

# Pouring forth from the desert

Chateau Changyu Moser XV is innovating to make the most of its grapes, whose special properties come from their unique terroir in arid Ningxia, **Li Yingxue** reports.

Chateau Changyu Moser XV's chief winemaker, Lenz Moser, decided to start this year's grape harvest in the Ningxia Hui autonomous region on Oct 3.

It was Moser's latest harvest in the past five years — about a week later than usual. He'd waited until the sugars and tannins were perfect.

"The intensity of the fruit was expressive as never before. They were the best grapes I have ever worked with in Ningxia," he says.

The harvest lasts for around two weeks, during which many people work 14 hours a day, seven days a week. It's the most important time of year for the chateau. Moser walked around 15,000 steps between the vineyard and the winery every day this season.

The grapes are sorted and fermented after harvest. After two years in French oak selected by Moser, the wines are ready to meet the world. Moser hopes they'll shine in the Chinese and global markets.

Moser belongs to the 15th generation of Austria's famous Moser winemaking family. He came to China in 2005.

After working with Changyu on sales and marketing for 10 years, he realized that, even though it had become the biggest wine company in China, it was not successful internationally.

Moser became chief winemaker of Chateau Changyu Moser XV in 2015.

He brought with him all his experience, from growing grapes to bottling.

He even sold his winemaking business in Europe so he could concentrate on the chateau in China.

Chateau Changyu Moser XV was founded in 2013 with the vision to bring the "best of China" to the world.

Changyu invested around \$77.2 million to build it. The chateau houses 1,500 barriques in its cellar and high-tech facilities, including the bottling line.

Every stage of production takes place at the chateau, including viticulture, pressing, fermentation and maturation.

The compound also hosts a museum dedicated to the history of Chinese winemaking and of Changyu since its founding in 1892.

It's located near Ningxia's capital, Yinchuan. The area is ideal for growing grapes because of an altitude of 1,100 meters, cool nights and over 3,000 hours of sunshine annually.

The chateau was under construction when Moser first visited Ningxia in 2011. But the grapes impressed him.

"This is why I fell in love with this country — because this is the small-



**Top:** Chateau Changyu Moser XV harvests grapes later than usual this year to wait until they get the perfect sugar and tannins. **Above:** Austrian winemaker Lenz Moser is impressed by the grapes grown in Ningxia. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

est cabernet sauvignon that I've worked with in my life," he says.

"When you see the small berries, you immediately know you will make good wine. The smaller the berry, the better. Also, in Ningxia, the days are warm, and the nights are cool, which can keep the freshness of the grapes."

Ningxia's desert climate causes the fruit to grow thick skins to prevent evaporation. And tannins and taste are extracted from the skin, he explains.

The vines are buried before win-



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**Lenz Moser**, Chateau Changyu Moser XV's chief winemaker

ter to protect them.

"On the other hand, because you bury them, which gives them four months of uninterrupted sleep, they end up growing faster the next spring," Moser says.

Ningxia's grape harvests usually start before the Mid-Autumn Festival.

The first change Moser introduced when he started at the chateau was to delay the harvest, which elevated the wines' quality.

"It was a simple idea, but we've been making better wines since

2015," he says.

"We postponed the harvest time by 10 days. When I see the sugar is right, the grapes taste great, and when the seeds are brown, not green, it's about time to harvest."

Moser believes the seeds' color and flavor are crucial. He chews them to see if they taste nutty enough for harvest.

Ningxia's wines used to be about 12 percent alcohol content, but delaying the harvest enabled the seeds to turn brown and the alcohol content to increase to around 14 percent.

It wasn't easy to persuade others to wait at first. If Moser was wrong, the whole year's work would be ruined.

Serendipitously, two rains arrived around the normal harvest time, which naturally stopped workers from gathering the grapes. And, in the end, the fruit was better than before.

Moser visits the chateau several times a year, including just before every harvest.

Before he arrives, his colleagues send him photos of seeds and other information, including sugar concentrations, on a weekly basis.

"Winemaking is not just one person. It's a teamwork," says Moser, who works with a well-trained all-Chinese team.

"All I have to do is bring my international experience to the chateau. We only produce and bottle what I believe is right for the global market."

About half of the chateau's wine is exported to over 40 countries and regions, including the United Kingdom, Italy, Germany, Canada and Singapore.

"Ten years ago, when I said I want to bring our wines from China to the world, nobody was listening," he says.

"Now, our wines are sold in the finest hotels and restaurants in London, such as the Mandarin Oriental and Four Seasons. We want to make the best wine of China, and we need also to make wines belonging in the company of the world's finest."

"Today, I can probably say we have achieved a lot of these goals already, because when I do a tasting in Europe, I always have a bottle of nice French wine or even Argentinean wine on the table to prove the point that we have the right to be on the same table."

Moser also wants to bring Chinese wines, including other companies', to the global market.

"We have a long way to go because we are at the beginning," he says.

"But we have good base."

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## Eatbeat

### Classic comeback



Zen restaurant has created a hotpot variety for the autumn season based on a two-page recipe used by the Beijing Hotel in the 1970s. Eighty percent of the original ingredients are used to make the hotpot, including 3-year-old wild sea cucumber, abalone, dried scallops, ham, bamboo shoots and mushrooms. The soup base is made with chicken.  
*3F, No 97 Qianmen Dajie, Dongcheng district, Beijing. 010-8861-5783.*

### Rolling along nicely



Japanese cuisine restaurant Yan organized a sushi class in September, teaching foodies how to make three kinds of sushi. Founder and chef Yan Ruijun taught the class himself and talked budding sushi chefs through the detailed steps required to flatten the rice on the nori and roll the nori into different shapes. Yan's signature sushi features red wine-stewed foie gras with eel.  
*5F, Building 6, No 5 Anding Lu, Chaoyang district, Beijing. 010-6441-8291.*

### Pick of the crop



Dutch chef Richard Ekkebus, whose restaurant, Amber, in Hong Kong has won two Michelin stars for nine consecutive years, will appear as a guest chef at the Mandarin Oriental Beijing on Oct 20. Ekkebus specializes in French cuisine and is quite picky about the freshness of his ingredients. He is bringing several of his signature dishes to Beijing, including wagyu beef and an avocado dessert.  
*B3 East Building, WF Central, Building 1, No 269 Wangfujing Street, Dongcheng district, Beijing. 010-8509-8810.*

### Currying favor



Laburnum Thai Restaurant has become a standout example of Thai cuisine in Beijing since it opened in the city 10 years ago. Their signature crab curry is a must-try. Sweet and salty flavors are released by the blend of crab-meat, curry base and coconut milk. The best way to finish the dish is to mix the curry with a bowl of rice.  
*South of west gate of Workers' Stadium, Chaoyang district, Beijing. 010-6652-9999.*

### Forest to table



Daccapo Italian restaurant launched a new "Into the Forest" set menu in October to bring the freshness of the forest to diners' tables. Mushrooms feature widely on the menu, and Yunnan mushroom consomme with braised beef tortellini and the chargrilled Australian sirloin with homemade spinach pappardelle and morels are just two of the highlights.  
*No 99 Jinbao Street, Dongcheng district, Beijing. 010-8522-1888.*

# Saury season has diners fishing for compliments

By **LI YINGXUE**

The arrival of autumn also marks the start of the saury-fishing season in Japan, which brings with it the saury-dining season — the mackerel pike is especially delicious at this time of year.

And luckily for local foodies, they won't have to miss the boat since this delicacy can also be enjoyed in Beijing. Fresh saury are shipped into the capital from Hokkaido, where chefs at Koyama simply cure the fish with salt before grilling it, to let its pure flavor shine through.

The restaurant is serving several dishes to counter the autumn chill with a distinctly Japanese touch, from grilled saury to warming *sukiyaki*. "From beef and mushroom to cabbage, tofu and onion, all our *sukiyaki* dishes are cooked using traditional methods that present the authentic flavors of Japan," says Anson Tsui, manager of the Beijing branch of Koyama.

The first branch of Koyama opened in Guangzhou, Guangdong province, in 1999, when Japanese restaurants were not common in China. Koyama has since expanded across China and has eateries in Shanghai, Chengdu in Sichuan province, and

Guangdong's Shenzhen.

Koyama's flagship Beijing restaurant opened on the lower ground floor of Taikoo Li Sanlitun North in 2013. It offers guests an authentic experience from the minute they arrive.

According to Tsui, what sets Koyama apart from other Japanese eateries in the city is variety — it serves every kind of Japanese food, from sushi and sashimi to *sukiyaki* and *teppanyaki*.

"Our menu is a celebration of regional Japanese cooking styles. It stretches to more than 90 pages filled with 400 dishes from all over the country," he says.

"Rather than bowing to internet-driven culinary trends that steer many popular restaurants these days, we are dedicated to maintaining traditional cooking techniques and flavors, and to honoring recipes that have developed over hundreds of years."

Training has always been a core element to the Koyama approach, and it has developed strict training and ranking systems to encourage each of their chefs to grow. The chefs also make frequent research trips to Japan to identify new ingredients and techniques, so that they can expand their understanding of authentic



Koyama Japanese-cuisine restaurant serves several seasonal dishes in autumn. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Japanese cuisine and pass it on to diners in China.

Koyama serves a range of vegetable and seafood tempura, and

the shrimp tempura is one of the most popular choices among diners.

"Tempura requires a skilled hand

in the kitchen. The oil must be heated to exactly the right temperature so that the natural flavors of the ingredients aren't compromised and the batter stays feather-light," says Tsui.

Hailing from the Kansai and Hiroshima areas of Japan, *okonomiyaki* is a savory pancake filled with ingredients like egg and cabbage, and topped with *okonomiyaki* sauce, Japanese mayonnaise and bonito flakes.

The term *okonomiyaki* roughly translates as "cooked as you like it", and is a reference to the rich variety of ingredients that can go into it. Koyama's version includes salmon for a touch of luxury.

From simple California rolls with ripe avocado to Motorola rolls with tempura shrimp, tuna, avocado and grilled eel, there's a sushi variety for everyone. The rolls are also available in half portions, making it easier to sample more than one variety.

*Yakitori* is another highlight of Koyama's menu. It features a variety of fresh ingredients and choices, including chicken wings, chicken thigh with scallions, chicken hearts and pork belly. Grilled ginkgo is perfect paired with a jug of warm sake as the cooler weather sets in.