

plonk, it would be interesting to see if winemakers in Italy, Spain, and Germany were using similar tactics, and with similar results.

Zachary Nowak
Harvard University
znowak@umbra.org
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PETER CSIZMADIA-HONIGH: *The Wines of India: A Concise Guide*. The Press Publishing Ltd, London, 2015, 452 pp., ISBN: 978-0993035913 (paperback), £25.00 (only direct from www.thewinesofindia.com or from www.amazon.co.uk).

There are at least three different kinds of wine guides one might imagine for a new wine country such as India: a traveler's guide for exploring wine regions of India; a taster's guide for finding the best among available wines if you live in, or happen to be visiting, India; and a wine guide for those acquainted with and knowledgeable about more established wine regions. This guide accomplishes each of these to some extent, but each imperfectly.

As a traveler's guide, the book does a good job of getting the key information across: where the wine regions of India are and where the wineries are located. But it does less well in other practical information that a visitor would want such as contact information, visiting hours (if such even exist), and suggested itineraries. Wine tourism is a nascent industry in India, but it does exist. Sula, one of the largest Indian wineries, now runs its own resort. The days of wine crawls through Nashik or northern Karnataka are probably not that far in the future. In its current form, this guide does an admirable job of telling who and where, but less so how.

As a taster's guide, Csizmadia-Honigh takes an admirable first stab at imposing some order on the wine chaos of India. And a wine chaos it is. Because of India's state-driven wine and liquor production and distribution rules it is impossible even in large Indian cities to find a consistent cross-section of India's better wineries. What is worth trying and what best avoided is basic but valuable information, and you will find it in this guide. Csizmadia-Honigh categorizes producers by a star rating (one to five) and then rates individual wines on a 20-point scale. Notwithstanding lengthy digressions on the criteria and the inherent subjectivity of wine ratings, the rankings, while useful, are rather opaque: Is a 17.5 meaningfully better than a 17.3? Setting aside subjectivity, without tasting notes or basic descriptions it is impossible to tell. To find them, you end up flipping between different sections of the book. But Csizmadia-Honigh has provided enough information to point you to the upper end of the wine list if you happen to find yourself in India and wish to drink local wine.

As a guide for those trying to understand Indian wines, Csizmadia-Honigh's guide has both strengths and weaknesses. He does an excellent job establishing both the big picture of the Indian wine industry and a plethora of fine-grained details. The contemporary Indian wine industry began in the mid-1980s with Chateau Indage and Grover Vineyard, and then really took off in the 2000s, with the arrival of Sula, which remains along with Grover, one of the big players, at least in quantity, today. One of the challenges in the Indian context was, and remains, that wine production is regulated at the state level, and states either prohibited production (with total alcohol prohibition in some instances) or did not offer clear guidance. Maharashtra was the first state to create an explicit policy in 2001, followed by Madhya Pradesh and Tamil Nadu in 2006 and Karnataka in 2007. Whether by cause or effect, many new wineries took off in this period, with 42 wineries in operation by 2015, centered mainly in Maharashtra and Karnataka. The same period saw the arrival of international houses, including Pernod Ricard and Moët Hennessy. As the numbers suggest, despite its rapid growth, the Indian wine industry remains small, cultivating approximately 2,300 hectares (indeed tiny for example compared to the more than 40,000 hectares under cultivation in Bordeaux).

Csizmadia-Honigh does an even better job in his review of the viticultural challenges and choices in South Asia. The chief challenge in India is the full-year growth cycle, which is a blessing for bulk but less conducive to quality production. As a result, winemakers in India use only the winter growth, discard grapes from other seasons, and prune heavily, resulting in yields comparable to international growers. Although India was initially known internationally for its ripe reds, as the guide documents much experimentation has occurred with whites as well, with notable success in sparkling wine.

What the guide does less well in addressing is the elephant in the room: How do Indian wines compare to their counterparts in other global regions? Living or travelling in India, the question is moot: With high excise taxes on wine, domestic bottles cost around \$15 and imported bottles begin at twice that price for wines that in the United States would be little better than jug wines. But setting aside the question of price: Do these wines achieve a level of quality that make them worth the attention? At a higher level, do they express their terroir and the winemaker's vision with subtlety and sophistication? The guide rates two wineries (KRSMA and SDU, both from Karnataka) as five-star, and another 12 (Alpine, Soma, Chandon, Four Seasons, Fratelli, Grover, Nine Hills, Reveilo, Sula, Vallonné, and York) as four-star.

How good are their wines? Csizmadia-Honigh's decision to use a 20-point scale in his ratings hints at his reluctance to tackle a direct comparison head on. Is a Charosa Viognier at 17.7 points really in the same ballpark as an 88.5 point Robert Parker rated wine? Even with this reviewer's limited knowledge and the inherent challenge in such comparisons, I am inclined to believe that the answer is no. Nonetheless, the relative rankings of the wineries and wines are useful starting points, pending a Judgement of Nashik.

But rather than to damn with faint praise, the goal here is the opposite: to praise with faint damnation, both Csizmadia-Honigh's guide and the Indian wineries he so enthusiastically catalogs. As we know from other new and non-traditional wine regions, ranging from South Africa to New Jersey, progress is measured in decades rather than years. And by this standard the progress that Csizmadia-Honigh documents is impressive: from non-existence to plausible, drinkable wines in less than 20 years in most instances. Of course, it is the next non-incremental step that would be the most exciting: to something truly spectacular and uniquely Indian. In this evolving setting, Csizmadia-Honigh's guide is ultimately best seen as a useful reference book: providing an historical and contextual overview, a point-in-time snapshot, and a useful geographical and quality grouping of wineries. While all 440 pages of this guide are unlikely to accompany me on my next trip to India, selected pages certainly will.

Rajeev Dehejia
New York University
rd875@nyu.edu
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