



SHOBANARAYAN

counters the ennui and challenges resulting from Covid by drinking more and better wine at home

Drinking wine in the age of Covid

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The joke about the lockdown was, of course, how all our wine supplies depleted rapidly. Here in Bangalore in between zoom calls, oenophiles shared photos and compared tasting notes about varietals from the new and old world wines of course, but also new regions like Israel and Slovenia. We have all been drinking very well – at home.

I opened a 1997 Latour last week in honour of a friend whom we hadn't seen in a while. The other wines that I have been drinking were a 2012 Stag's Leap 'Artemis' Cabernet Sauvignon which was beautifully balanced with scents of fennel, berries, licorice and spices although I didn't much like the Stag's Leap Karia Chardonnay 2012. I opened several bottles of a 2015 Cloudy Bay, which I felt had sadly gone the way of all great brands that have been bought by large corporates. Somehow, they manage to squeeze the soul out of these lovely wines in the name of increased scale and efficiency. A 2004 Dominus (Christian Moueix) red from Napa Valley was quite wonderful and I

savoured each of the five bottles I bought. I had to decant this wine overnight and thank god I did. The cork was falling off these bottles, so I was thrilled the wine was okay. It was rich and dense with scents of leather and cedar smoke. Very earthy yet so fine.

In between emptying my personal stash, I also participated in wine events. The Bangalore Wine Club (BWC) held two events, which were both oversubscribed. What's not to like? We got food and wine sent to our homes and sat on a zoom call to savour our tippie.

The first events had two Chilean wines: a Cosecha Chardonnay and a Merlot. We spoke to the winemaker on a zoom call and got food from Blue Ginger at the Taj West End. While we sampled fresh Asian appetizers, we swirled the Chardonnay and moved on to the Merlot (which would soon become my everyday wine for a while. I ordered a case of it after the event).

The second BWC event took us to New Zealand, where we sampled Brancott Estate's Sauvignon Blanc and Pinot Noir, both belonging to the 2018 vintage. Alongside, we

got a spread of hors d'oeuvres from the Ritz Carlton with Christmas cake, if you please. If you like the herbaceous quality of New Zealand's Sauvignon Blancs, then these fall right down the middle. Chill and drink. The same with the Pinot Noirs, which have a light touch, somewhat like the Pinots of Willamette Valley in Oregon.

The French Consulate of Bangalore organized a wonderful virtual Diwali celebration with the same format. They partnered with chefs from a French firm, Elier who created a delicious spread of dishes – all French with an Indian touch. The wines we had were a 2011 Pontet Canet (Grand Cru) from Pauillac. I loved this wine, perhaps even more than the 1997 Latour I mentioned earlier, but then 1997 was a tough year in Bordeaux even for the big Five. Pontet Canet has many fans, partly because it has been sustainable and biodynamic for years and also because Alfred Tesseron, the owner, venerates the soil and terroir more than he does technique.

The other wine that we had during the Diwali celebration, while chatting with Francophiles from all over Bangalore, was a Saint-Emilion. It was like a salon, a "dining room filled with friends," as Consul-General Marjorie Vanbaelinghem called it.

My only grouse with all the three events was the packaging of the food, which is really no one's fault. Chefs need to keep sauces and condiments separate, so in all these at-home dinners you get a whole bunch of tiny cardboard boxes (each marked of course) but which end up taking over your dining table. Was there a way to simplify the food, I wondered? Maybe send a one-pot dish with the wine instead of an array of separate containers. But this is just a small quibble.

In a difficult time like this, it feels special and precious to drink good wine and eat delicious food from the comfort of your home. The fact that you can commune with like-minded



Winemaker Anvay Sawant with wines for the "Tastin' France" event in Bangalore

oenophiles is just icing on the proverbial cake.

The last event in Bangalore was a tasting organized by Business France – their annual "Tastin' France" held at the Shangri-La hotel. This year, eight producers of wine, champagne and cognac showcased their wares. Standouts were Champagne Andre Heucq, Edmond Rentz Pinot Gris (they also had a Riesling which wasn't to my taste), and 2016 Château Moulin de Ferrand with a Bordeaux blend from a vineyard that is organic and en route to becoming biodynamic, said Anvay Sawant, the winemaker who was present. We also tasted a lovely red from Château La Coste 2019 and a Pont de Gassac 2018. Whether these wines will become available in India depends on the interest taken by distributors, some of whom were present that day.

And finally, just in time for New Year, Fratelli sent over a sampling of their Tilt wine-in-cans. For all of us who have teenage kids, these low-alcohol wine-in-cans offers the cool factor. The Spotify playlist sent along with the wines was a nice touch.

So whether you are drinking a Dom Perignon, a Château Palmer or a wine-in-can this New Year, the main thing is to stay safe. *Happy New Year! Salut! Feliz Navidad!*

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