



'Brothers' passion translated into Fratelli

It was many moons back when Kapil Sekhri, one of the promoters of Fratelli Wines, had invited Spiritz Group Editor Bishan Kumar and Editor Shalini Kumar for a tour to his vineyards and winery. Time flew and this generous invite faded from their memory, but not from Kapil's. About a month back they got a reminder from Abhishek Haryson, Senior Manager of Fratelli, and this time the editors ensured they honour the long pending invite. **Bishan Kumar** shares his exhilarating journey to Fratelli winery and vineyards in Akluj, near Pune.

Catching early morning flight from Delhi airport is always a hassle for us (Are we getting old?). And, then the prospect of being on

the road for about three and half hours from the Pune airport to reach Fratelli winery in Akluj town was not exactly thrilling.

However, after traversing uncountable miles on the Pune–Solapur highway number 9, followed by bumpy rides of about 30 km on dusty roads of

spread-out villages, our perseverance was most suitably rewarded as soon as we entered a very tastefully done Fratelli winery at Motewadi village. The beautiful façade of a modern structure announcing 'Fratelli' in big, bold letters and well-manicured green lawns around the winery were a calming balm to our weary souls.

Even before our vehicle stopped at the winery's main entrance, a couple of Fratelli boys led by mild-mannered Winery Manager Babulal Thakur were

there to take us to the first floor where the four-room guest house is located. While we were freshening up, a knock at the door announced that the lunch was ready. Quite surprising that the guest house has no door bells and no lock on the room doors! We were assured to leave our door unlocked and move to the sprawling dining-cum-lounging room.

While resting after a piping hot well spread lunch, I went through the available material to delve into the

history of Fratelli wines.

INDO-ITALIAN DREAM OF SIX BROTHERS

Fratelli is an Indo-Italian dream realized by six brothers from three families – one from Italy and two from India, aided by Piero Masi, a renowned Italian winemaker from Tuscany. The brothers are Alessio & Andrea Secci from Italy, Ranjitsinh & Arjunsinh Mohite-Patil from Maharashtra, and Kapil & Gaurav Sekhri from Delhi. The name Fratelli, which in





Italian means brothers, is just apt for the brothers' venture. Also the circle in the Fratelli logo signifies life and unity, while the seven segments denote the seven partners behind the project.

What brought these seven people together was the common passion of creating high-quality wines with grapes harvested from their own vineyards by following Italian wine-making traditions. Their desire was to be a game-changer in the Indian wine scene. And, the mark they have made in a short time is a reflection their assiduous efforts to achieve their goal.

The seven pillars of Fratelli have their jobs cut out. The Seccis look after the vineyards and the wineries, the Sekhri

brothers, operating from Delhi, are in charge of the finance and marketing aspects, and the Mohite-Patils oversee infrastructure and production

But how these three diverse families actually met? The story goes that Kapil Sekhri's family has an old connection with the Secci brothers, Andrea and Alessio. The Secci family had helped in setting up Sekhri's footwear manufacturing company in Europe.

It was in 2006 that the idea about making wine in India was discussed when Sekhri was in Italy. Subsequently, the Seccis introduced Sekhri to Piero Masi. The idea took a concrete shape when Masi agreed to join the venture. Thereafter began the painstakingly slow

process of choosing the right terroir to set up a vineyard.

CREATING VINEYARDS AND WINERY

The Mohite-Patil family, which hails from the Akhuj area and has a huge political clout, helped in identifying some land tracts for the vineyard. After months of soil testing and analysis, the land tracts, totaling 240 acres across three villages in Akhuj – Motewadi, Garwad and Nimgaon – were finalized. Of the selected villages, Motewadi has the vineyard as well as the winery.

Early in 2007, the Fratelli boys started preparing and tilling the selected land to cultivate grapes. The viticultural aspect

was taken care of by Piero Masi. He and his team handpicked about 350,000 wine saplings of 12 grape varieties from France and Italy and planted in the vineyards. The latest irrigation and spraying techniques were used and the 'VSP system' of vine training was adopted to ensure perfect growth of wine saplings. Yields per acre are restricted to half the industry average to ensure that only the best grapes are harvested and the quality of wine held sacrosanct.

Fratelli bottled its first batch of wines in August 2010. Within just five and half years of its inception, the Fratelli brand has performed exceedingly well in the Indian market, expanding its portfolio to about two dozen labels, using famous international varieties like Sauvignon Blanc, Chardonnay, Chenin

Blanc, Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, Shiraz, Sangiovese, Gewürztraminer and Müller-Thurgau.

HUMANE ASPECT OF FRATELLI BUSINESS

We were more than willing to say yes when Babul Thakur asked whether we would like to see the ongoing grape harvesting of the season. A ride through the narrow and rough roads took us to Pesiwadi village where the last crop of Chenin grapes was being harvested under not-so-friendly sun, mainly by women. I was told that these women and men come from neighbouring villages and they are employed by Fratelli almost throughout the year for different kinds of manual work in the vineyards.





Our driver, who also hails from one of these villages, proudly shared with us that the Fratelli family takes care of almost all the needs of these workers, be it medical or educational. The company even supplies water to some villages which face water scarcity in some months. Fratelli's social commitment towards its people is commendable.

The seven boys of Fratelli are not only interested in making good wines but also in bringing a change in the lives of the common people in their neighbourhood. This humane aspect of their business surely makes Fratelli wines more enriching and satisfying for a lot of socially-conscious people.

MAGNIFICENT HUT AT THE SYRAH HILL

We were also driven to the biggest site of Fratelli vineyards in Garwad, which a few years back was almost a neglected land owing to the low availability of water. Fratelli bought about 180 acres of the land from different farmers and landscaped it to get the ideal gradient for vine plantation. The most attractive part of Garwad is a hut almost at the top of the Syrah hill, where guests are served lunch along with wines. From the top, it is an amazing site of green vines on three



Hut at the Syrah hill in Garwad vineyards

sides, with some ponds adding to the charm and hardly any soul in sight. You feel that you are in an oasis, lost in time.

A FIRST – TANKS FROM VELO AT THE WINERY

The imprint of master wine maker Piero Masi is quite evident in the wine making processes and experimentations with grape varieties. Piero is also credited with the creation of the famous 'Chianti Classico Casa Sola'. So refined is his art of winemaking that his wine brand

'Fattoria dell'Agenda' for vintages 2004 and 2006 (100% Cabernet Sauvignon) was sold out even before bottling.

We missed meeting Piero but his able assistant wine maker Vrushal Kedari was a great person to talk to and learn from him about wines and wine making. Vrushal learnt the art and science of wine making in different countries and continents. He is a treasure trove of wine knowledge. He took time out from the on-going crushing to take us around the winery. He also conducted tasting



Assistant wine maker Vrushal Kedari in action

sessions on two consecutive evenings – first for the whites and next for the reds.

The winery has an installed capacity of around 600,000 litres. It is equipped with 58 multi-capacity tanks especially imported from Velo, Italy – a first by any wine company in Asia. The proximity of the winery to the vineyards ensures that once grapes are harvested, they are processed within an hour in an absolutely fresh condition.

The winery has a fully equipped high-tech laboratory for testing wines at each and every stage of the production process.

THE WINES

Vrushal told us that Fratelli wines cover all major international styles – from a dry Chenin Blanc to a late-harvest dessert wine, while maintaining their distinct characteristics which are imparted by the Indian terroir.

Fratelli whites are: Sangiovese Bianco, Chardonnay, Sauvignon Blanc, Chenin Blanc, Classic Chenin and Vero Sauvignon Blanc. Fratelli reds are: Sangiovese, Merlot, Cabernet Franc-Shiraj, Cabernet Sauvignon, Classic Shiraj, Classic Merlot, Vero Cabernet Sauvignon. Their port wines are called Sidus Premium Port and Sidus

Premium White.

Fratelli's flagship wine, of course, is Sette. The first sette 2009 was launched in 2011 followed by its vintages of 2010 and 2011. Sette is a super Tuscan style wine of a blend of Cabernet Sauvignon (60%) and Sangiovese (40%), aged in French oak barrels for 14 months. One can see a huge number of barrels, silently maturing Sette in the cellar. This signature blend of Piero Masi has bagged many international awards since its launch.

New additions in the impressive Fratelli line-up – Sette 2012 vintage, Gran Cuvée Brut and Vitae Tre – have strengthened its position in the market as a premium wine producer. These wines are winning hearts of wine lovers.

Vitae Tre has the distinction of being the first wine in India which is produced using three blends – Chenin Blanc, Gewürztraminer and Müller-Thurgau. Gewürztraminer and Müller-Thurgau have been planted by Fratelli for the first time in India. The Vitae range has three labels – Sangiovese, barrel-fermented 100% Chardonnay and, vitae tres. Its Shiraz Rose is also a really good wine.

Fratelli is, indeed, a dream realized and truly lived every day with every drop of wine produced at its Motewadi winery. 

