cousins and making wine less expensive would help increase its consumption in restaurants. In France, Italy and Spain the differential in the cost of wine in shops and restaurants is far less. A pricing model that the UK's 8,500 curry houses would do well to emulate, because for me curry & wine go together like well..."curry & wine"!

WINE FOR SPICE

Edwardes worked closely with the producer of the pre-eminent Spanish brand of "semi-sparkling" wines - to develop a range exclusively from traditional local grapes in Girona, Spain. He commissioned Raja Rosé™, Viceroy White™ and Rani Gold™ as the first wines for Wine for Spice. The wines, although designed to blend with curries and spicy food, are also suitable for everyday drinking on their own or with snacks such as Bombay Mix, Samosas, or Papadums.



"Neither oaky flavours nor tannin seem to go well with spicy food. They are both avoided in these wines. Whilst a hot sweet tea is often drunk with curries in India, the tannin present in full bodied red wine is exaggerated by spicy food and oaky wines just clash with it", Edwardes explained. In my personal taste test, the Raja Rose seemed most appropriate as an aperitif wine. It's light

texture and tangy bite making it an ideal accompaniment to pickles and papad!

Garnacha and Tempranillo are used in the production of Raja Rosé™, producing a pale ruddy complexion redolent of cherries and plums with well-balanced, clean aromas. Residual sugar content is 9 to 11 grams per litre, so it is "medium dry" according to EU regulations. Raja Rosé also goes well with lamb and pork Tandoori dry dishes and mild curries. Its alcohol content is 11.5% vol.



For the main meal I had expected to prefer the Viceroy White, but found it a little too "light" in texture for my palate. If I had to make a recommendation, I would say that the Viceroy White is a "safe" choice for those less adventurous with their wines. I could also understand some of Peter May's concern about loss of flavour in this wine when it is served chilled, but my only answer would be that with a spicy chicken tandoori or fish tikka, there is probably already a lot going on in the mouth!

Personally I found the cool taste and bubbles in the Viceroy White helped to increase the taste of the food. Pale yellow Viceroy White™ wine is a blend of Macabeo, Parellada and Xarel-lo with hints of green apple and citrus. It is a dry crisp wine with a pleasing taste and fine acidity. Residual sugar content is 0 to 4 grams per litre; therefore it is "dry" according to EU regulations. Warren Edwardes suggests that Viceroy White is a great wine with Chicken and Fish Tandoori, Tikka and mild curries. Its alcohol content is 11.0% vol.



The Rani Gold - redolent with the imagery of the Mughal era, is the one I least expected to like. As a huge fan of Gewurztraminer wine from the Alsace region, I dreaded the idea of "wannabe" Spanish equivalent laden with a sickly syrupy taste. Imagine my surprise then that Rani Gold was actually my favourite! It has none of the floral bouquet of a Gewurztraminer, but the interplay of the Muscat grape with the bubbles makes it a splendidly refreshing, very drinkable wine at any temperature.

Served chilled it would make a terrific aperitif wine for parties and served at room temp, it still slid down my throat very comfortably!

Mediterranean sun-drenched aromatic Rani Gold™ has just a touch of sweetness. Edwardes claims that it is "reminiscent of Alphonso mangoes plucked freshly off a tree and the higher", but whether you accept this analogy or not, Rani Gold is not cloyingly excessive. The sugar content that helps "tame the flames" makes Rani Gold ideal for hotter curries. It has a majority of Muscat in the blend in addition to Macabeo, Parellada and Xarel-lo. Residual sugar content is 19 to 21 grams per litre, so it is "medium" according to EU regulations. Its alcohol content is 11.5% vol.

"My wines are best served cold, at the temperature of a cold beer rather than a wine and in a chilled glass," Edwardes highlighted. "The hint of sparkle provides the ideal alternative to beer. A natural second fermentation produces fine, gentle bubbles in these refreshing fruity wines."

Wine for Spice's wines are being trailed in London and are scheduled to be launched one a month in the UK in September to November 2003. All three wines are to be launched in the UK at a retail price £5.99 including VAT. 'Wine for Spice' will accept direct bookings for parties, weddings and dinners and can be contacted via www.winesforspice.com

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