

## Grover takes a leaf from the French

With Michel Rolland as wine consultant and Ariff Jamal as CEO (both from France) Grover Vineyards aims to make wines the French way



Cultivating wine grapes of the highest quality is a priority at Grover Vineyards along with stringent controls in the winery

Compared to the French who claim to have made wines since the 11th century and boast of an unquestionable level of quality protected by the AOC system respecting the parameters of name, origin and class, Grover Vineyards' history commenced only 24 years ago.

Driven by his passion for wine, Kanwal Grover a pioneer and a visionary, decided to produce wine in India with the aim of putting India on the world map as a wine producing country. Along the way, Grover Vineyards underwent several challenges and revolutionary changes, but never lost sight of its founder's vision.

The first challenge was replacing the cultivation of table grapes with the more traditional grape varieties used for wine. Then five years ago the winery was taken over by Kanwal Grover's son Kapil, who decided to retain Michel Rolland as his French consultant and make wines in the "French Style". Two years ago, Grover took another significant decision by inviting Brindco Sales Limited to the table as investors with the aim of

expanding distribution, but also injecting fresh oxygen into the organization to meet the new aspirations of the Indian wine consumer. In July 2008 Grover took an important step towards realizing his most treasured dream – an Indian winery, entirely run by Indians, making wine from grapes grown in India, the product of international recognition and standards.

To this end Grover engaged Dr Ariff Jamal – a French national based in Burgundy who had helped build Brindco Sales and was instrumental in the exponential growth of imported wines into India – as his Chief Executive Officer. With the help of French consultants lead by Stephane de Saint Salvy as Vice President, Winery, Jamal set out to bring the 2008 vintage to international standards and plan the 2009 harvest by procuring quality grapes for an outstanding vintage.

"The drive towards quality has always been our objective," Kapil Grover said. Good quality grapes make a good quality wine – this is what I have learnt over the years and it is now time to prove to the world that India, too, can be counted among the leading wine producers.

“It is not my intention to compete against either the ‘old world’ or the ‘new world’, but I wish Grover Vineyards Limited (GVL) to be a leader in the segment of the *future* world. Our winery deals directly with over 25 farmers in Bangalore, Bijapur, Solaphur and Sangli. The supply of grapes is vital for the quality of the final product and I have confidence in Dr Jamal who is driving the local team to achieve this result.”

**W**ith the help of Dr V S Patil, plant physiologist, who has been with Grover Vineyards for a number of years, Dr Jamal is making sure that farmers are being educated and trained, and offered technical advice to help them cultivate wine grapes of the highest quality, with the assurance of a long term tie up and guarantee of purchase. Simultaneously, the winery staff is being trained in the art of ‘receiving’ the harvest, followed by proper vinification and ageing. Dr Jamal has modernized the winery’s operations and general running, raising the level of hygiene and winemaking.

“In order to maintain high standards,” Dr Jamal said, “a great deal of time and effort has gone into training the staff, both in the vineyards and the winery, which re-opened in September last year.

“New and sophisticated machinery has been installed, and the great distances covered from the vineyards to the winery in hot, daytime temperatures have been compensated for by harvesting in the late afternoon before sunset. Refrigerated containers transport the grapes overnight and the crush in the winery takes place before sunrise.”

**The 2009 harvest** This year’s harvest is estimated to be roughly between 1,000 to 1,200 tons to meet Grover’s requirement for vinification in Bangalore and Sangli, and the needs of the domestic and international market. Wine grapes ripen between August and September and yield after February – a long cycle which does not allow the plant to rest. Unlike European countries that have a winter period of dormancy, the challenge in India is that there is no rest for the plant. Summer is so hot that the ‘must’ or fermented grape juice has to be kept in an air-conditioned environment around 0° C to ensure proper vinification. The air-conditioning which consumes a vast amount of diesel is very expensive.

Having monitored the vines from budding and flowering to cane management, along with Dr Patil and in close

cooperation with Stephane de Saint Salvy, Dr Jamal declared the Sauvignon Blanc harvest in Sangli on January 25, 2009, only after the quality parameters of sugar, pH levels and acid had reached the optimum. He was surprised to note that in Bijapur the Cabernet was ready to pick before the white grapes and therefore began the crush on February 10. The white grapes in the farms around Bangalore (which is approximately 600 kilometers south of Bijapur) ripened only by the beginning of March. “It was a long but not terribly hot season,” noted Dr Patil. “We obtained great ripeness.”

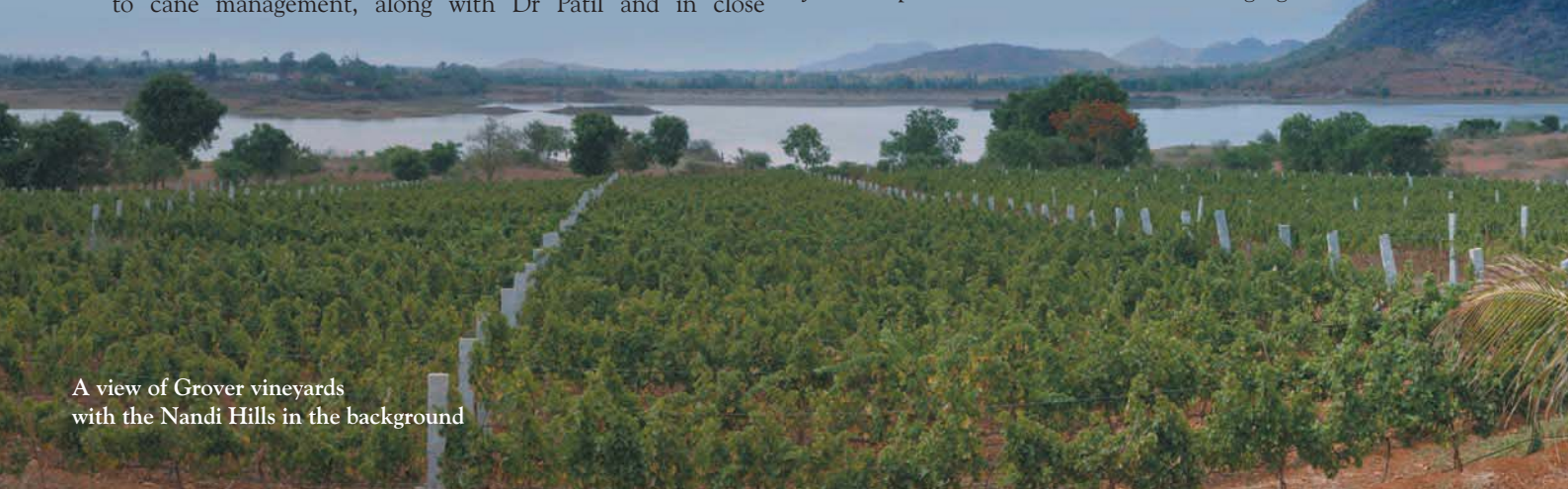
“Although the Cabernet took a beating this year,” said Stephane de Saint Salvy. It still looks absolutely gorgeous and promising, especially from Sangli. It has beautiful flavour and colour. I am pleasantly surprised at the rich fruit.

“The terroir in Bangalore favours the production of white grapes, due also to the excellent climatic conditions. I am sure the 2009 vintage for Sauvignon Blanc and Viognier will express the exotic tendency which India promises. The Cabernet and Syrah wines show great potential to age in barrels, which will provide for a magnificent La Reserve. However, there is still a long way to go in the vineyards. This is a never-ending task.”

Talking about the harvest, one of the farmers commented, “GVL has been ruthless with us this year. But they demonstrated their eagerness to obtain quality grapes with punctual visits and advice. They forced us to drop grapes at green harvest, and even more demanding, they conducted a pre-harvest selection before the actual harvest. Yields per acre have dropped substantially. They are also concentrating on bunch management per vine. This approach was very difficult for us to understand, but we know that the market is becoming more demanding and to compete with imported wines the local producers need to stand out in quality. So, we farmers need to support producers in their drive for modern new practices in the vineyards.”

GVL is determined to set a new pace in the Indian wine industry and the outcome of their efforts is already seen in the recently launched Art Collection Series 2008. Vintage 2009 also promises to be a good one.

When asked how he compared the Indian harvest to that of the French which he has conducted for over 20 years, Dr Jamal responded with one word – Challenging! 🚩



A view of Grover vineyards with the Nandi Hills in the background