

Chinese whispers

Lenz M. Moser's Cabernets from Ningxia have a fan base among London sommeliers. A group of independent merchants took a closer look

There are many reasons to like Lenz M. Moser. He talks affectionately about his twin daughters, he is charming and funny, he joyfully engages in conversation on a range of ubiquitous British topics – the World Cup, Brexit and what the heck is up with our politicians – but the most admirable thing about the Austrian winemaker is that he's a man who doesn't shy away from a challenge.

A self-confessed "Gruner guy" whose "DNA is practically wine", Moser has spent the past three years immersed in a Cabernet Sauvignon monoculture in Ningxia, and the results are likely contenders for that ever-elusive next big thing.

Moser's collaboration with Changyu, China's biggest wine company, comprises Chateau Changyu-Moser XV, built with an investment of €70m and named with nod to the 15 generations of the Moser family.



"When I talk about Chateau Changyu-Moser XV, I'm not talking about big Changyu with €750m turnover and 150 million bottles," he explains.

"I'm talking only about the chateau which in Ningxia is very far away from headquarters – we are 250 hectares and 500,000 bottles. That

is my universe."

The determination to run the project with complete authenticity is best demonstrated by the fact that it took Moser two years to find an English-speaking assistant winemaker, when an easier route would have been to draft in fellow Europeans.

He explains: "I am working only with Chinese people because I believe it is a Chinese wine, it's a Chinese estate – I want to be Chinese as much as I possibly can."

Chinese wines may be unfamiliar in the UK but merchants agreed that, with the help of entry-level wines to pique interest and a by-the-glass offering, consumers will start to embrace this emerging wine-producing country. And if they like what they taste, there's a decent chance that they'll venture up the scale towards more premium offerings, where the potential of China really comes alive.

Chateau Changyu-Moser XV, Cabernet Sauvignon Blanc de Noir 2016 RRP £16.99

Moser's experiment, a white Cabernet Sauvignon, is a triumph and the star of the tasting. This peachy, aromatic number is already the darling of many a London sommelier. "We have 10 minutes to make this wine. We don't even go to press with it: you capture the juice right after de-stemming. It is completely unique and I am the only one in the world producing this on a commercial basis."

Chateau Changyu-Moser XV, Cabernet Sauvignon 2015 RRP £13.99

The entry-level red drinks as Cab should with hints of violets, pepper and eucalyptus. "This is something very simple, an easy-drinking wine completely unmanipulated by wood. The '16 is more full-bodied but this is already a very good start."

Chateau Changyu-Moser XV, Moser Family Cabernet Sauvignon 2015 RRP £34.99

To give some perspective we tasted this barrique-aged Cab alongside Château Montrose, La Dame de Montrose, Saint-Estephe 2015. "I want to show how different we are from Europe but I want to give you an idea of what we're aiming at in terms of quality."

Chateau Changyu-Moser XV, Grand Vin, Cabernet Sauvignon 2013 RRP £65-£70

Moser inherited this vintage and put it into new oak barrels for two years. The result is smooth with notes of cherry and chocolate.

Chateau Changyu-Moser XV, Grand Vin, Cabernet Sauvignon 2015 RRP £70

Rich with dark fruit and with a woody and smoky character, thanks to the use of new oak. "This was my first vintage. Wait for the 2016, it's dynamite and if I die after the bottling of the '17, it's OK!"



Kiki Evans, Unwined in Tooting

"There are tentative steps going from the Grand Vin 2013 to the 2015 – you can start to see the change, and if you're saying the 2016 and the 2017 are quantum leaps up then oh my god, it's going to be amazing."

Emily Silva, Oxford Wine Company

"The wines were in a style that we could all recognise but there's something distinct about them, which is what Lenz was talking about. They are Chinese in nature but more in a terroir way than a gimmicky way. We have a lot of customers looking for something different, with a story behind it and that tastes good – Lenz delivers on all of those fronts."

Feature sponsored by Chateau Changyu-Moser XV

www.changyu-moser-xv.de
Twitter: @ChangyuMoserXV
Instagram: changyumoserxv

orders@walkerwodehousewines.com